Engaging object visitor encounters at the museum: a phenomenological approach

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Contents

Abstract

Engaging object visitor encounters at the museum: a phenomenological approach by Oonagh Quigley

The focus of this PhD is engagement. In museum studies literature, there is a problematic absence of substantive analysis of immediate visitor responses to objects. To address this gap, I propose the investigation of object visitor encounters using a particular phenomenological approach. Centred on semi-structured interviews undertaken in a museum, the thesis: 1) explores and develops the consideration of engaging object encounters from a phenomenological, and specifically a Heideggerian, stance, and 2) examines whether or not 'engagement' can be characterised from fieldwork-derived descriptions of an exhibition experience.

Beginning with an argument for the relevance of a phenomenological research approach, the process of creating an interview instrument for museum visitors inspired by phenomenology is outlined. In particular, Martin Heidegger's arguments on object manifestation and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's reflections on embodiment are applied. A phenomenological lens combined with grounded theory is used to analyse 30 interviews undertaken with visitors at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

I found that a phenomenological investigation was useful for exploring visitor engagement. While a Heideggerian approach was not directly applicable in the field, the phenomenological approach was successful in revealing characteristics of engagement in object encounters. I also found that engagement descriptions can be partially derived from fieldwork-derived descriptions of an exhibition experience. The characteristics that the research demonstrated to be associated with an engaging object encounter include: the object manifesting in a way that evokes reflection from the visitor; the visitor feeling positive about touching the object; and the visitor imagining embodiments of the object, specifically how it was made, how it was used, or the people that interacted with the object. Finally, the potential application of these characteristics to museum practice is explored.

Throughout the thesis the use of phenomenology is reflected upon, and its application in the museum field is considered. This thesis contributes to research-led practice as it encourages application of the characteristics of engagement in an effort to create exhibitions that will enhance real-life visitor engagement.

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Chapter One: Looking at Engagement

> I like sitting, looking at paintings. You can, in Edinburgh, there's a painting that I can always go back to in the art gallery there. And I can sit and just look at and think, it's amazing…it's just a man, sitting there. I don't know, it's just, it just catches your eye. And you like to look at it, gives you such a peace I suppose.[1]

Preamble

This thesis focuses on museum visitors and their engagement with objects on display using a phenomenological research approach. What exactly is engagement, how has it previously been understood in museum studies and what could be further studied about it? I ask what approach is most appropriate to investigate immediate responses by visitors to object encounters, question if these object encounters *are* engaging, and consider how to identify or determine the characteristics of an engaging object encounter. My findings were generated in fieldwork that consisted of a series of 30 semi-structured interviews conducted in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow. The interview questions were developed using a phenomenological framework and had an emphasis on object interaction. The data were analysed with a focus on characteristics of engaging object encounters as defined by the visitors themselves, as well as a focus on overall engagement. The research makes a contribution through its particular application of phenomenology to the study of visitor engagement. Moreover, the identification of key characteristics of engaging object encounters contributes towards literature on engagement.

I came to this topic through my own professional experience. Prior to my PhD, I was a curator in social history museums in Western Australia. I created different exhibitions that displayed objects which had hitherto typically been used for a function in everyday life. On display in the museum, however, they shifted into display cabinets, an environment vastly different from where the object came from. I became intrigued with how, in this museum setting, the object stays the same but also changes. How do

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[1] G13 (Quote from one of the 30 interviews undertaken in the final fieldwork of this research project. For more detail, see Chapter Four.)

visitors understand these museum objects? How could one delve deeper into the nuances of a visitor interacting with an object? How do visitors perceive objects in display cases, rather than on a kitchen table – do they see it in the same way, or as different, limiting or more expansive; or all of the above? How could I make exhibitions consistently engaging to visitors? And how could I assist a time-poor curator in creating object encounters that would engage visitors? I played with displaying the object with different material that could remind the visitor of the object's previous function. Was there a deeper theoretical understanding of objects that could provide a framework for how visitors consider them engaging? I read around object perception and became intrigued by phenomenology. I became interested in how I could use this philosophical approach as a means to further explore the magic of what happens when a visitor interacts with an object. My PhD journey involved taking all these questions and sculpting them into a manageable research project. My resulting research nuances 'engagement', using phenomenology; however there is more to explore of object encounters, especially as there are commonalities and differences when comparing a visitor being engaged with an object in a museum, but not being engaged overall with the exhibition, display, or museum that contains the object. I return to these tensions, as well as potential applications of the findings, in the conclusion of the thesis.

This chapter sets out the aim and objectives, parameters, and scope of my project. In addition, I present the research background and envisage the contribution of my research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the contents of the thesis and an outline of its key arguments.

Research aim and objectives

The aim of this project is to investigate the characteristics of museum visitor engagement and to develop a useful method for such an investigation. In order to realise this, I seek to meet the following research objectives:

- To review how visitor engagement has previously been defined, considered, and understood.
- To explore and develop the consideration of engaging object encounters from a phenomenological, and specifically a Heideggerian, stance.
- To examine whether or not 'engagement' can be characterised from fieldwork-derived descriptions of an exhibition experience.

These objectives are broad enough to allow for research into object engagement as well as into engagement overall. I discuss in this chapter why engagement is a subject that merits research and in the next chapter why phenomenology is an appropriate framework to carry out that research. Suffice to say here that, in relation to engagement, there are absences in knowledge regarding visitor engagements surrounding the immediate response to an object (Kirchberg and Trondle, 2012) as well as concerning reactions that involve curiosity or emotion (Chatterjee, 2008), imagination (Bedford, 2014) or the appeal to memories and senses that the dream space of the museum can offer visitors (Kavanagh, 2000). Phenomenology, meanwhile, has been argued to be different from most approaches as it focuses on the experience of a phenomena and does not endeavour to find the 'meaning specific to particular cultures (ethnography), to certain social groups (sociology), to historical periods (history), to mental types (psychology), or to an individual's personal life history (biography)' (van Manen, 1990, p.11). It is an approach that can examine the immediacy of the first-hand experience, as well as reveal the nuances of what a person feels and experiences when they encounter an object. As I will discuss in detail later, phenomenology has been selected for this research for three reasons. Firstly, it is an approach that places the researcher close to what is being researched – visitor experience. Secondly, phenomenology will allow what the visitor is feeling and seeing to be recorded. It is of importance that a person's first-hand experience, rather than abstract theories that may not have practical applications, informs the outcome of this project. Finally, phenomenology is about how things manifest themselves to people, and therefore the personal descriptions of what people experience is recorded in my fieldwork. The quote that begins this chapter (and others that begin later chapters),

for example, is one of the many, rich reflections from research participants that are the foundation of my findings.

Research background

In order to navigate the breath of research approaches to engagement, this chapter outlines literature and touches on methodologies as well as findings. I argue in the contribution section that the aims of researchers impact what they discover. Therefore while this is a literature review it is not strictly focused on research outcomes. I wish to plot how I navigated the engagement literature in order to arrive at my research aim and objectives. Engagement is a broad field and there is much variety in how researchers have studied it and in their findings. I provide here an overview of the most apposite research, presenting a sample of the different approaches and reflections on visitor interactions. The aim is not to provide an inventory of researchers, but to establish the varied nature of the research landscape and to illustrate the gaps that this research project seeks to address. This section is also the beginning of my argument for a phenomenological approach being an appropriate way to research engagement and object encounters.

Why study engagement?

Engagement is a highly relevant topic in museum studies. Jones, reflecting on its significance, argues it has been used to 'develop museum spaces, exhibitions and programmes, helped to diversify and increase who visits museums, and deepened our collective understanding of why people visit museums and the impact' (Jones, 2015, p. 539). I initially review the definitions and general research approaches to engagement, before going on to consider in detail such differences in the literature as engagement with objects, and engagement in exhibition or museum settings.

Conceptual frameworks and theoretical paradigms have changed over time as the study of how people interact with objects and consume knowledge has become more nuanced (Hooper-Greenhill, 2008, p.374). Some researchers write personal, critical, and reflective treatises on what they feel in museums, other researchers make practical suggestions based on general observations. Researchers have undertaken

rigorous fieldwork and interviewed and observed interactions in museums, and some have channelled these findings into creating models of interaction or engagement. Engagement has been considered between visitor and objects, and between visitors with more than objects – whether exhibitions or the whole museum. Visitor studies is a diverse field; works produced by academics and practitioners have different perspectives and motivations, which can pose challenges for visitor studies researchers (Hooper-Greenhill, 2008, p.374). This all reflects the intriguing nature of engagement, as it has not been readily defined or fixed in its definition in museum studies, as demonstrated by the wide range of terms used to describe it as well as the spread of research approaches.

Although visitor studies is 'situated, differentiated and relatively complex', reflections on how exhibitions are encountered by visitors is still of relevance and 'the challenge is to try and understand how particular exhibition forms or "prompts" are "taken up"' (MacDonald, 2007, p. 152). Engagement is described in many ways, and this research project pulls at one thread on the complex tapestry of engagement to learn more about visitor definitions of engagement. The concept of engagement can be articulated with different words, most likely because 'the field of museum visitor research is not well coordinated, largely because it spans so many disciplines' (MacDonald, 2007, p.149). For example, terms used include transformative (Soren, 2009), strong interest/nature of fascination (Dahl, et al., 2013), participatory (Simon, 2010), attention (Bitgood, 2013 and Trondle, et al., 2014), learning/fun (Perry, 2012), as well as visitor reflection and discussion (Skydsgaard, Moller Andersen and King, 2016). Engagement is also used as a term but it is not formally defined (for example Shaby, Assaraf and Tal, 2017). The term engagement can mean different things. While dissecting the Royal Ontario Museum exhibition on the Dead Sea Scrolls, five types of engagement the museum intended visitors to experience were described – curatorial, interacting, marketing, intercultural, and political (Ashley, 2014). To summarise, different researchers define engagement in different terms, and one researcher even defines engagement in five distinct ways. I consider engagement complex and the working term for it in this thesis is when a visitor stops at an object and interacts with it by viewing, considering it and/or talking about it. I asked visitors to define their own

state of engagement, and to provide examples of previous engaging experiences. This broad concept of engagement will allow for openness when I am researching the concept.

There are many different approaches to investigating engagement. Hooper-Greenhill comments that studies of engagement 'encompass a range of types of study carried out by different bodies, for different purposes, and using different research paradigms' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2008, p.365). Different groups are researching what happens when a museum visitor experiences an exhibition, with different focuses. These different focuses include empathy (Arnold, et al., 2014), wellbeing (Froggett and Trustram, 2014), emotion (see Fleming, 2014; Geoghegan and Hess, 2015; Watson, 2007; Watson, 2010), affect (Wetherell, 2012; Witcomb, 2013), spiritual experiences (Cameron and Gatewood, 2003), a psychological state of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990), numinous experiences (Latham, 2013), touch (Chatterjee, 2008; Classen, 2005; Pye, 2007), as well as human understanding and connection (Roberts, 2013). Many researchers focus on learning as the outcome of a visitor experience (see Falk and Dierking, 2012; Leinhardt and Knutson, 2004). Falk and Dierking conceptualised a 'Contextual Model of Learning' in which personal, sociocultural, and physical contexts work together to influence how a visitor experiences the museum (Falk and Dierking, 2012, p.26). A critique of their material is that while outcomes are discussed, the means of audience evaluations is not explicit thus preventing interested readers from replicating the research and assessing museum visitor experience in different museums (Jones, 2015, p.540).

Bedford recognises the tendency of museum exhibitions to focus on learning, and calls for a more diverse understanding of exhibitions – she argues that through story and imagination an engaging aesthetic experience can be possible for visitors (Bedford, 2014). She gives examples of different practitioners and researchers exploring the continuum of exhibition experience, as well as listing several concepts she finds engaging, including use of metaphor, objects allowing visitors to create their own narrative, uniqueness, and embodied experiences leading to multi-sensory engagement (Bedford, 2014). Imagination also resonates in 'Dream Spaces', where Gaynor Kavanagh adopts Sheldon Annis' arguments about the spaces a visitor

experiences at the museum. A museum visitor traverses through the cognitive (learns new information from the visit), social (interacts with the people accompanying them), and/or dream spaces (Kavanagh, 2000, p.2). The dream space is the 'field of interaction between objects and the viewer's sub rational consciousness' (Kavanagh, 2000, p.3). It is 'where visitors make personal associations and objects can trigger an infinity of different thoughts to come to the visitor' and is unpredictable and not planned by exhibition curators (Kavanagh, 2000, p.3). The call for dream space is also a call to 'accept more fully the imagination, emotions, senses and memories as vital components of the experience of museums' (Kavanagh, 2000, p.3). She reflects that dream spaces in the museum can open up possibilities of visitors connecting their own inner museums and experiences with what the museum communicates in exhibitions (Kavanagh, 2000, p.175). In the variety of studies reviewed for this thesis, only a few address emotion (for example Crooke, 2012; Dudley, 2012; Witcomb, 2010). Therefore a research approach that is open to visitor experience and engagement which would allow these imaginative, dream space encounters between visitors and objects to be characterised could reveal more of object interactions than previously found.

My curiosity is particularly addressed to what happens when a visitor encounters an object. What is happening, from the perspective of a visitor interacting with an object, and what is engaging about the interaction? In an earlier research study, a series of workshops were held to examine the importance and relevance of object handling in museums (Romanek and Lynch, 2008). One workshop explored the question of visitor object interaction when the visitor feels 'disturbed by the encounter' or has their curiosity piqued (Romanek and Lynch, 2008, p.282). How is this type of reaction measured, 'how does one measure the worth or degree of someone's curiosity', and should museums attempt to predict how people will respond to objects were raised by workshop attendees (Romanek and Lynch, 2008, p.282). One respondent spoke of questionnaires that analysed kinaesthetic learning, while another argued for a new process that could capture these reactions such as visual ethnography or visual sociology (Romanek and Lynch, 2008, p.283). Another approach could be phenomenology.

As object encounters are the central research focus of this project, I will summarise reflections on objects in museums, on their interchangeability, and on the variation between people in responses to objects, and highlight why research is necessary.

The idea of objects is a deeply complex one and there are many different contemporary debates about what objects actually are (Harvey and Knox, 2014, p.4). Various disciplines examine material culture, including anthropology, archaeology, museum studies, architecture, and philosophy (Candlin and Guins, 2009). Along with the different fields, there are numerous approaches for researchers to probe objects and material culture; for example feminism, consumerism, or consumption (see Buchli, 2002). Objects have been described by a museum theorist as 'lumps of the physical world to which cultural value is ascribed' (Pearce, 2012, p.23). My working term for object will refer to material with physical mass, and not for example a person or a nontangible concept. I will use the terms object and things interchangeably, being aware that object is more museum associated (Tybjerg, 2017, p.271). I will not align the use of the term object to Brown's thing theory, in which things have more unbounded potential than objects which are delineated and considered to have less potential (Brown, 2001). In this study, objects are physical pieces of material that are on display in a museum.

Theorist Walter Benjamin argues that once an object is in a collection, the use of the object prior to being in the collection is no longer relative to the object; the object is instead viewed in the context of the collection of which it is now part (Gourgouris, 2006, p.219). Furthermore, an anthropologist argues museum objects are 'abstracted from a dynamic context of multisensory uses and meanings and transformed into static objects for the gaze' (Classen, 1997, p.401). It is recognised that objects undergo a change once in the museum (see Annis, 1987; Swensen, 2017). However, this does not have to be considered limiting to the object as while it is no longer in circuits of original use, there is still significance in the presence of the object in the museum. Objects act as 'eloquent legacies from the past' and have 'a special kind of immediacy' (Deetz, 2005, p.375). Objects are so powerful, in a museum environment even their absence can be used as an element in an exhibition narrative (Farthing, 2011, p.94). The potential of objects will be explored in the findings and discussion of fieldwork.

Objects are not fixed in their identity or meaning but fluid and constructed and reconstructed by the people that interact with the objects, as 'things create people as much as people create things' (Basu, 2017, p.2). Objects are 'ambiguous' and their 'lack of definitive and final articulation of significance keeps objects endlessly mysterious' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.115). Indeed, what museum objects stand for, 'depends on who uses them and how, who responds to them and why' (Dudley, 2017, p.46). Therefore the different perspectives of visitors are relative when considering the intricacies and potential of objects, and how people interpret and encounter them. In recognition of these intricacies, this research project delves into the fluidity of how an object can be considered by museum visitors through its study of engaging object encounters.

Engagement with objects

In addition to engagement with objects, research is also carried out that asks questions of engagement with exhibitions or museums. Studies are listed below to orient the reader to the richness of the field of engagement studies. There is a wide variety of approaches to and types of outcomes of investigation into museum engagement. Personal reflections by researchers when encountering one object, for example, vary from in depth emotional contemplations to technical considerations of appearance. At the other end of the spectrum, are quantitative studies that survey hundreds of visitors about their response to a whole museum. Below I consider this literature.

An expressive object encounter is found in a house museum reflection, which speaks of the 'evocatory power' of objects 'to incarnate their former owners' and 'vivify the past' (Hancock, 2012, p.116). Dudley describes her 'fundamental, emotional, sensory, even visceral' reaction to a bronze horse in the Compton Verney art gallery (Dudley, 2012, p.2), recalling how she entered a display room and was 'spellbound' by the object (Dudley, 2012, p.1). Once drawn to the object, she approached it and through a visual inspection identified 'material details' such as the condition of the object, the colour and the texture (Dudley, 2012, p.1). She 'wanted to touch it' and knew she could not, but did imagine different ways the horse figure would react to a physical

investigation – how it would feel to touch, sound if tapped or how heavy it would be if picked up (Dudley, 2012, p.1). This engaging interaction with an object can be extended to general museum visitors – an initial encounter that attracts a visitor to an object can make the visitor more responsive to the many facets of the object. This type of enticement to stop a visitor is described in Greenblatt's arguments, applying literary theory to the museum environment. For him, wonder is the ability of an object to attract a visitor so that they stop to look at an object, and resonance is the capacity of the object to suggest the conditions that it emerged from (Greenblatt, 1991, p.42). Therefore the working term of engagement in this research project will include the event of being drawn by an object and stopping a museum stroll to find out more about the appearance (by interacting with the object) or its history (by reading about it) or experience something akin to Greenblatt's resonance and consider object origin and imagine the conditions it emerged from.

Continuing with the thread of personal reactions of researchers is the encounter with a Tahitian god-house, an object in the British Museum collection (Hooper, 2012). The analysis is highly visual and examines form, texture, and condition similar to Dudley's; different, however, is the absence of any emotional reaction (Hooper, 2012). Another emotionless analysis is found when an Islamic art and architecture lecturer describes a candlestick in al-Aqsa Museum, Jerusalem (Taragan, 2012, p.79). The article focuses on the appearance, its similarity to certain period architecture, and inscriptions that reveal the object's history of creation and owners (Taragan, 2012). There is no examination of the personal response of the writer to the object but an overall technical approach to the object. When a later addition by the son of the ruler-patron is mentioned, there is no discussion of family, memory, or legacy (Taragan, 2012, p.85). In order to consider collection policy development, a museum practitioner reflects on the concept of cod as a Norwegian museum exhibition theme, as well as a specific set of curtains and a collection of shoe planes from different sources (Maurstad, 2012). While an analytical stance is taken for most of the objects in the article, the description of the shoe planes is composed with some humour and personal reflection, the terms 'wonderful' and 'beautiful' are used (Maurstad, 2012, p.176). Thus, there is rich variety in how researchers reflect on their object

encounters. This hints at the subjectivity of responses and indicates a study of engagement interviewing museum visitors requires a variety of participants to garner ranges of responses.

The above examples are of experiences unmediated by a museum guide; yet the presence of a museum guide closely related to displayed material can evoke many feelings. Witcomb had a visceral and emotional response to a model of the Treblinka holocaust in the Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre, Melbourne (Witcomb, 2010). The model was not commissioned, but 'built in a private living room out of a personal desire to testify and memorialise as well as to display' (Witcomb, 2010, p.46). The maker, Mr Sztajer who was present in the museum and spoke about why he made the model, survived the Treblinka camp but his wife and daughter were killed there (Witcomb, 2010, p.47). Witcomb reflects on how the personal nature of the maker of the model heightened her emotional response (Witcomb, 2010, p.47). The Museum of Free Derry examines the conflict in Northern Ireland with material displayed that is accompanied by minimal interpretation (Crooke, 2012, p.28). John Kelly, a museum guide, lost his brother Michael during the Bloody Sunday event and his speaking of material relating to his brother transforms 'the most ordinary objects' (Michael's half-eaten chocolate bar or the baby outfit that was used to mop up Michael's blood) into something 'sacred' (Crooke, 2012, p.28). From both these examples, the visitors connected with the concept of the Holocaust or the killing of people in Derry, and were engaged through the personal display and sharing of objects by survivors of violence. That there are different ways of encountering objects is evident, then, as is the resonance that different researchers describe in relation to their encounters.

Studies have been made of visitors, either through observation and/or surveys, using various approaches. A multidisciplinary team used an empirical approach to studying how visitors experience artworks, and asking if the position of artworks influenced their experience (Trondle, et al., 2014). The term engagement was not used, however the group made comments around visitor attention (Trondle, et al., 2014, p.169). There was a focus on empirical measurements, including heart rate and skin conductance as well as visitor tracking (Trondle, et al., 2014). Other researchers have

considered how to make every displayed object enticing and effective. This was
achieved by observation and interview of visitors, and a combination of museum
studies (object biographies and learning styles), cognitive science (flow and beauty,
and usability), architecture (space syntax) and design (Monti and Keene, 2013, p.17).
As a reviewer commented, although their research aim was to give agency to
unnoticed objects, their recommendations are more general and not specifically
object based (Woodall, 2014). They recommend imaginative displays, a 'broad design
strategy and visual effect of an exhibition, as opposed to the individual physical
characteristics of things' to entice visitors (Monti and Keene, 2013, p.263). They argue
there is a finite amount of time, energy and attention that visitors have, and for
museums to be aware of this (Monti and Keene, 2013, p.265). Thus, while different
approaches can gather findings on how visitors respond physically or psychologically,
these do not gather findings that relate to embodied or emotional responses – facets
that a phenomenological investigation could gather.

While phenomenology is not commonly used as an explicit methodological framework
for the investigation of engagement in museum studies literature, there are two
researchers, Latham and Wood, who use the approach. When comparing their
research to mine, their studies can be clustered into three groups. The first group uses
phenomenology as a research approach but does not use phenomenology to analyse
the findings (Latham, 2013; Latham, 2014; Wood and Latham, 2009). My research, in
contrast, uses phenomenology in both the research methodology and the analysis of
findings. The second group of studies uses phenomenology in a general way to
consider exhibition design (Wood and Latham, 2011; Wood and Latham, 2013). The
final group comprises one study that, like my own work, uses phenomenology in both
research methodology and analysis of findings (Latham, 2015); this study will be used
when I compare my results to findings from other researchers (Chapter Five).

To look in more detail at the first group of Latham and Woods's work: 'numinous'
experiences, when museum visitors have what Latham defines as a 'transcendent or
deeply meaningful experiences with a museum object', were researched with a
phenomenological approach to describing the visitor object encounters (Latham, 2013,
p.6). The numinous experience was interpreted as a document-centred transaction, as

a physiological state of flow, as well as a mythical state of consciousness (Latham, 2013). The study identifies people who feel a deep connection in museums (Latham, 2013, p.18). In another study with a similar approach, Latham aims to investigate 'numinous' or transcendent museum experiences that connect people to the past, in order to illuminate how people relate to objects (Latham, 2014, p.551). The museum experiences were gathered by interviews and a phenomenological approach was taken to reveal themes of the experiences (Latham, 2014, p.551). In her analysis however, Latham applied concepts from John Dewey and Rosenblatt's Translational Theory of Reading rather than directly from phenomenology (Latham, 2014, p.549). And finally, in Wood and Latham's 2009 work, phenomenology is proposed as a methodology but the resultant theories of object knowledge are framed from a multidisciplinary approach drawn from education, information studies, semiotics, anthropology, and history (Wood and Latham, 2009).

The second group of studies by the same group uses phenomenology in a general way to consider exhibition design (Wood and Latham, 2011; Wood and Latham, 2013). For example, the researchers use a phenomenological approach to argue that more than a visual means of interacting with objects is desirable in a museum (Wood and Latham, 2011). They consider that touch in museum exhibitions enables visitors to experience 'a personal sense of the life of another as it was lived, or simply provides access to the vital and fundamental aspects of being human' (Wood and Latham, 2011, p.52). Two types of touch are suggested for improving museum experience – physical touch through creating an education collection for visitors to lay their hands on, as well as imaginative touch (Wood and Latham, 2011, p.60). Imaginative touch encourages visitors to think how it would feel to touch the objects and it is suggested it can be achieved by text or by museum workers facilitating the experience (Wood and Latham, 2011, p.61). In another study of object encounters, the researchers use phenomenology and make recommendations to create more engaging exhibitions (Wood and Latham, 2013). The suggestions are very broad and a review alluded to the underdeveloped nature, commenting the 'strategies and exercises are mostly inherently-frustrating motherhood statements (maxims such as "do cool things",

"leave room for more", and "make it come alive") that are, ultimately, ephemeral' (Ravelli, 2014, p.226).

There is, as I have mentioned, one study by Latham that uses phenomenology in both research methodology and analysis of findings (Latham, 2015). For this, Latham recruited participants through social media and flyers in museums to examine their thoughts on the 'real' thing in museums (Latham, 2015, p.4). Using a phenomenological approach to analyse participant interviews, four themes emerged of how visitors understand the real thing: through relating to oneself; through connecting to other people, times, event and things; as a physical entity; and how is it presented and the surroundings of the visitor (Latham, 2015, p.5). Each visitor understood their object experiences in not one, but a combination of these ways, demonstrating the myriad ways of object encounters. In the research presented in this thesis, however, characteristics identified as part of an engaging object encounter are reported and analysed in more detail, and through a deeper and more particular application of phenomenological method and analysis, than the more general themes Latham describes as visitors understanding objects through connecting to other people, times, event and things. As Latham 2015 is the most relevant Latham study, however, it is used in the contextualisation of the results of my fieldwork in Chapter Five.

Engagement with more than objects

It is clear from the existing literature that there are differences to be observed in how researchers personally reflect on engaging museums, modes of visitor interaction with museums, and the effects of the large array of research approaches. Watson, for example, reflects personally on an 'intensely immersive experience' in the Churchill War Rooms museum upon seeing images of World War Two and hearing Winston Churchill's voice in different speeches (Watson, 2010, p.220). The sensory participation involved, she explains, allows visitors to be emotionally involved in the history and absorb how Churchill acted during the war, revealing how people of his time considered his actions (Watson, 2010, p.220). Watson adopts a personal, reflective approach to discussing the museum. Most of the literature on engagement

with more than one object, however, is based on research carried out with visitor observations and surveys.

Following many observations of and interviews with visitors to Smithsonian museums, for example, Pekarik postulated four categories of visitor experience (Pekarik, Doering and Karns, 1999). These are object (responding to the object itself), cognitive (learning from encounter), introspective (reflecting and extending meaning from encounter), and social (interacting with other visitors) (Pekarik, Doering and Karns, 1999, pp.155-156). Another possible mode of interaction is dialogic engagement, which is based on the literary theory of dialogism and carnival theory and can be used to measure participation (Jun and Lee, 2014, p.249). The dialogic engagement has four facets: dialogue with others (engagement with other people), dialogue with self (engagement with self through new forms of expression), dialogue with context (engagement with new concepts or interrelations of themes), and dialogue with principle (reflection and re-evaluation of beliefs) (Jun and Lee, 2014, pp.249-250). The carnival model of engagement does not give a specific facet for object-person interaction, only the reactions that might happen when a person is in a museum. While an engagement with context (consideration of theme) or principle (consideration of beliefs) may be a result of an object encounters, there is no explicit allowance in their framework for what happens when a person encounters an object.

There are numerous studies of museum visitors, and many authors make recommendations towards models of how to enhance engagement, although not necessarily with specific objects but with overall exhibitions or museums. For example, Savenije and de Bruijn explored the interplay between cognitive and affective engagements as a form of historical empathy, and found that multi-perspective narratives – in addition to objects – connected school students with concepts of World War Two; this informed their subsequent recommendation regarding modes of exhibition design (Savenije and de Bruijn, 2017). The Selinda Model of Visitor Learning, in contrast, was composed – following years of visitor observation, rather than interviews, in different exhibitions – to understand the visitor experience and to engineer means of making learning fun (Perry, 2012). The Selinda Model of Visitor Learning was not directly tested but has three components: motivations,

engagements, and outcomes (Perry, 2012, p.40). Motivations are psychological factors that can impact on how the visitor experiences the museum and learns; engagements are the different ways a visitor can interact with an exhibition; and outcomes are the consequences of a museum visit (Perry, 2012, p.40). Specifically the engagements can be social (regarding other visitors), intellectual or connecting with material through cognitive means, emotional, or physical – which can be either by touching interactives or through multisensory experience of a display (Perry, 2012, pp.60-63). Perry dedicates a chapter to each of the motivations (communication, curiosity, confidence, challenge, control, and play). She gives general advice on how to design exhibitions with these factors in mind, giving examples of interactives, label length, label content, and some display recommendations.

Another example, this time with a specific focus on exhibition design, comes from Roppola's investigation of the experience of museum visitors using phenomenological, transactional, and grounded theory approaches (Roppola, 2012). Her research area (visitor experience) and approach (phenomenology and grounded theory) are similar to those in my research. However, the questions asked in her interviews did not focus on a specific object encounter to the degree that mine do. Roppola's questions address how people are attracted to displays, how they interact with them, if they received an exhibition message, display design, past engaging experiences, and museum visit frequency (Roppola, 2012, p.70). She interviewed visitors and found their interactions with exhibition environments could be grouped into four categories: framing, resonating, channelling, and broadening (Roppola, 2012, p.74). Framing is the general museum environment and is considered from a material semiotic network perspective (Roppola, 2012, p.74). Resonating is when a visitor is attracted to 'exhibition environments' (Roppola, 2012, p.74). Channelling is the process of a visitor being guided through the museum (Roppola, 2012, p.74). Broadening is when a visitor has a personal, transformative and reflective experience (Roppola, 2012, p.74). Resonating in particular has some similarity to my research into object engagements as it speaks to a visitor being attracted to and interacting with displays. Roppola's recommendations on exhibition development span object, display and overall museum experience.

Other work of relevance includes Black's practical recommendations for an engaging museum, which are based in an overall approach to visitor experience (Black, 2005). He argues that the central task of exhibitions is to 'engage audience directly with collections – to gain visitor attention, to hold it and to encourage reflection' (Black, 2005, p.271). Black discusses engagement in terms of a visitor having sustained interest for a display and being eager to mentally and physically interact with the displays (Black, 2005, p.266). He also speaks of engagement in terms of a museum that addresses visitor needs and expectations and attains an audience (Black, 2005, p.266). The focus on objects is how best to display them in order to attract visitors' attention as well as to contextualise the objects (Black, 2005, p.276). He details pre-visit motivations, best practice museum staff interactions with visitors and the use of both learning theories and interpretation in exhibition development as well as a museum interpretation master plan and concept development (Black, 2005). While many facets of a museum visit are examined, unlike in this research project there is no work on what a visitor feels when engaged with an object.

Nina Simon writes about a museum where visitors feel welcome and are more than passive consumers of the exhibition. Specifically, she discusses the importance of the museum as 'a place where visitors can create, share and connect with each other around content' (Simon, 2010, p.ii). The concept of people connecting with each other is briefly touched upon in my research too, as several interviews were with more than one person. The one element that Simon examines that significantly aligns with my research focus, however, is the idea of connecting around content. She argues that this occurs when visitors 'focus on the evidence, objects, and ideas most important to the institution in question' (Simon, 2010, p.iii). She continues to argue, 'the goal of participatory techniques is both to meet visitors' expectations for active engagement and to do so in a way that furthers the mission and core values of the institution' (Simon, 2010, p.iii). The term engagement relating to active engagement is not explicitly defined and Simon gives general suggestions for exhibition planning, public and educational programmes, and ways to encourage and maintain participation. If one considers participation as a form of engagement, then this type of engagement is between visitors and the overall museum, and the museum institutional goals. My

research does not examine if the aim of a museum or curator has been taken up by a visitor. Rather, my research focuses on how visitors encounter objects, and does not concern itself with museum mission or comprehension of exhibition messages.

Bitgood adopts a psychological approach to study why and how museum visitors pay attention to exhibitions, and what factors can increase or decrease this visitor attention (Bitgood, 2013, p.9). A primary motivation worthy of attention is the value a visitor places on the object or exhibition, where value is defined as 'a ratio of utility or satisfaction or benefit divided by cost such as time, effort, or money' (Bitgood, 2013, p.12). The higher the value the visitor places on an exhibition, the longer attention is paid. Factors impacting how visitors perceive value include personal and psychological (interest level, museum visit expectation, level of fatigue) as well as environmental (other visitors, architecture, exhibition design) (Bitgood, 2013, p.13). Bitgood proposes an attention-value model as a means to encourage museum visitor attraction (Bitgood, 2013, p.64). The model posits a continuum of visitor attention at three stages: capture, focus, and engagement (Bitgood, 2013, p.64). At each of the stages, different factors influence how visitors act in the museum, the terms used are 'response-impact measures' and 'person-setting variables' (Bitgood, 2013, p.64). The model endeavours to encourage attentive museum visits through decreasing opportunities for fatigue (wayfinding to ensure visitors know what to expect and to find it) and increasing opportunities for attention through exhibition design (label length, interpretation that encourages visitors to look at display). While the model recognises the complexity of visitor interactions, and makes each encounter personal as the model takes into account psychological motivations, it is a broad view of visitor experience. My research aims instead to focus on the interactions between a person and an object: not necessarily on what value the person puts on that interaction, but on the nuances that are occurring within it.

In the studies referred to above, there is great variety in how engagement is described and studied. While one could research the engagement between a visitor and the museum overall, objects are central to the museum experience (Dudley, 2012, p.5), and how visitors interact with the objects will influence their experience. The possibilities of how to research object encounters are many. Envisaging the future of

museum design, MacLeod, et al. argue for 'cross-sectional collaboration' and that 'design must be research led and research must be design led demands the production of new creative methodologies' (MacLeod, et al., 2018, p.7). Perhaps a distinct and explicitly phenomenological approach could be one of these new and creative methodologies. Further, a recent review of visitor experience studies found that different groups focused on their specific means of considering the topic (for example, Falk and Dierking emphasised on learning) and that there is an absence of attention to immediate visitor reactions in exhibitions and to their experiences in and of themselves (Kirchberg and Trondle, 2012, p.448). And what should museums themselves measure, when it comes to understanding the experience of their visitors? Wertsch argues the 'evaluation of museums' impact on visitors' can be difficult to assess as what is being evaluated 'remains unclear' (Wertsch, 2002, p.113). Are visitors evaluated on their uptake of knowledge, increase in curiosity, reflection of their identity or something else? And underlining these possibilities is the question, what exactly is the museum supposed to be doing? (Wertsch, 2002, p.114). To understand the museum experience, researchers must do more than observe visitors and pose demographic questions, and instead must employ in depth qualitative research approaches (Hooper-Greenhill, 2008, p.373).This PhD thus seeks to address the lack of attention on visitors' interactions in exhibitions and in experiences in themselves, and to adopt a general phenomenological approach to allow for personal, multisensory, emotional, and other ways of experiencing to be expressed by museum visitors. It will also be open in its approach and not set out to validate a fixed concept of engagement.

Research parameters

My research aim is object encounters, however there are many factors that can influence how a visitor experiences the museum. In order to scope my PhD to a feasible project I have considered several of these factors and determine them to be outside of my research set-up. What a visitor experiences at the museum, as well as the museum as an institute, and all of the potentials about visits and museums are vast. A typical museum visit is not, for example, in isolation of other people. Even if a visitor is alone, there are other people present that can influence the museum

experience (Heath and vom Lehn, 2004). And many museum visits heavily feature social activities (see Falk and Dierking, 2012; Falk, Moussouri and Coulson, 1998; Houlberg Rung, 2013; Pekarik, Doering and Karns, 1999) and conversation between people in their visitor groups (see Leinhardt, Crowley and Knutson, 2002; Leinhardt and Knutson, 2004). In order to scope this research project, however, it was decided to focus on object encounters of one or two people, and not to explicitly study the interaction between people. However, points of social interaction which are of relevance will be mentioned.

Museum architecture also influences how visitors navigate the museum as well as their museum experience. The museum is not a static building, but something that is lived and used; 'the museum-as-practised' is a place in flux, the experience of the museum being influenced by ongoing interactions between space, objects, and people (Jones and MacLeod, 2016, p.208). Buildings can also influence how visitors interact with displays; through visitor mapping, it was observed that at the Centre Pompidou 'objects are placed in a variety of relations with each other, encouraging visitors to systematically change points of view and so see changing relationships between works in foreground and background' (Tzortzi, 2014, p.346). The movement of visitors in the museum space is so integral to the museum experience that one research group argues for the composition and testing of a visitor circulation checklist in exhibition development (Guler, 2015). Museum visitors are not passive receptacles to exhibitions or to buildings and space, but active participants during their museum visit (Forgan, 2005, p.582). Indeed a study of Te Papa visitors found that people remember a combination of space, exhibition themes, and design (Schorch, 2014). Other researchers have found that the visitor experience is influenced by environmental, psychological, and social factors (Goulding, 2000). It is not within the capacity of this research project to specifically study architecture, however the open nature of the interview allowed visitors to reflect upon the topic if they felt it appropriate.

Digital means of interacting with a museum object, for example taking photographs (see Stylianou-Lambert, 2017) or placing images on social media platforms (for example see Budge and Burness, 2018) is not explored in this research project. In order for a visitor to decide to take a photograph and/or put it on social media, they

were attracted in some way to the object (Budge and Burness, 2018; Stylianou-Lambert, 2017). Therefore, it can be considered an outcome of an engaging encounter or part of an engaging experience, as it speaks to how visitors commune with objects and share their encounters with others. However, it will not be researched in this project as here the focus is on the immediate encounter between a visitor and the object. Similarly, how museums use social media and the potential continuation of museum authority (see Kidd, 2011; Kidd, 2014), and the ways in which they communicate online or use interactives in exhibitions (see Drotner, et. al, 2013; Heath and vom Lehn, 2008; Kidd, 2014; Parry, 2007) will not be examined.

It is recognised museums can challenge traditional historical narratives, and enter into dialogues about who is represented, how people are represented, and display themes that are difficult or contested (see Cameron and Kelly, 2010; Kidd, et al., 2014). The addressing of previously underrepresented groups can lead to the museum having a social justice role, and potentially democratising the museum to people that had previously not been represented or felt welcome in the space (see Sandell and Nightingale, 2012; Sandell, Dodd and Garland-Thomson, 2010). A social history perspective has the 'tendency to see history not just from the top down but also from the bottom up' which 'challenges naturalized, dominant ways of understanding the past' (Smith, 2003, p.177). Perhaps a mode of object encounters is possible if aspects of the objects relate to something that visitors are likely to be familiar with, for example the act of making, eating, or handling things for use. This will be revisited in the final chapter when object encounters and the possible uses of the research findings are reflected upon.

My PhD focuses on the object encounter, and does not have scope to also untangle the motivations or outcomes that the visitor experiences. As the immediate object encounter is under investigation, surrounding factors leading up to it (the journey a visitor traverses as they go through the museum) and leading from (self-identity affirmed or challenged, wellbeing enhanced) the event are not investigated. It is recognised that an increased awareness of different motivations in making the choice to visit the museum is of importance to museum workers as a variety of different activities, whether social, object specific, or self-exploration, can appeal to the varying

motivations of visitors (Stylianou-Lambert, 2009, p.154). Outcomes of the museum visit, such as wellbeing (see Binnie, 2010) or the perpetuation or challenging of self-identity (see Paris and Mercer, 2002; Stylianou-Lambert, 2010) will not be explored. It is recognised that the selection of exhibition themes and objects is political, especially relating to colonised people (see Jessiman, 2017; Onciul, 2014) and that the museum as an institution demonstrates authoritative power (see Bennett, 1995; Stylianou-Lambert, 2010). The authoritative power of the museum as an institution as well as political dimensions of exhibitions and objects will not be investigated.

This research project explores how visitors encounter objects – which in turn can be considered in various ways. However, this research will not review authenticity (see Hein, 2011; Jones, 2010; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006), nor investigate the power of object display to bring about political agendas, for example display of material from source communities in museums in colonial countries that collected the material (Peers and Brown, 2003), nor explore objects in gift giving exchanges (see Purbrick, 2014), nor objects in collections (see Byrne, 2011; Geoghegan and Hess 2015).

The parameters of the museum visit that I refer to within this thesis, and was the basis of fieldwork, is that the site of study is not an historic site or a house museum, but a museum that holds historic objects. The objects concerned are originals rather than replicas. While replicas have been considered as a means to connect the visitor with an object in a display case, they also have the potential to focus visitor attention in such a way that leaves the original object ignored (Pilegaard, 2015, p.72). The objects are displayed in a case, away from touch. The encounters are between museum visitors and objects and not mediated by a museum guide (for example unlike the conditions described earlier from Crooke, 2012 and Witcomb, 2010). Unless indicated, the objects relate to social history – material that people have used or made in their day to day lives. The visitor is envisaged to walk through the museum and stop at objects that attract them, and possibly be engaged. As mentioned above, it is this intimate object encounter that is the focus of study, and not what happens after the visit. The research has engaged only with non-vulnerable, adult visitors, fully able to traverse through the museum, listen to soundscapes, look at objects and read interpretation without assistance. While both physical and social access are of great

relevance, it is not within the scope of the research project to explore object encounters in the absence of sight or hearing, or by neurodiverse people.

Research contribution

Several of the studies mentioned previously in this chapter offer models of engagement for general engagement, and not specifically for object encounters. It is an aim to work towards object encounter knowledge that could be used by museum practitioners. Academic research into visitor studies generally produces works that comprise of a theoretical framework, rather than works that inform practice or policy (Hooper-Greenhill, 2008, p.365). In order for the reduction of barriers between teaching, research and practice in the museum field, Murphy advocates the novel, especially, 'inventiveness, risk-taking and innovative approaches designed to respond to the challenges that exist within the museum sector' (Murphy, 2018). This research project uses a known, but not commonly employed means of considering visitor engagement. One of the desired outcomes of this research project is the application of the findings in a practical manner that would allow a time poor curator a means to create an exhibition that could facilitate visitor engagement. It will attempt to take specific cases and produce observations that are 'of direct relevance to exhibition design' (MacDonald, 2007, p.158). It will also hope to contribute to the development of 'a more nuanced observation and analytical vocabulary' (MacDonald, 2007, p.158) of what a museum visitor experiences. Through the innovative approach of phenomenology, I hope to contribute meaningful findings for museum practitioners to enhance engagement with their visitors.

Structure of this thesis

This thesis has six chapters, bringing the reader on the journey of object engagement, from conception to investigation, through to analysis and reflections, to finish on what applications the findings have relative to museum practitioners and researchers. Each chapter opens with a quote from interviews undertaken in fieldwork and quotes are also used throughout the thesis. This not only honours the contribution of the research participants, without whom the thesis would not be possible and the richness

of results would not have been achieved, but also demonstrates the main thread of enquiry for each chapter. A critique of research relating to museum visitors is not allowing the 'visitor "voice" to shine through, as though only the experts have something important to say' (Jones, 2015, p.541).

This first chapter establishes the landscape of research into engagement of visitors with objects, exhibitions or museum themselves. It introduces the research aim and objectives, and explains why they are being asked. Chapter One goes into detail on the first research objective, 'to review how visitor engagement has previously been defined, considered, and understood'. The parameters of what has been studied is laid out and the reader informed of working terms. The chapter opens with a quote of an engaging experience detailing how a visitor feels something important when they are engaged, and indicating that engagement is a worthy study pursuit.

Chapter Two begins with a quote rich in imagination, validating the selection of phenomenology as a research framework. Through explaining phenomenology the chapter outlines how and why it is a viable means to investigate engagement. Other research approaches are analysed and found not to be as robust as phenomenology in the aim of describing and capturing emotional, imagination, multisensory, and other facets of object encounters. It also explains how this research project is different from other engagement orientated research that uses a phenomenological approach. The chapter will speak to the research objective, 'to explore and develop the consideration of engaging object encounters from a phenomenological, and specifically a Heideggerian, stance'. Chapter Two introduces the themes of object manifestation, from Heideggerian thought. It also introduces the concept of embodiment.

Following on from how phenomenology can be used as a framework to consider object encounters, a methodology for doing so in the field is summarised in Chapter Three. It continues to address the research objective, 'to explore and develop the consideration of engaging object encounters from a phenomenological stance'. The chapter also hints at the possibility of the fieldwork to respond to the final research objective, 'examine whether or not 'engagement' can be characterised from fieldwork-derived descriptions of an exhibition experience'. The third chapter reveals the trial

and error of developing a methodology partially based on dense philosophical texts. The chapter starts with a reflection on the subjectivity of engagement and thus the inherent difficulty of measuring it, indicating the need for a flexible methodology approach – one that is achieved with mixed methods of phenomenology and grounded theory.

The fourth chapter reports the findings from fieldwork. By detailing themes identified in interviews, the chapter addresses two research objectives, 'to explore and develop the consideration of engaging object encounters from a phenomenological stance' in addition to 'examine whether or not 'engagement' can be characterised from fieldwork-derived descriptions of an exhibition experience'. The first research objective regarding visitor engagement is also addressed, as literature is referred to in order to understand the findings and develop concepts around them. Chapter Four also resonates with themes of object manifestation, embodiment, object engagement, and overall engagement. The spectrum of engagement containing characteristics of engaging object encounters is introduced. As findings are the focus, a visitor thought on object engagement begins the chapter.

Chapter Five discusses the findings and puts them into a larger context, thus addressing all three research objectives of engagement definition, phenomenological comprehension of object engagement, and the characterisation of engagement from descriptions in the field. More detail is offered regarding themes of object manifestation, embodiment, object engagement, and overall engagement. The chapter starts with a quote on engagement.

At the commencement of the final chapter is a participant reminiscing about the experience of encountering Sagrada Familia and a contemplation on the past and future. It was selected as the last chapter reflects on the overall project as well as what possibilities the future holds. It reviews the research aim and objectives that were the foundation of this project. The chapter takes the contextualised findings and applies them to the museum world. Chapter Six ponders what use the characteristics of an engaging object encounter as well as a phenomenological research approach can be to

museum researchers and practitioners. It reflects on limitations of the research project

and my development as a researcher and finishes by recommending future work.

Chapter Two: Framework to research engaging object encounters

> I read a poem once when I was in school and it was for whatever reason, about a vessel in a museum and it said that it, they imagined, this poet imagined, that the vessel was very sad because it's no longer being actually used and, like, touched by human hands. It's being, like, looked at, and that's it. And I kind of wonder (laughs), if they are all that happy, being objects to look at rather than objects to be, like, used and incorporated into people's lives in the same way.[2]

Overview

This chapter suggests a framework to investigate engagement. It begins with a survey of other possible research approaches and finds them lacking in capacity to examine the immediacy of the first-hand experience and to reveal the nuances of what a person feels and experiences when they encounter an object. Phenomenology is then introduced as a more suitable research approach. A background of the field is detailed, including its use in museum studies. Two particular theorists and their arguments are outlined: Heidegger and object manifestation; Merleau-Ponty and embodiment. The chapter then concludes with an outline of how these philosophers' reflections will be used in the phenomenological approach of this research project.

Alternatives to phenomenology

In order to support the choice of phenomenology as a framework to study museum visitor engagement, alternative research approaches were also considered, in relation to their potential to unravel the complexities of visitor experiences and capacity to address my research aim and objectives. My research objectives include a specific focus on phenomenology and thus preclude other approaches. However, alternative approaches to engagement and encounters with objects were nonetheless considered, as a way of both contextualising and drawing out the specific strengths of a

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phenomenological approach. Other frameworks considered were anthropology, narrative analysis, psychology, and object oriented philosophy.

Anthropology is a broad field and not easily defined, as it 'is not confined to a delimited segment within a wider division of academic labour: rather it exists to subvert any such tidy division, render[ing] problematic the very foundations on which it rests' (Ingold, 1994, p.xvii). Therefore I do not attempt to define it but instead review two particular anthropological approaches that serve well in considering objects and people's engagements with them: sensory and material anthropology. I also explore how a phenomenological stance intersects with these approaches.

Sensory anthropology recognises that the world is understood through senses and that these senses are perceived differently in different cultures (Classen, 1997). Phenomenology allows for the researcher to ask about the lived experience of participants. As the research participants in a project framed by a phenomenological approach are reflecting on their own experiences, their reflections will also capture their sensory interactions, as interpreted by participants in their cultural frame. Sensory anthropology questions the Western assumption that 'in terms of cultural significance, sight is the only sense of major importance' (Classen, 1997, p.402). Phenomenology also returns lived experience to the realms of any sense as it allows capture of multisensory, embodied means of encounters and is not limited to what was seen.

Material anthropology embraces the study of the social-material world and highlights materiality. My own referrals to materiality follow the notion that 'materiality, then, is about not solely meaning nor simply physical forms, but the dynamic interaction of both with our sensory experience' (Dudley, 2010, pp.7-8). As with material anthropology, I centralise the presence of the object in the museum experience by investigating object encounters encompassing emotion, imagination, and other facets, rather than focusing only on information such as meaning or physical form.

There is an intersection of sensory and material anthropology concerning object encounters as I wish to study them. A sensory anthropology includes embodied and

other responses and not just the visual, while a material anthropology approach focuses on not just the physical nature of an object or how it relates to the culture that made it, but on its materiality. A phenomenological approach could be a means to capture this intersection of sensory and material anthropology. Indeed, several anthropologists utilise phenomenological approaches in their practice (see Cox, Irving and White, 2016; Ingold, 2000; Ram and Houston, 2015). Dudley too argues that 'a truly materialist approach necessitates a subtle, but important, re-jigging of emphasis on many areas of study, especially museums, influenced in part by phenomenology' (Dudley, 2010, p.3).

A material anthropology approach to museum objects results in an evocative reflection on engagement (Dudley, 2012). Methodologically, however, while semi-structured and informal interviews may be used by anthropologists the classic ethnographic field method is participant observation of a particular group over a sustained period of time (Flemming, 2012, pp.153-154). In my research, in contrast, I wanted to probe the object encounters of different museum visitors, each of whom would only be in the gallery for a short space of time. Interviews comprised my main chosen method and, as I discuss in the next chapter, while conceptually sensory and material anthropology align with my research aim, it is phenomenology that provides the framework for my interview questions and analysis relating to object manifestation and embodiment. Interviews and observations which are part of the fieldwork of anthropology are used in this PhD, but with questions composed with phenomenological influence.

Narrative research is an area with some relevance to my research aim. The approach investigates a person's experience (Creswell, 2013, p.104) but is defined and used differently by different researchers (Riessman, 2008, p.539). Two categories generally used in all narrative analysis are thematic – what the narrative is about – and structural – how is the narrative is composed in order to articulate an aim or aims (Riessman, 539). A narrative can be in the form of an everyday conversation, research interview, or writings from personal, public or political spheres, to film or performance (Griffin and May, 2012, p.442). Narrative analysis allows researchers to delve into participant experiences as narratives are 'situated and understood within larger

cultural, social, and institutional' realms (Clandinin and Caine, 2008, p.514). The approach can be used on first-person accounts and focuses on 'how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences' as well as taking into account the context of the experiences, which can impact how individuals relate their experience (Griffin and May, 2012, p.442). Narrative analysis aims to 'shed light on meaning, and to study the interface between individual and social context' and 'how individuals use socio-cultural narratives to make sense of their experiences' and 'how these individuals narratives in turn help shape social contexts and collective ways of constructing social realty' (Griffin and May, 2012, p.446).

In an effort to locate the reasons for sustained visitation to a museum, for example, Everett and Barrett used a narrative analysis of visitor interviews (Everett and Barrett, 2009). The team wished to discover how visitors 'form and sustain continuing relationships' with the museum (Everett and Barrett, 2009, p.3). They claim that narrative research can 'place museum visitation within the broader context of people's lives' (Everett and Barrett, 2009, p.11). Visitors were interviewed three separate times and one of the interviews involved the participant guiding the researcher through the parts of the museum that attracted them (Everett and Barrett, 2009, p.6). Narrative analysis is useful for this kind of reflection over periods of time. For example, in Everett and Barrett's research participants spoke of how their experiences of museums developed over time with their own changing interests and different life events (Everett and Barrett, 2009, p.12). However this kind of temporal progression is not the focus of my research. Instead, I wish to investigate the intimate object encounter in and of itself; questions around self-identity or post-object encounter reflections are not part of the research scope. Everett and Barrett do not describe whether or not they asked particular questions in front of objects. The absence of such specific object interaction questions and the overall research focus of engagement with the museum as a place to visit over a length of time, rather than on specific object engagement, makes their project rather different from mine. For my research, narrative analysis would not offer an adequate research framework within which either to generate questions around object manifestation or embodiment, or to analyse the findings around individual encounters.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, psychology has also been used to study engagement (Bitgood, 2013: Perry, 2012). It is a useful approach to understand what a person thinks and experiences in the museum. However, there is a limitation in that it rarely takes into account embodied modes of experience (Brown, et al., 2009, p.202). For example, a university psychology research group studied 'the nature of fascination' and 'strong interest experiences' in museum visitors with a cognitive and emotional focus (Dahl, et al., 2013, p.160). Visitor preferences influence their museum experiences, however these experiences can be impacted by the cognitive and affective interaction of a visitor with exhibitions (Dahl, et al., 2013, p.178). Therefore a method to engage visitors cognitively and affectively, as suggested by the authors, is to deliberately fascinate visitors with material that is cognitively accessible or 'comprehensible, cohesive, and vivid' (Dahl, et al., 2013, p.178). While the psychological research focuses on levels of emotional and comprehension responses, it does not take into account embodied or physical responses to objects nor a connection to the past of the object. In Soren's research into 'transformational' or engaging experience, triggers for engagement were identified as 'objects, unexpected and emotional experiences, and new cultural and attitudinal understandings' (Soren, 2009, pp.247-248). Again, there is reference to the emotional but none towards the embodied nature of museum encounters. In summary, while there are similarities between psychology and phenomenology, as both seek to explain behaviour 'in terms of a person's subjective existence' (Kendler, 2005, p.318), in the context of my research objectives phenomenology offers a more robust framework to gain impressions of visitor cognitive, emotional, and embodied reactions to objects.

A relatively new philosophical movement is object oriented philosophy. This mode of thinking is part of the speculative realist movement and views previous theories about objects as belonging to two extremes: objects are either 'undermined' or 'overmined' (Harman, 2014, p.240). Undermined objects are '*insufficiently* deep, a purely superficial crust atop something much more fundamental' while overmined objects 'are *too* deep: that they have no genuine independence and are really nothing more than convenient way of tying together diverse outward qualities or effects'; the movement argues that the reality of objects is somewhere between these two

extremes: objects exist in reality and can have effects on people (Harman, 2014, p.240). The approach recognises humans are relevant but are not the only focus of examination, object oriented philosophy 'puts things at the center of being' (Bogost, 2012, p.6). Object oriented philosophy offers a novel way to consider objects and in this research was used in the creation of a question (what would it be like to be that object?). However, as this thesis is couched in practical outcomes, and while the consideration of a museum from an object's point of view may reveal a deeper understanding of the metaphysics of objects, it may not provide results that would influence exhibition display or similar museum activities. Therefore, it was not a central component of the approach used in this research. However it is mentioned in the next chapter as it did influence an aspect of the field methodology.

This section detailed the selection process for selecting the most appropriate framework for this PhD. The requirement for a means to capture the nuances of a personal experience between a visitor and an object, and their immediate responses, invalidated the use of several approaches from scientific, social science, and philosophical disciplines. The next section argues that phenomenology can address all the requirements.

The selected framework

What approach, then, can nuance object encounters, capture embodied modes of interaction, as well as provide a means to consider object manifestation? My selected framework is a combination of grounded theory and phenomenology. Below I define and describe first grounded theory and then phenomenology in general terms, before moving on to consider particular forms of phenomenology of specific relevance to this research.

Grounded theory is a research approach that in every step of the process collects data, analyses the data, develops a theory or argument and then applies that to subsequent steps of data collection and analysis in order to re-examine the emerging findings (Seale, 2012, p.395). In addition to the iteration between data collection and data analysis is the constant comparison in the data analysis method. Constant comparison

involves reviewing collected data and as themes emerge, to categorise these and combine them with corresponding properties (for example, if a visitor is engaged or not with an object) to reach 'theoretical saturation' which leads to the composition of a theory (Seale, 2012, p.397).

A strength of grounded theory is that it forces the researcher to 'look beyond the superficial, to apply every possible interpretation before developing final concepts' (Goulding, 2005, p.297). In addition, a grounded theory approach maintains the immediacy between the investigator and what is being investigated, allows for the first person perspective to be recorded, and enables visitors to respond to questions about their experience easily. A reported weakness of grounded theory is that researchers construct theories about social interactions that do not reflect how people act in their daily life (Seale, 2012, p.400). However, in this research this weakness is addressed by the mixed method approach, using grounded theory in conjunction with an approach that sets out to examine the lived experience of people. The outcomes of this PhD research are centred on lived experiences.

Below, I define phenomenology and discuss its strengths and weaknesses, and its appropriateness for this research project. I also describe how it has been applied in museum studies.

In the late 1800s a philosophical approach of descriptive psychology emerged from the Franz Brentano school (Moran, 2008, p.10). It was further developed by mathematician and philosopher Edmund Husserl into phenomenology in the early 1900s; influential theorists of the field include Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur (Zahavi, 2008, p.661). Phenomenology influenced the development of hermeneutics, deconstruction and post-structuralism, all movements that are classed under the umbrella term continental philosophy (Zahavi, 2008, p.661). While Husserl is credited with being the founder of the movement, many deviations from his thought and challenges to his arguments have been made by succeeding philosophers (Zahavi, 2008, p.661). Not all these deviations will be detailed, however it is stated to make the reader aware that there is a richness of thought which can be applied to phenomenology.

Phenomenology is characterised by several themes and is not founded upon a strict system but is rather unified in that a phenomenological approach is a practice (Moran, 2000, p.4). The practice focuses on descriptive means of phenomena, an unbiased account that concentrates on 'evidence that presents itself to our grasp or intuition' (Moran, 2000, p.1). The use of a phenomenological methodological approach results in a description of how people experience the phenomena under investigation (van Manen, 1990). In a summary of phenomenological philosophers, Heidegger's approach to the field is that phenomenology is a 'methodological concept' and examines 'the "how" of what is to be analysed' (Macann, 1993, p.69). The 'how' in this research context is the visitor experience when encountering an object.

Phenomenologists display a variety of interests for the application of phenomenology as well as in what they consider to be the central themes of phenomenology, and indeed in how they have further developed the approach (Moran, 2000, p.3). This elasticity of approach and definition allows phenomenology to be both a method and a general movement (Moran, 2000, p.3). As phenomenology can be used to examine the interactions between people and phenomena, elements common to the majority of humanities research, it is versatile and has been used in diverse fields. For example it has been used in archaeology (Karlsson, 1988; Olsen, 2010; Tilley, 2004), architecture (Hale, 2017), anthropology (Jackson, 2015; Katz and Csordas, 2003; Otto and Bubandt, 2010), management studies (vom Lehn, 2018), queer studies (Ahmed, 2006), psychology (see Wertz, 2005), to interrogate the intricacies of image sense making when people view photographs (Belova, 2006), and to research fashion and the fabric industry (Aspers, 2009).

Phenomenology is extremely well suited to exploring the details of the object encounter, something which happens every day in a museum but still requires deeper characterisation. The practice examines how phenomena (things, events, people) appear to and are experienced by people, specifically the 'manner in which things and meanings show themselves, come to self-evidence, or come to be "constituted" for us' (Moran, 2000, p.1). A phenomenological approach is to gain insight into the meaning and natures of experiences people have every day (van Manen, 1990, p.9). It allows researchers to give importance to all aspects of life, including observation of all things

commonplace and routine. Phenomenology 'refuses to separate philosophical knowledge from the world of things, while viewing thinking as an embodied practice, and sees no observation, however mundane, as immune from an unending critique' (Thomas, 2006, p.57). Therefore it is an ideal approach to investigate the fabric of everyday – material culture (Thomas, 2006, p.57). This view is shared by archaeologist Olsen who champions a phenomenological approach to considering material culture as it allows for 'a practical, lived experience, un-obscured by abstract philosophical concepts and theories' (Olsen, 2003, p.96).

The approach is highly appropriate for describing the personal experience, which will allow a conduit into the unique experiences that each visitor has in the museum. This is especially relevant as visitors will have various perspectives and different life experiences. Phenomenology rejects objectivism, scientism, metaphysical realism, and instead focuses on the first-person perspective (Zahavi, 2008, p.663). This focus on first-person precludes an empirical third-person perspective that can 'objectify both agent and world' (Schroeder, 2005, p.180). While a scientific approach, for example brain imaging techniques, can illustrate an encounter through brain function, a phenomenological approach 'focuses on the structure and qualities of objects and situations as they are experienced *by the subject*' (Moran, 2000, p.2). It firmly places the person experiencing the phenomena at the centre of analysis, focusing on their responses, absent of any judgement by the researcher of the experience. The approach gives 'manifest appearances their due' and the lived experience being examined includes 'all forms of appearing, showing, manifesting, making evident or "evidencing", bearing witness, truth-claiming, checking and verifying, including all forms of seeming, dissembling, occluding, obscuring, denying and falsifying' (Moran, 2000, p.5). Thus, a phenomenological investigation seeks to describe the immediate experience felt by a person about a phenomenon, an immediate experience which is different and unique for every person.

A phenomenological approach does not set out to prove the existence of entities, but to examine how they are, or are not, experienced by people: 'in the phenomenology of religion, the focus is on the manner in which the sacred is experienced by the religious practitioner – or indeed as denied by the atheist – rather than on the attempt

to ascertain if there really is or is not a domain of the sacred as it were "behind" the belief' (Moran, 2002, p.6). It 'seeks a direct intuition of the essence of the object or situation' (Moran, 2002, p.5). Therefore, a phenomenological approach can be used to examine how someone feels in a haunted house, although people may claim there are no such things as ghosts, others may believe there are and experience heightened responses in a haunted house. In this way, no facet of experience is dismissed by assumptions by the investigator. In a museum context, this allows for all nuances of an experience to be captured. As stated in Chapter One there has been an absence of investigation of how emotion, imagination, and other facets are part of an engaging experience. If a visitor makes an imaginary interpretation of an object or has an emotional encounter with an object, a phenomenological approach would describe it.

Therefore phenomenology is an ideal framework to explore what people experience in the museum and the different elements that influence how engaged they may, or may not, feel towards objects and exhibitions. The topic under investigation, visitor engagement, will be close to the investigator and not distanced by placing theoretical layers upon the experience.

Regarding a strength of the approach, Tilley argues that phenomenology, unlike empiricist or positivist approaches, allows for the subjectivity of how a person experiences the world to be described (Tilley, 2004, p.1). While this description is a re-description by the person experiencing the phenomena, the findings can facilitate insights and new understandings of how the person experiences phenomena (Tilley, 2004, p.1). He views phenomenology as a way 'to describe the objects of consciousness in the manner in which they are presented to consciousness' (Tilley, 2004, p.1). This, in addition to the appealing facets of the approach underlined in the explanation of the approach, argues the strength and appropriateness of phenomenology as the selected methodology in this research project.

I now turn to examine four weaknesses of phenomenology, and how they might be addressed: limits regarding metaphysicality, generalisations, being apolitical, and being too descriptive.

Phenomenology is accused by speculative realists as being limiting with regards to metaphysicality. Speculative realism is a school of thought which diverged and developed from phenomenology (Sparrow, 2014), but considers phenomenology metaphysically limiting because of its assertion that the totality of the universe is the same as the totality of what human consciousness perceives (Sparrow, 2014, p.114). The field of speculative realism allows for consideration of the universe not limited to human orientation (Sparrow, 2014, p.114). However, the weakness as professed by the speculative realists that phenomenology can only reveal what is evident to a person is not considered a weakness relative to this PhD. As the research is focused on visitor experience, the focus is exactly trained on what is considered a weakness – how objects are encountered by people. Therefore it is recognised as a weakness if one has a different research focus, but is actually a strength when considered in the context of my research project.

Another limit of a purely phenomenological approach is the assertion that it does not lend itself to the creation of generalisations or functional relationships (van Manen, 1990). The view is that there is a risk in generalising, in that the unique nature of each person's experience would be lost (van Manen, 1990, p.22). This is seconded in a review of the impact phenomenology has had on material culture studies, where the reader is warned against a general interpretation of a phenomenological approach as it does not achieve the potential 'to the subtlety of phenomenological thought' (Thomas, 2006, p.43). The reviewer is concerned with an absence of criticality when the nuances of phenomenology are reduced to a methodology where a researcher interprets a phenomena 'upon their unbridled subjective experience' (Thomas, 2006, p.43). Instead phenomenology is suggested to be used to problematize experience and to delve into how humans encounter the world (Thomas, 2006, p.43). The complexity of taking unique personal experiences in order to generate broader statements is recognised and I have reflected carefully on its in relation to my own work. In particular, I have worked hard to honour and 'sound' the voice of my participants, using their words and opening each chapter with an individual quote, as I described in Chapter One. Thereby the uniqueness of each participant has been maintained. Moreover, through the use of a grounded theory approach interwoven with my

phenomenological framework, different themes are enabled to emerge through their communal presence.

Regarding an absence of politics in phenomenological approaches, some critics claim that phenomenology's 'fundamentally descriptive aim does not directly produce political consequences' (Schroeder, 2005, p.202). This statement does not, however, take into account the myriad uses researchers can make from phenomenological investigations, and the potential consequences of research. For example, Anderson and Spencer examined how AIDS patients consider their disease in an effort to improve 'medication adherences and other health behaviours' (Anderson and Spencer, 2002), and Brown, et al. described the experience of people waiting for liver transplants then made recommendations for transplant teams and other health care professionals involved in the process (Brown, et al., 2006). Also, a person lives in a world that has a political environment, and how that person lives, acts and consumes in that world is a political action (Hale, 2013, p.28); therefore any reflection on a lived experience is in some way political.

Being descriptive is one of the strengths of phenomenology, however it has the potential to descend into 'hyper-interpretive romanticism' (Hicks, 2010, p.72). In addition, a pure phenomenological approach has been argued to be inadequate without being associated with interpretation that goes beyond description (Tilley, 2004, p.224). This will be avoided in this PhD as phenomenology is utilised as a means to create questions about visitor interaction that are then analysed with grounded theory. This will negate the possibility of an overly descriptive account of an experience. Also the findings will be contextualised regarding practical applications to the museum, resulting in more than a description or a summary of an experience.

In conclusion, phenomenology offers a way to consider engagement in museums. Indeed, as I return to in Chapter Three a number of researchers are already using phenomenology to investigate museum experience using different approaches and with different research focuses. Discussion of the four weaknesses of phenomenology alludes to the potential for the limits to be overcome by mixed methods. This thesis seeks to delve into visitor engagement, investigate the nature of the experience and

contribute towards formulating visitor-derived descriptions of what they feel when engaged with an object and visitor-derived characteristics of engagement. A singularly phenomenological approach would not allow for that, as a means to review the experiential data in order to glean patterns of behaviour is also required. A mixed method research framework combining phenomenology and grounded theory is robust, increases the strengths of the different approaches and decreases the weaknesses (Mayoh and Onwiegbuzie, 2013, p.2). This is fitting as it has been argued that an investigation involving material culture 'both demands and requires a multidisciplinary perspective' (Tilley, 2004, p.224).

Heidegger and object manifestation

Now that phenomenology has been introduced, the final part of this chapter outlines the work of two different phenomenologists. It discusses Heidegger and his arguments on object manifestation, as well as, subsequently, Merleau-Ponty and his arguments on embodiment, outlining the particularities of the phenomenological framework for this research project.

Martin Heidegger is one of the most significant philosophers of the twentieth century, his work influencing theology, hermeneutics, literary theory, psychology, existentialism, and ecology (Guignon, 2006, pp.1-2). He was born in 1889; in 1915 he began lecturing in philosophy and contemplating existence, which resulted in the 1927 publishing of the book 'Being and Time' (Davis, 2010, pp.260-262). Prior to World War Two, in 1933 Heidegger joined the Nazi party and was appointed to a teaching post at University of Freiburg but resigned a year later following differences with the university and the government (Davis, 2010, p.262). Heidegger's approach to articulating his thoughts changed from the transcendental mode of 'Being and Time' to a lyrical, poetic means to overcome what he termed 'the language of metaphysics' (Moran and Mooney, 2002, p.245). He later described this change of expression as a 'turning' (Moran and Mooney, 2002, p.245). With the new way of conveying his thoughts in the 1930s, through lectures and writing he developed the essays 'Introduction to Metaphysics', 'On the Essence of Truth', and 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (Davis, 2010, p.262). Due to his Nazi leanings, he was banned from teaching

between 1945 and 1949 (Davis, 2010, p.263). After the ban was lifted, Heidegger travelled throughout Europe lecturing and pondering concepts of technology, dwelling, and language, as well as continuing his thinking on art (Davis, 2010, p.264). In the 1950s he published 'Poetry, Language, Thought', a collection of works including reflections on language as well as the nature of the thing in the essay 'The Thing' (Moran, 2000, p.209). Heidegger died in 1976 (Davis, 2010, pp.260-264).

Before moving further forward in considering Heidegger's work, it is important to say something about Heidegger's political activity as he was lecturing in German universities throughout World War Two and was appointed to teaching roles by the ruling Nazi party (Karlsson, 1998, p.25). A number of his notebooks written from 1930s-1970s have been recently published, and these reveal the extent of his anti-Semitism (Inwood, 2014). Is it appropriate to use ponderings from a philosopher who did not challenge a regime that killed millions of people based on their race? Or as one Heideggerian expert asks, can Heidegger's thought be saved from his politics (Inwood, 2014)? Inwood argues that Heidegger's work does not portray political leanings or display Nazi beliefs such as biological racism or a conspiracy view of history (Inwood, 2014). It is reported that Heidegger acknowledged a link between his concepts of historicity and his political alignment to the Nazis in 1936, but later criticised National Socialism's biological racism (Davis, 2010, p.262). Therefore can Heidegger's thought can be viewed as separate from his politics? A leading Heidegger critic refutes the claim that his actions were of his time; not everyone decided to work from within the system (Guignon, 2006, p.35). Indeed friends of Heidegger considered his actions opportunistic at worst, or naïve at best (Guignon, 2006, p.35). However, Zabala reminds us that Heidegger stated, 'he who thinks great thoughts often makes great errors' (Zabala, 2015). I do not consider the argument that a person acts in their own time as a valid excuse, as there were many people that did not align with the Nazi party. Further, I disagree that a person can be exonerated on bad behaviour because they have produced important philosophical work. Therefore I recognise, and do not excuse, the involvement of Heidegger with the Nazi party. Instead, I share the view of how his work can be used with archaeologist Karlsson, who nuances the separation of a philosopher and the material they produce by adhering to the postmodern argument

that texts are dissociated from their creator as each new reader will interpret the material through their own cultural lenses (Karlsson, 1998, p.27). In this thesis, therefore, Heidegger's material is interpreted through this researcher's cultural lenses, which are not aligned with the Nazi party and aim to treat the material in an ethical manner.

It is recognised that Heidegger's later work, for example the essay, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' drafted in the 1930s and published in 1950 (Inwood, 1999, p.18), can relate to museum matters. These reflections on art relate to the experiences of someone interacting with it as well as the notion that material (in the essay, a temple) displayed out of the context of their origins may lose meaning (Heidegger, 2008, pp.139-212). However, my research focus is the more intimate encounters between a person and an object rather than questions about de-contextualisation. In this, Heidegger's work on object manifestation is of direct relevance.

In particular, 'Being and Time' has been described as Heidegger's radical call to re-consider traditional approaches to consciousness, existence, time, history, and the history of philosophy (Moran, 2000, p.222). While 'dense and difficult', it is also a masterpiece (Moran, 2000, p.192). The complexity is demonstrated in the number of multitude companion guides attempting to characterise material Heidegger discusses (for example Campbell, 2012; Davis, 2010; Guignon, 2006; Inwood, 2000; Large, 2008; Mulhall, 1996). Indeed, the work was so ground breaking, 'Being and Time' partially inspired a new philosophical movement of object oriented philosophy (see Harman, 2011). Themes relevant to this thesis, are that in order to understand the idea of existence Heidegger initiated investigations into how the world appears to people, from the interactions between people and things, as well as between people and their worlds (Heidegger, 1996). Heidegger's investigations go into depth regarding how people experience the world, and as such are phenomenological investigations. Applying his thinking about object manifestation could illuminate encounters between museum visitors and objects.

Engagement in this research project is contemplated through Heidegger's concepts of how people encounter and interact with things, specifically *Zuhandenheit* and

Vorhandenheit. In this section, these terms are defined and discussed. Regarding language used, as the concepts are complex, they will be referred to in the German language to distance them from the deceptive simplicity of being referred to in English as 'ready-to-hand' and 'present-at-hand'. Translations of Heidegger's 'Being and Time', originally published in German, will be in English. Heidegger rejected the traditional philosophical prioritisation of sight and 'emphasises that our initial contact with objects is in terms of their use and availability to us for certain assigned tasks, tasks generated by our interests' (Moran, 2000, p.233). Objects are thus considered in how they manifest to people, and whether the objects are useful or not useful.

The German term for handiness, or readiness-to-hand, *Zuhandenheit,* refers to how a person encounters things in such way that the objects are considered useful and available (Heidegger, 1996, p.67). *Zuhandenheit* objects are used in day-to-day activities with a basic characteristic of something *for* something, such as a hammer for hammering (Heidegger, 1996, p.67). These things are handy and have an assigned role for some particular task and the more one gets used to these things, the less one notices them (Cerbone, 2008, p.37). For example, when hammering a nail into the wall, one does not notice the hammer (Sparrow, 2014, p.125).

An object that is not handy, in contrast, is *Vorhandenheit*; it is 'something unusable or completely missing' (Heidegger, 1996, p.69). The *Vorhandenheit* object is not available to be used or is not present at all. It is something that one explicitly notices as an object (Sparrow, 2014, p.125). The more one examines *Vorhandenheit* objects, the more their usefulness is lost and the more the object becomes something that cannot be used to perform a task but instead is seen only for its components and properties (Cerbone, 2008, p.46).

Objects do not, however, exist in isolation or in binary states of *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit*. As argued throughout the preceding sections, Heidegger's thought is deep and rich. The next section nuances *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* and explores how objects exist in associations.

An object that is not immediately *Zuhandenheit* is not automatically considered *Vorhandenheit.* 'This objective presence of what is unusable still does not lack handiness whatsoever; the useful thing *thus* objectively present is still not a thing which just occurs somewhere' (Heidegger, 1996, p.68). When one does not recognise tools as being something one can use, the tools are not 'purely' *Vorhandenheit* 'since they are deeply intertwined with world and significance: the broken hammer or vandalized windshield are not annoying pieces of failed equipment that we would like to shove aside' (Harman, 2011, p.63).

Zuhandenheit objects are things that are used in a process, with an action attached, the end result, something 'in order to…' (Sparrow, 2014, p.125). If one considers a museum as using displayed objects in order to communicate a narrative, is this a process that can encourage *Zuhandenheit* manifestations to visitors as they view objects in order to consider the exhibition narrative? Is the exhibition narrative the only thing a visitor considers in a museum? Or as visitors are staring at objects, is this a *Vorhandenheit* interaction?

Heidegger argues that a thing's *Zuhandenheit* is related to how/what it is used for, the work it does and the final product it assists in producing: 'What everyday association is initially busy with is not tools themselves, but the work. What is to be produced in each case is what is primarily taken care of and is this also what is at hand' (Heidegger, 1996, p.65). It is not solely the tool that is considered but the connections and requirement of the tool to processes. Heidegger argues that a thing is a useful thing, and the product that it is used to make, is also a useful thing, 'as the *what-for* of the hammer, place, and needle, the work to be produced has in its turn the kind of being of a useful thing' (Heidegger, 1996, p.65). Therefore a hammer is used to fix the roof or make a table. How we use the things, how they work for us, is a property of the things and we use it because it is usable, and through this usability, the usability of the thing is discovered. We interpret the use of things on the basis of how we use them (Heidegger, 1996, p.66). Heidegger expert, Graham Harman, argues that in Heideggerian terms, 'there is no such thing as 'an' equipment, since all equipment is assigned to other equipment in a single gigantic system of references' (Harman, 2011,

p.62). Therefore a tool is seen as part of a relationship that includes other tools and work done by the tools.

Taking the involvement of the tools with processes into account, what occurs when a person sees a tool not being used as a tool in a museum? Would the associations with process and work still be maintained? The tool may not be solely on display, it could be placed into its working life context though display techniques (for example in a re-creation). The tool may be on display with other tools – either made or used by the same people group. In addition to how the tool is displayed, is it possible for a tool, or object, to manifest as both *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit*? Perhaps there is a spectrum of how visitors consider objects. As part of its wider research, this PhD seeks to understand if people are considering objects in *Zuhandenheit* and/or *Vorhandenheit* states in order to investigate these possibilities.

How does a museum visitor consider objects? When in the process of looking at something, how does the object manifest? It has been argued that 'the readiness-to-hand of equipment is what we encounter first; it is not something that we inject into things after first seeing them as bare physical lumps' (Harman, 2011, p.62). This argument could be viewed as one that does not allow for slippage between *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* as what one first encounters is the state of the object and not something that is then placed on an object – whether this placement is caused by a person considering the object in different ways by reading interpretation or being asked questions about it. This is taken into consideration when contextualising my findings in Chapter Four.

Previous research has asked visitors questions about their experience in museums. However, there have been relatively few phenomenological motivated questions of visitors in these studies, and still fewer investigations of engagement that explore *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* interactions. I identified just two studies that relate object manifestation to research on the museum experience.

In the first, Dorsett, an artist-curator, reflected on his experience at the British Art Show, partially taking Heideggerian object manifestation into account. He experienced

an 'interpretative blankness' as he approached a delicate sculpture that had broken in two as he approached it – what was expected was not present (Dorsett, 2012, p.100). He argues that his ability to interpret the artwork was diminished due to the change in the physical makeup, its 'material presence' (Dorsett, 2012, p.101). When analysing how the appearance of objects influences how they are interpreted he applies semiotics, Barthes' theory of *punctum*, and Heideggerian concepts (Dorsett, 2012). He speaks of Heidegger's arguments around a hammer that is useful and a hammer that is broken, and how people respond to the hammer in the different states (Dorsett, 2012, p.108). Although not specifically stated, these are *Zuhandenheit* or *Vorhandenheit* manifestations respectively. He argues that the broken hammer allows a viewer to awake from an 'habitual non-attentiveness' to reveal the presence of the hammer and 'an extensive network of connected meanings' (Dorsett, 2012, p.108). Examples of this break from the typical appearance of an object are Nelson's coat and Anderson's coatee, the 'tiny indexical traces of bygone violence' stops visitors in their tracks and makes them reconsider the objects (Dorsett, 2012, p.108). Dorsett's article does not, however, centralise Heideggerian thought in his consideration of object encounters in the way that this research project does.

In a rather different study, McLauchlan investigated the learning experience of museum visitors using an ethnographic and phenomenological approach (McLauchlan, 2013). The phenomenological approach utilised draws on Husserl, Heidegger, and Van Manen. Although *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* are mentioned, it is in regards to the researcher's own reflections on the museum experience rather than in analysing the experiences of the participants and the research data (McLauchlan, 2013, pp.219-220). McLauchlan's participants were not visitors already in the museum but university students paid for participation and brought to the fieldwork sites specifically for the research (McLauchlan, 2013, p.123). McLauchlan interviewed the participants after their museum visit and also requested them to create personal meaning maps in order that he might study what the participants had learned (McLauchlan, 2013, p.113). A major similarity between McLauchlan's and my research is the phenomenological approach to the experience of museum visitors. However, there is not the same focus on engagement, nor questions composed with influences of Heidegger and Merleau-

Ponty (see Chapter Three). My research also differs from McLauchlan's in the type of participants, focusing on people that have chosen to visit a museum rather than specific research recruits that were brought to the museum.

Both Dorsett and McLauchlan employ Heidegger's concepts of object manifestation, but more as personal reflections rather than a means to investigate visitor engagement. The rarity of application of Heidegger's thoughts on object manifestation could be due to the complex nature of the texts 'Being and Time'. Or it could be due to the variety of research approaches; for example, when reviewing the contribution of museums to health and wellbeing the 'lack of a unified, agreed evaluation or measurement approach' was noted (Chatterjee and Noble, 2013, p.14). While the application of *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* is novel, it is also unconventional. However, the other phenomenologist used in this research project, Merleau-Ponty, is better taken up by museum studies researchers.

Merleau-Ponty and embodiment

Having outlined Heidegger' arguments on object manifestation, this section examines embodiment through the arguments of Merleau-Ponty. This research project uses phenomenology as a framework to consider engagement. While neither object manifestation nor embodiment are equal nor unequal, as per one of the research objectives a Heideggerian but not a Merleau-Ponty-influenced stance was primarily a focus for fieldwork. Therefore while Merleau-Ponty and his work on embodiment is outlined here, it is not examined to the same level of detail as that applied to Heidegger and his work on object manifestation.

Born in 1908 in France, Merleau-Ponty explored philosophy, politics, and art in his writing and lectures at French universities until his death in 1961 (Macann, 1993, p.159). Primarily, he was a phenomenologist who investigated the lived experience and perception of a person from the perspective of their physical body (Dant, 2005, p.89). This was a reaction against the scientific trend of objectification of how people act, which severed the senses from each other and obscured the holistic way a person behaves and lives (Moran, 2000, p.420). His work highlights the relationship,

interaction, and synergy between perceived thought and the person that is perceiving, as opposed to a behaviourist approach that considered the body as something that is mechanical with automatic responses or a mentalist approach where the brain receives sensory information and directs action (Dant, 2005, p. 89). Merleau-Ponty re-examines the notion of dualism of soul/body, mind/body, and consciousness/body and argued against the concept that 'reason sits on top of a physical, sensory experience' (Moran, 2000, pp.442-3). His focus was on the embodied ways a person experiences their world through sensory perception (Moran, 2000, p.420). Indeed, the philosopher stated, 'the world is not what I think, but what I live through' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, pp.xvi-xvii). His most prominent work on embodiment, 'Phenomenology of Perception', was published in 1945. It is this text and his work on embodiment that inform my research project's phenomenological framework.

The combination of Merleau-Ponty with Heideggerian thought allows for more variety in how people consider objects to be studied. Indeed, it has been argued that 'perceiving an artefact, a place or a landscape is thus not just a visual practice but involves the whole living body: experiencing hot and cold, sounds, smells, textures and surfaces' (Tilley, 2004, p.221). The relation of the body in object encounters is also observed in museum studies. Morgan argues that 'meaning is not only abstract and discursive, but embodied, felt, interactive and cumulative' (Morgan, 2012, p.102), while nearly two decades ago Hooper-Greenhill claimed that 'objects are encountered as much by the body as the mind' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.116). Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodiment is thus a useful and valid component in approaching object encounters.

Merleau-Ponty firmly roots the experience a person has of the world through their body, and regards the physical interactions a person has as the foundation for the description of a person's experience (Tilley, 2004, p.2), making his approach very useful for this research. The body-subject experience of a person is particular to them, different from others as they do not occupy the same space and do not live through the world with the same mind (Tilley, 2004, p.3). Therefore the approach seeks to capture what is unique to each person's experiences, as demonstrated in the studies below. Embodiment lends itself readily to the study of people and their experiences. It

has been applied in museum related research on how people experience objects, photographs and heritage sites. There are some similarities between these studies and this research project, commonalities that will be used to contextualise the findings in Chapters Four and Five.

One study, for example, surveyed visitors to Bristol City Museum and found that one object evoked different reactions in different people (Ting, 2012, p.171). While some respondents were interested in a crafted ivory ball, other respondents, who were familiar with the particular craftwork, dismissed it as "nothing spectacular" (Ting, 2012, pp.171-172). This subjectivity of response to the objective world validates Merleau-Ponty's argument that people encounter and perceive things with their senses and facets of their body (Ting, 2012, p.172). Merleau-Ponty further argues that as people encounter objects through themselves, the objects can also be considered with regards to the people that have made, previously used, or interacted with the object, 'an object can be defined as the material result of human experiences that replicate and shape human cultures, bodies and persons, both symbolically and materially' (Ting, 2012, p.180). Therefore, material culture theorists should not only consider physical properties of an object but also 'sensory stimulations it embodies' (Ting, 2012, p.180). Personal reflections of embodied reactions to objects are also evident in the wider literature (see Hancock, 2010).

An experimental exhibition at the Royal Danish Library, Copenhagen used exhibition design techniques, rather than text, to communicate a narrative around a photograph (Gunderson and Back, 2018). The aim of the exhibition creators was to encourage an embodied, sensory based experience by the visitors (Gunderson and Back, 2018). Visitors to the exhibition were recruited through the library social media and culture club, and were interviewed after experiencing the exhibition, away from the display as well as in the display area (Gunderson and Back, 2018, p.308). The Royal Danish Library project is different from this research project as it recruited participants already known to the museum, with a level of museum literacy, and undertook longer interviews regarding the exhibition experience, instead of the specific object encounter. This Royal Danish Library research is part of larger project in which exhibition design was considered in relation to how visitors use their body to navigate

space, encounter objects, and interact with text and other exhibition elements. An architect and curator team at the Royal Danish Library used Merleau-Ponty and embodiment to shape a research approach to consider how visitors go about 'active process of interpretation' in the exhibition space (Hale and Back, 2018, p.349). Visitors were encouraged to be mindful bodily engaged agents in their exhibition experience by the placement of material at different positions adjacent to movable steps or seats (Hale and Back, 2018, p.349). Thus visitors were required to make a physical "investment" in order to locate the encounter the displays (Hale and Back, 2018, p.349). This type of embodiment in the presence of exhibition space was also used in my methodology. During data analysis, a phenomenological lens of object manifestation and embodiment were employed. Embodiment was broadly defined, and ranged from the active physical investments on the part of visitors as opposed to a passive person standing in front of an object – for example peering round display cabinets as well as bodily movements including gestures. In addition to the active embodiment in the physical world, embodiment was considered conceptually.

A multisensory and immersive digital heritage experience, 'With New Eyes I See', was created in Wales to explore military themes for the centenary of World War One (Kidd, 2017). Participants engaged with a park and buildings through archival material, audio, and projections of images that related to a specific serviceman – Cyril (Kidd, 2017). Images were projected from a handheld device which a participant carried and while there were no museum objects, found objects in the form of a lab coat and a first aid kit were used to further the narrative of the historic episode (Kidd, 2017, p.6). The creators were keen to immerse participants in the history of Cyril, and from evaluations this was achieved as people felt attached and connected with his story (Kidd, 2017, p.7). This immersion was achieved by the experience facilitating the embodiment of participants, allowing them autonomy to 'negotiate their own path through the narrative', be offered opportunities to 'explore with their own hands' and to grasp the handheld device themselves (Kidd, 2017, p.3). That an absent person was evoked through interpretation without objects is interesting. The means of connecting with a theme was not a typical museum set up as participants were in a park at night, had the means to project and view interpretation material themselves, and did not

include objects in a display case. However the situated bodily attitude of the participants and how they encountered the experience in an embodied way is significant with regards to this research project.

The concept of embodiment has been explored relating to other historical narratives outside the museum or not focused on objects, too. It is argued that people initially encounter buildings in multisensory and emotional ways prior to intellectual encounters (Pallasmaa, 2014), and that buildings are experienced through the body (Zumthor, 2006). In Kenderdine, et al.'s study, visitors are in a space where they are immersed in interactive digital reproductions of material from grotto temples in Chinese caves (Kenderdine, Chan and Shaw, 2014, p.2). The digital means of exploring a site that is not accessible offer visitors 'theatres of embodied experiences' otherwise not possible (Kenderdine, Chan and Shaw, 2014, p.3). The experience begins with a guide leading visitors to a dark space, akin to when one does enter a cave, and then visitors can walk around, explore imagery in more detail, all while still being able to converse with each other (Kenderdine, Chan and Shaw, 2014, pp.6-7). The multisensory and social interaction afforded by the digital exhibition encourage an embodied experience from visitors (Kenderdine, Chan and Shaw, 2014). Embodiment was also used to examine the phenomenological aspects of visual sense-making by surveying how university students interact with photographs (Belova, 2006). Belova framed her analysis with Merleau-Ponty's theory of people not being passive observers but living-in-the-world embodied agents who make sense of the world by acting in and on it (Belova, 2006).

In this thesis, 'embodiment' is understood similarly to the situated bodily attitude described in the 'With New Eyes I See' heritage experience (Kidd, 2017). Informed by Merleau-Ponty the term refers, in my research project, to actual physical movements and museum visitors being active in their spatial movements. It also refers to movements that are not actual, seen or performed, but are thought about, considered and contemplated. As I return to in Chapter Three, these elements of physical motions, whether mentally envisioned or physically performed are threads that are used in fieldwork, with embodiment one of the factors influencing the formulation of

interview questions. Embodiment, like other elements of the phenomenological lens, also informs the data analysis described in Chapters Four and Five.

Conclusion

This chapter has championed the use of phenomenology to shape a framework for the study of museum visitor experience, and pointed to the mixed methods approach utilised in this PhD and described in the next chapter. The next chapter details the combination of Heideggerian and Merleau-Ponty phenomenology with grounded theory, explaining the composition of the interview questions as well as the nuances of grounded theory data analysis.

Chapter Three: Methodology

> Engaging is such an interesting word as well, because it means different things for different people.[3]

> Reflections on the vessel:

> OK, I don't want to insult the object, it's really fascinating but it's quite anonymous.[4]

> I think it's beautiful.[5]

Overview

The previous chapter argued for the combination of phenomenology and grounded theory in order to form a framework for the investigation of visitor engagement. In five sections, this chapter details how the framework was developed into the methodology used in this PhD. The first section summarises the selected methodology, references to literature, and the testing of methodology. It is followed by an outline of how I composed the interview questions. The third section describes how the methodology was carried out in my fieldwork. The fourth section details how I performed data analysis. The final section comprises reflections on the development and execution of the methodology.

Methodology development

My selection of methodology was an iterative process of reviewing literature, considering how phenomenology could be applied, as well as my own reflections on how best to study engagement. Therefore this write up of methodology development begins with my philosophical stance. I then describe my chosen methodology and review literature around use of interviews, observations, and phenomenology in visitor studies research.

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[3] G24
[4] G25
[5] G16

There is a link between a researcher's personal philosophy and the framework the researcher chooses as well as how the researcher undertakes data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013, p.15). My personal philosophy, which inevitably underpins this PhD, is an interpretivist one. My epistemological stance is that all observations and knowledge are imbued with a human perspective (Smith, 2008, p.460). My ontological stance adheres to the realist/neorealist position that there is a physical reality but the descriptions and interpretations of reality that people experience are constructions (Smith, 2008, p.460). My perspective aligns with the research orientation of phenomenology and grounded theory, as they are interpretivist (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.113). Also as the researcher I was not an outsider but interacted with participants, used semi-structured interviews and investigated experiences that consisted of the perceptions, feelings, and thoughts of the participants – all hallmarks of an interpretivist approach (Thomas, 2013, p.11).

This PhD used a methodology of museum visitor interviews in front of objects, the results of which were analysed with a grounded theory approach. The interviews were semi-structured, approximately 10 minutes in length, and recorded with a microphone. Interview questions were composed to investigate visitor object encounters. The question framework was informed by Heidegger's arguments on object manifestation and Merleau-Ponty arguments on embodiment. In addition to interviews, visitors were also observed. The interviews were analysed using grounded theory approach in combination with a phenomenological lens that allowed for unexpected themes to emerge.

I decided that semi-structured interviews were the ideal avenue through which to employ phenomenology to investigate object encounters. While observations can reveal how people act towards material, I was interested in *their* experience as the participants articulated and reflected upon it, and not what I as a researcher observed. A researcher can glean much from observations, however I wished to discover the emotional, multisensory, or imaginative ways a visitor encounters objects that may not be readily observable and therefore used interviews to acquire this information. I asked questions instead of giving a survey to visitors. This ensured I interacted with the participant in a most natural manner as possible, and that the dialogue which was

created had opportunities to deviate to allow different reflections to emerge. The immediacy of the reactions of visitors was of interest and a visitor completing a survey by themselves might remove their reflections from the actual experience they had been having. In order to garner as many acceptances to my request for participation, the interview was modelled to be completed in 10 minutes. This time is long enough to gather useful responses, but also short enough that a visitor will not baulk at the duration resulting in non-participation.

There is a wealth of literature on interviews and observations regarding visitor studies. Observation, timing and tracking has been used so frequently to gauge levels of success of museum exhibitions, it necessitated a review of the trends in the field (Yalowitz and Bronnenkant, 2009). The review mentioned how dwell time has been viewed as a factor of engagement (Yalowitz and Bronnenkant, 2009, pp.49-50). It also stated that many research groups record in-gallery activities as they can impact on visitor experience (Yalowitz and Bronnenkant, 2009, p.50). Observations formed the basis of a research approach towards student experience in a science museum (Shaby, Assaraf and Tal, 2017). Elsewhere, however, Trondle, et al. noted the limit of tracking and physiological measures, commenting that empirical data does 'not reveal the thoughts and reflections of visitors' (Trondle, et al., 2014, p.171). Utilising a mixed method approach of observations and interviews instead, allows for more robust data to be gathered. This combination fits with Dierking and Pollock's recommendations to use a variety of techniques in studying visitors, for example, questionnaires, observations, and object-elicitation, in order to gather as much data as possible. They also stress that when analysing the material one must be reflexive to identify any assumptions or bias (Dierking and Pollock, 1998). These suggestions were followed in this research, for example seeking to minimise bias by using grounded theory analysis of the interviews, rather than reviewing the data for evidence to support a hypothesis.

Interviews are often used to gauge museum visitor reaction and reflection, and their practicality is demonstrated in the following studies. A German research team tested visitors' response to authentic objects by creating a display that featured replica moon rock and a replica astronaut suit in a space science museum (Hampp and Schwan, 2014). The items were placed in a cabinet by itself (moon rock) or with other materials

(space suit) and displayed without any indication they were replicas, or displayed with text stating the original was removed conservation and replaced with a replica indicative of the original (Hampp and Schwan, 2014, p.352). Through interviews and qualitative analysis, it was discovered that even when people, especially those that considered authenticity important, knew the displayed objects were replicas they still experienced an emotional response (Hampp and Schwan, 2014). Soren used interviews to investigate catalysts for transformative experiences in museum visitors (Soren, 2009), a study that I refer to in other chapters. A research team investigated reasons to visit Gettysburg National Military Park (Cameron and Gatewood, 2004). Through their approach of questionnaires and ethnographic analysis they classified several visitors as numinous seekers (Cameron and Gatewood, 2004, p.208). The researchers adopted the term from the religious sense of "nod or beckoning from the gods" and define it through three elements of deep engagement or transcendence of a loss of time passing, empathy for people from the past, and awe or reverence by being with something holy or spiritual (Cameron and Gatewood, 2004, p.208). They conclude that visitors experience emotion on site and also expect to learn something from the "living history classroom" (Cameron and Gatewood, 2004, p.213).

An interesting facet of interviews is the survey instrument used, whether asking questions (as in this research project) or requesting visitors to rate their experience on a numerical scale. A research group examining visitor experience ponders how to measure this as what occurs in a museum visit is varied and influenced by visitor 'backgrounds, knowledge levels, and even personalities' (Pekarik, Schreiber and Visscher, 2018, p.353). The group calls for a means that allows visitors to decide themselves how they will make their assessments (Pekarik, Schreiber and Visscher, 2018, p.353). This agency is applauded and reflected in this research project by asking visitors themselves to define their object encounters as engaging or not. In addition the group argue against indirect measurements such as future willingness to revisit but instead argue for a means that will capture the personal experience of visitors (Pekarik, Schreiber and Visscher, 2018, p.353). Again, this research project supports the approach of subjective reflections and aims to capture this using a phenomenological approach. While the research group aim is sympathetic to this

research project aims, the execution is different. To the general question, 'please rate your overall experience', the research group gather responses from visitors selecting from a list of numbers, range of words (good, better, best), or statements (worse than I expected, as I expected) with no option for free written response (Pekarik, Schreiber and Visscher, 2018, p.355). In addition, the research group investigate responses to displays, exhibitions, public programmes, or museum as a whole (Pekarik, Schreiber and Visscher, 2018, p.358), and not to an intimate object encounter – as this research project endeavours to do. The group reports on percentage of people that responded positively or negatively to the exhibition (Pekarik, Schreiber and Visscher, 2018). Their approach had no way to ascertain the nuances of responses nor the capacity to gauge visitor responses as their experience unfolded, both requirements for the selected methodology of this PhD.

As part of the selected methodology, interviews were recorded. Several groups record conversations that visitors have in museums for analysis. There are some commonalities to my research in that museum phenomena were examined and some findings were similar. For example, one research group that listened to conversations found that objects can facilitate reflections on a variety of topics and that visitors attempt to understand how objects work or were created (Leinhardt and Knutson, 2004, p.11). However there were differences such as absence of phenomenological approach or grounded theory analysis. Visitors in gallery conversations were recorded in a Pittsburgh museum to investigate learning and how people interact socially in meaning making (Fienberg and Leinhardt, 2002, p.167). The conversations were analysed for structural features, what was discussed, and level of engagement (Fienberg and Leinhardt, 2002). Engagement was decided by the researchers, not the visitors themselves (Fienberg and Leinhardt, 2002, p.169). The researchers then reviewed the recorded conversations for four predetermined elements of how the researchers predicted visitors behave in a museum (Fienberg and Leinhardt, 2002, p.170). While this approach provides unprompted reflections on viewed works, this research project is investigating object encounters through the lens of phenomenology. This lens was achieved by the series of questions that were informed by theories from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Therefore the lens of phenomenology

on visitor engagement would not be possible if participants were recorded having unstructured conversations, and not being interviewed with the phenomenologically influenced questions. Also, the study described an analysis performed in order to locate specific predetermined themes, and not to allow unexpected themes to emerge (as this research project does). Another study with a predetermined set of categories (perceptual, conceptual, connecting, strategic, and affective types of talk) used the terms to analyse in gallery conversations (Allen, 2002, pp.274-277). This predetermination can limit the identification of other categories that can potentially emerge from a grounded theory approach. In addition, as I recorded the interviews, I was also aware of the active bodily movements of participants and stated the movements on the recording. As embodiment was not a research focus for the studies described above, the variety of physical responses in the museum may not have been captured for analysis.

Phenomenology has been used to research different aspects of people's visits to museums or heritage sites, demonstrating the applicability of the approach to various topics. In addition to experience (Latham, 2009; Latham 2013; Roppola, 2012; Tam, 2008; Ting, 2008; Ting, 2010; Wood and Latham, 2011; Wood and Latham, 2014), analyses have been undertaken with a focus on learning (Yilmaz, Filizb and Yilmaza, 2013), interpretation (Monod and Klien, 2005), the role of the museum (Roberts, 2013) wellbeing (Froggett and Trustram, 2014), and empathy (Arnold et al, 2014). These studies are described below, along with differences and similarities to the research focus and methodology of this PhD research.

Regarding experience, an American research team have applied phenomenology to visitor and object interactions and the museum (see Latham, 2009; Latham 2013; Wood and Latham, 2011; Wood and Latham, 2014) and the details of their studies are in Chapter One. They use phenomenology in varying degrees, either only in research approach but not data analysis (Latham, 2013; Latham, 2014; Wood and Latham, 2009), as a broad way to reflect on exhibition design (Wood and Latham, 2011; Wood and Latham, 2013), or as both a research approach and in data analysis (Latham, 2015). However, their fieldwork involved interviewing people that had previously encountered an object (Latham, 2013; Latham, 2014; Latham, 2015; Wood and

Latham, 2009). Whereas my research project differs in that it interviewed people as they were experiencing their encounter with an object.

The visitor experience and how that relates to exhibition design was investigated using phenomenological, transactional, and grounded theory approaches (Roppola, 2012). The research approach was to unobtrusively observe visitors, then interview them, and use grounded theory to analyse data (Roppola, 2012). The types of exhibitions selected were chosen to represent differences on a design continuum and were image-based, audio-visual, touchscreen, artefact-based, model/replica, hands-on, simulation, and reconstruction (Roppola, 2012, p.63). Whereas this research project focused on what Roppola terms artefact-based displays. The questions asked enquired about what drew the visitor to the display, how they felt, what they thought – all similar to this research project (Roppola, 2012, p.70). While these are similar to this research project, the visitor could respond about any element of the display – whereas my research required visitors to respond to a specific object. Also, the details of the thinking behind the question composition is not described whereas this research project designed questions based on phenomenological thought. The other questions in the Roppola study focused on exhibition design and what message the visitor thought the exhibition was communicating (Roppola, 2012, p.70). While the research area (visitor experience) and approach (phenomenology and grounded theory) are similar to my research, her use of phenomenology was very broad, in that the aim of research was to describe the essence of the visitor experience (Roppola, 2012, p.59). However the application that is used in this research project – question composition and lens as a means of interview analysis – was not shared in the Roppola research project.

Phenomenology was also used to investigate how people experience art in Hong Kong art galleries (Tam, 2008). During analysis of interviews with participants, he identified that people lost a sense of time, as well as instances where interviewees could not articulate their feelings regarding their experience (Tam, 2008). Writing from the perspective of a teacher, the researcher makes recommendations to teachers for preparing their students to encounter art works (Tam, 2008). This is different to my research project as the characterisation of an engaging encounter is the focus.

How museums visitors interact with Chinese ceramics in British museums was explored using phenomenology (Ting 2008; Ting 2010). Visitor surveys were semi-structured and centred on asking participants what object in the gallery was their favourite (Ting, 2008, pp.43-46). The use of a phenomenological framework in her research was in the form of considering objects in an embodied multisensory way (Ting, 2010). This approach aligns to mine, and I will also consider object manifestation in addition to visitor concepts of engagement.

Learning was the focus of a research team in Turkish museums, whom used a phenomenological research approach (Yilmaz, Filizb and Yilmaza, 2013). They identified the essences of how 25 students learned in social studies classes in Turkish museums (Yilmaz, Filizb and Yilmaza, 2013). While aspects of learning are of interest to the object encounter, a wider research scope is applied in this PhD – one which includes emotion, imagination, and other facets.

Phenomenology has been used in the study of interpretation, specifically as a framework to measure the effectiveness of cultural heritage interpretation, with a focus on digital means of interpreting archaeological sites (Monod and Kline, 2005). While the group took into account Merleau-Ponty's reflections on embodiment, the main thrust of the phenomenological framework were Heidegger's views on historicity (Monod and Kline, 2005, pp.2872-2873). This particular Heideggerian perspective is not, however, one that will be used in this research, which instead draws on Heidegger's notions of tool manifestation in framing how people encounter objects.

In order to study the role of museums, a researcher adopted a phenomenological approach by inviting people known to her to visit several museums, record their onsite experience, and also later interview them (Roberts, 2013, p.89). She found that museums can be sites of human understanding and connection which encourage visitors to ponder their state of 'being-in-the-world' (Roberts, 2013, p.100). Both her study and this PhD adopt a phenomenological lens to the consideration of visitors' interactions in a museum. Although Roberts used a phenomenological methodological approach to data analysis, this research project uses a grounded theory approach. Also Roberts is considering the museum as a whole, whereas this study investigates

reactions to objects and displays. Finally Roberts is investigating the general experience of visitors, while this research focuses on object engagement.

The final two studies describe outcomes of the museum visit. In order to investigate how objects can contribute to wellbeing, particularly with vulnerable or culturally excluded people, a phenomenological analysis was used on museum visitor interviews, focus groups, and discussion during creative activities in the museum (Froggett and Trustram, 2014). A phenomenological approach was used to analyse students' written material after they viewed art works which explored death and dying (Arnold, Meggs and Greer, 2014). The research focus was on level of empathy articulated by participants (Arnold, Meggs and Greer, 2014). Visitor outcomes are out of the scope of this PhD but are listed to illustrate how phenomenology can be used to study not only the in gallery experience, but also the after effects of that experience.

Testing methodology

The nuances of how the methodology developed and the details of the research set-up are summarised below. The theoretical decisions I made prior to fieldwork did not always apply in reality (for example, timing and tracking strategy, as I detail later), making the early practical testing invaluable to designing my final methodology. The testing and modifications are part of research and are included here to evidence the development of my methodology and to demonstrate that this development was not linear. The testing was carried out at the Museum of Liverpool, where five interviews were undertaken in February 2016, and a further six interviews in April 2016. In addition, four interviews were executed at Jaipur City Palace Museum, India in March 2016. Once I was confident that interviews were how I would go about the broad gathering of participants' reflections on their engagements, I then explored different phenomenological approaches. After the exact research approach was decided, I optimised how museum visitors would be selected for recruitment. The initial timing and tracking strategy was re-evaluated in the field. Another variable re-evaluated in the field, was the site for final fieldwork.

I explored different phenomenological research approaches. At the start of this PhD research process, a transcendental phenomenological research approach was chosen to examine the experience of a museum visitor. A transcendental phenomenological research approach identifies a phenomenon to be explored, investigates the experience as it is lived rather than as 'we conceptualize it', reflects on the central themes that make the phenomenon what it is and uses text to describe the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, p.30). The two most common types of phenomenological research approaches are hermeneutical, or interpretative; and transcendental, or psychological (Creswell, 2013, p.79). The hermeneutical phenomenological approach calls for the researcher to interpret the meaning of experiences that are being investigated while the transcendental approach concentrates on the description of the experience (Creswell, 2013, p.80). Transcendental phenomenological research approach has been used in different fields to describe experiences and make recommendations for how to improve peoples' experiences and recognise different elements of the experience (see Padilla, 2003; Brown, et al., 2006). It was envisaged a detailed description of exhibition engagement would be the outcome of this particular methodological approach, which would allow recommendations to be made regarding exhibition development.

The transcendental phenomenological approach was subsequently abandoned in this research, however, as there were complexities around the laborious steps required in data analysis as well as time asked of participants. Several researchers contact their participants after the initial interview to confirm the interview content or their researcher interpretation. While this validates the data, it can be difficult to get responses from all participants (Moustakas, 1994, p.111). Therefore, in this research project it was decided not to contact participants after the interview. In order to secure participation by as many people as possible the interview was of a short duration, was requested during a museum visit, and as a one-off use of the participant's time. If a condition of participation is to receive follow-up communications and for the participant to respond, they may not agree to be part of the study. Also contact information would be required, which would no longer enable the study to be anonymous, and participants may answer questions differently if they

know they will be contacted later. In addition, the many steps of data analysis required in a transcendental phenomenological research approach were lengthy. Therefore, phenomenology was used to compose interview questions and as a lens through which to analyse data. This was used in combination with a grounded theory approach to data analysis, which allowed themes to emerge around engagement and involved fewer steps of data analysis.

Regarding participant recruitment, how I selected visitors to be invited changed after testing in pilot studies. At first it was envisioned that participants would be recruited based on the appearance of different levels of engagement. In a review of timing and tracking of museum visitors, dwell time has been viewed as a factor of engagement (Yalowitz and Bronnenkant, 2009, pp.49-50). In my research, therefore, participants would be identified by observing how long they looked at a particular display in a museum in addition to their body language and facial expressions. In order to gain a spectrum of different levels of engagement and what factors can influence this, visitors who do not spend time looking at the display would be interviewed as well as those who do. There would be three categories, defined by level of engagement – not engaged, partially engaged and engaged. The three categories would be measured by the amount of time spent at a display. 'Not engaged' would be categorised as 0 seconds (walk past display); 'partially engaged' as 15 seconds (glance or briefly stop before moving on); and 'engaged' as over 60 seconds (stop and look, read interpretation, bend down, view display). In practice, this was difficult to achieve. During pilot studies at the Museum of Liverpool, I observed visitors near a display case in order to select which visitors to recruit. Some visitors did not walk near the cabinet at all, and when visitors that had stopped at the cabinet were approached, there were several rejections. As a result, it was not feasible to achieve interviews from visitors in each of the categories. Another complexity was that several of the displays contained many objects and it was not evident what object visitors were encountering. In addition, the findings from initial interviews indicated that engagement is more complex than dwell time. Therefore, the dwell time-derived method of selecting visitors by the time they spend at displays was discarded. Instead, it was decided that

levels of engagement would be articulated by the visitors themselves, through their responses to questions.

Through trials at different sites, the most appropriate research set-up was established. The most effective research was when museum visitors were having an engaging experience and could be questioned about the experience in direct relation to a specific object. During the two days of pilot studies undertaken at Museum of Liverpool, this did not occur. The typical lay out was an arrangement of objects with small numbers beside them, that indicate written interpretation either near the object, on a panel along bottom of case, or on the side of the display case. Several visitors did not make an immediate connection between the objects, the numbers, and the interpretation. Also, many displays have audio elements preventing interviews being undertaken in those areas. Therefore it was decided not to undertake final fieldwork at Museum of Liverpool, but to do so at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

Interview questions

One of the key elements of this PhD research was to investigate how phenomenology could be used in the study of engagement. And in particular, how engagement could be explored from a Heideggerian perspective. This section describes the process of translating phenomenological thought into questions that could be asked of museum visitors. As this research approach is central to the research objectives of this PhD, the conception, development and testing are described in detail.

In the early stages of considering how to compose the questions for the 10 minute interview, previous visitor studies research that used questionnaires were consulted (Monti and Keene, 2013; Pitman and Hirzy, 2010; Woodall, 2015). These questions were general in their approach and I was not sure how to adapt phenomenological thought to interview questions. In July 2015, half way through my first year of the PhD, I met with Professor of Philosophy Dermot Moran at University College Dublin. After discussing this project with him, I had an epiphany in how to employ phenomenology in the investigation of exhibition experiences. It was to be used as a tool and

scaffolding to enable interview questions to be composed that would allow for visitors to speak about their experiences of engagement and to allow for personal, multisensory, emotional, and other ways of experiencing to be expressed.

Questions were further developed and optimised by reading literature and testing questions in interview situations through pilot studies, to ensure the 'questions are really working to achieve the aims of the research' (Gillham, 2005, p.18). It was decided not to gather demographic details in the interviews as it could potentially infer a power imbalance. Demographics are not the direct focus of this research; the experience of the visitor is. Indeed, a researcher into engagement reflects that demographic information does not reveal how people 'might relate to museums' nor what sort of meaningful experiences the visitors might undergo (Falk, 2009, p.31). Another researcher reflection on engagement is that it cannot be explained though demographics such as gender (Schorch, 2015, p.439). Therefore in this research project, age, gender, and socio-cultural index were not asked of visitors.

The final questions used in fieldwork are listed in Table 3.1. The initial questions were general, to relax the visitor into the interview situation; they were followed by an abstract question that requires reflection on a label free museum and then returned to specific objects and experience. Then in front of an object, questions about the visitor experience are asked and concluded with some abstract questions about touching and imagining what it would be like to be an object. Finally the interview ended with questions about engagement. While speaking about an object in front of them, the visitor may also be thinking about other museum experiences. Therefore, the engagement questions were placed last, to ensure respondents have eased their mind into reflections on exhibitions. The arrival at these questions will be described by each section, background, object interaction, engagement, and conclusion.

Table 3.1 Interview questions

General question area	Specific questions
Background	Why did you visit today – have you visited here before – when? Did you have any expectations of your visit? Do you read labels? What would you think about a museum with no labels? What types of object makes you stop and look at a display case?
Object interaction	What did you think about that object? What did you think its intended use was? Was it something you would pick up and use? Did it seem familiar to you? Did you spend time examining the physical properties of the object or think immediately about its use? Did you think about what people could have used or made this? Did you think about the past or future when looking at this? Did you think about touching the object? If you could touch the object, what do you think it would feel like? Were you engaged with this object? What would it be like to be that object?
Engagement	Can you tell me about an engaging exhibition or museum that you have visited? (prompt for words if necessary) Do you remember not being engaged by an exhibition?
Conclusion	Do you have any questions for me?

The five background questions posed aimed to build rapport that would lead to a rich sharing by the participant, following advice to first ask a non-threatening, broad question that reflects the research (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p.316). To this end, the first question in my research was a general query into the visitors' familiarity with the museum. While it settled the respondent into the interview, it also provided information about their motivations for being in a museum. The second question was based on expectations; it was envisaged it might reveal any previous museum experience and their cultural views on what makes an appropriate museum visit. The label-related questions revealed how visitors go about their museum experience. In the first round of interviews, the question 'When you go to museums, do you have a

look at the labels?' mostly received one word answers. While the response indicated visitors read labels, it did not encourage participants to go into detail about how they navigated displays and written interpretation. In later interviews, the query around a museum with no labels received diverse and lengthy answers that revealed how visitors considered museums as well as their behaviour regarding written interpretation. Another element of museum behaviour was the type of objects, if any, that attracted people to stop – and this was asked. It was a general question, as I wished to ensure participants had scope to categorise objects if they so wished; for example whether contemporary art or military objects.

Following the background questions, visitors were then asked specific questions about the object they were encountering. In order to garner responses to object interactions, a general question was asked. 'What did you think about that object?' was open ended and allowed participants to answer in whichever way they thought about the object.

The intended use question was asked in an effort to pin down the idea of the use of the object prior to it being in the museum. However it was envisaged that responses may also relate to the use of the object in the museum. As referred to in Chapter One, Benjamin argues that when an object enters a collection the prior use of the object is no longer relative (Gourgouris, 2006, p.219). If one considers this in the museum context, once an object is in the museum, it is part of the museum. The prior use of the object may be lost as it is viewed as a museum object. The use as a museum object could be to illustrate an exhibition theme. For example a hammer that is part of a history of woodwork may be considered in the context of woodwork but not as something that a visitor could use. Or perhaps the visitor could consider both these uses, as objects have more than one use prior to being in a museum, and one use as a museum object. They are also physical substances that people can look at, without considering the object's use. And perhaps people oscillate between thinking about different uses of an object. It is argued that museum objects have presence and agency, an element that may be overlooked as museums often use objects as 'social texts or cultural symbols' (Bencard, 2014, p.30). In an effort to capture the complexity of objects and the complexity of how people interact with objects in a museum, the question around intended use was posed.

The main thrust of phenomenology is lived experience, and there are many facets to this. Different phenomenological theorists have concentrated on different areas. I will apply the arguments of two phenomenologists. Both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty declare 'our most basic understandings can only be generated in the context of a social and phenomenal world' and as such focus their attention to the 'interrogation of the everyday' (Thomas, 2006, p.56). Therefore the application of the thinking of both these phenomenologists is appropriate to investigate the nuances of objects encounters in the museum.

In an effort to choose questions that could reveal what people thought about the uses of objects on display, if visitors had a *Zuhandenheit* or *Vorhandenheit* interaction, and if there is some oscillation between *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* interactions, three questions were asked. As outlined in Chapter Two, *Zuhandenheit* objects are used in day-to-day activities with a basic characteristic of something for something such as a hammer for hammering (Heidegger, 1996, p.67). An object that is not handy is *Vorhandenheit*. The more we examine it the more its usefulness is lost and it becomes something that cannot be used to perform a task, but instead is seen only for its components and properties (Cerbone, 2008, p.46). Therefore participants were asked if the museum object was something they would pick up and use. It was envisaged if they answered yes it was a *Zuhandenheit* interaction as the object would be considered handy and ready for use. Whereas if participants said no, the object would not be something considered handy and it was a *Vorhandenheit* manifestation.

In order to gauge the level of familiarity and usefulness of the object, a question on whether the object seemed familiar was posed. It was envisaged if they answered yes it would be a *Zuhandenheit* interaction as the object was considered familiar. Whereas if participants said no, the object was not something considered familiar or handy and it was a *Vorhandenheit* manifestation. The question 'Did you spend time examining the physical properties of the object or think immediately about its use?' aimed to arrive at how the visitor considered the object, were they immediately considering the use of the object, or were they visually examining it. It was envisaged that an immediate consideration of use indicated a *Zuhandenheit* interaction. A

Vorhandenheit interaction would be one that did not involve use and only involved the visitor staring or visually examining the object.

Responses from visitors about the object being something they would pick up and use and whether the object was familiar to them could potentially reveal if *Zuhandenheit* or *Vorhandenheit* interactions occurred. Heidegger's reflections on object manifestation are mostly in the context of a tool shed and he provides allowances for touching (Heidegger, 1996). However the potential applicability of *Zuhandenheit* or *Vorhandenheit* interactions in an environment where people cannot touch objects could be ascertained with the comparison of responses from these questions with the question regarding time spent examining the object compared with thoughts on use. In addition, the question around visual inspection is important as a negative response may indicate a *Zuhandenheit* interaction and a positive a *Vorhandenheit* interaction. A comparison of the responses to the three questions could reveal if *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* interactions were discrete or somehow operate on a spectrum.

In my research into object encounters, concepts of embodiment were also applied. The embodiment related questions were more general than the Heideggerian influenced questions. Merleau-Ponty speaks of objects being conduits to the people that had previously used or encountered it (Ting, 2012, p.180). Therefore visitors were asked if they had considered who could have used or made the object. The concept of how visitors might relate to objects of the past, to themselves and reflect on future object use was explored through the question 'Did you think about the past or future when looking at this?'. More targeted questions around the embodied bodily experience visitors had during object encounters was asked through two questions. These were if the visitor thought about touching the object and what would the object feel like if it could be touched.

In this research project, arguments from Heidegger as well as Merleau-Ponty are used. It is of interest to note if a relation between *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* and embodiment will be found in the museum visitors. Moran, a philosopher reflecting on the work of Merleau-Ponty, comments on the embodied and physical response when considering objects: 'When we see scissors they already mobilise certain potentialities

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of movement in us. It is our "phenomenal body" (*le corps phenomenal*) and not the "objective body" (*le corps objectif*) which is moved when we reach for the scissors' (Moran, 2000, pp.419-420). A person may respond to an object through the means of physically interacting with it – whether holding it or gesturing toward it, or even shying away from it. One is reminded that *vorhanden* translates to 'before the hands, at hand but now (to be) there, present, available' and *zuhanden* translates to 'to, towards, the hands' (Inwood, 1999, pp.128-129) and relates to how one physically uses or does not use an object. Taking these movements into account in combination with states of object manifestation (*Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit*), may illuminate how engaged, or not, a visitor is in a museum.

Two questions concluded the object interaction section. In order to allow visitors to define their own state of engagement, they were asked explicitly if they were engaged or not with the object. Object oriented philosophy was outlined in Chapter Two and the concept that objects exist in reality and can have effects on people (Harman, 2014, p.240) was articulated in a question. Participants were asked what it would be like to be the object that was the focus of the interview.

Questions around engagement were streamlined as initially, visitors were asked to define engagement with their own terms and provide examples of an engaging museum. However, when an interviewee was talking about an engaging museum experience, they were using their own words and memories to define what was engaging to them. Therefore the definition question was discarded. It was of interest to the definition of engagement to understand what visitors reported as unengaging. At first, in an effort to capture what respondents found engaging and not engaging, they were asked to speak about engagement on a scale from 0 to 10. An experience that was 10 was highly engaging, and an experience that was 0 was not engaging. When these initial interviews were analysed, however, I was unsure how to compare different levels. Therefore the rating question was discarded. Thus, general questions about what was an engaging experience and what was an unengaging experience were asked instead.

The final question was asked in order to return some autonomy to the participants, as the interviewer had until then asked them all the questions. As stated in the research set-up section, power dynamics was a constant consideration and how to balance the dynamic in the interview was of concern. Therefore the last question allowed participants to ask a question of me, the interviewer.

Final fieldwork

Following pilot tests, the final fieldwork this thesis draws findings from was undertaken at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow. The site underwent an extensive renovation in both building and exhibition ethos in 2006 (O'Neill, 2007). Rather than objects being something to punctuate an exhibition; 'the story was to arise out of the objects' (O'Neill, 2007, p.385). And these stories were not 'summaries of disciplines', but instead 'to reflect the strength of the collections' (O'Neill, 2007, p.385). The result is that the museum uses storytelling and objects 'to stimulate visitors to open themselves to beauty, to imagine the past, to think about issues, and to empathize with people who are different from them culturally or in terms of ability' (O'Neill, 2007, p.387). The stories are grouped by themes, and interactives are in many galleries (O'Neill, 2007, pp.392-393). The majority of visitors to the museum are from Glasgow (approximately 30%) or nearby (approximately 40%), with the remaining 30% from the rest of UK or overseas (O'Neill, 2007, p.380). It is the most visited museum in Britain outside of London and the most popular in Glasgow (Fitzgerald, 2005, p.134). Therefore Kelvingrove Art Museum and Gallery was chosen as the fieldwork site as it displays best practice exhibitions, has an extensive regional draw and accessible content, all characteristics which are highlighted as significant for fieldwork (Leinhardt and Knutson, 2004, p.23).

Previous research has been carried out at Kelvingrove. I will describe the research and compare it to mine in order to highlight the novelty of my research at the site. One group researched the social interactions of museum visitors as a result of their cultural consumption of exhibitions through observations, individuals and group interviews (Jafari, Taheri and vom Lehn, 2013). Interviews were not conducted on site, whereas in my research the visitors were interviewed in the museum in front of objects. In

addition Jafari, et al.'s research was contextualised within a managerial framework and suggested methods for communication strategies (Jafari, Taheri and vom Lehn, 2013, p.1746). A similar managerially focused study on engagement of tourist sites was executed through 625 surveys of visitors to Kelvingrove Art Museum and Gallery (Taheri, Jafari and O'Gorman, 2014). A Partial Least Square system was used to map visitor motivations, such as prior knowledge and level of cultural capital, to engagement (Taheri, Jafari and O'Gorman, 2014, p.322). Although visitors were surveyed, the analysis was quantitative and analysed with a lens of what motivations people have that can influence engagement (Taheri, Jafari and O'Gorman, 2014). Also while visitors rated their engagement on a scale, they did not define it in their own words (Taheri, Jafari and O'Gorman, 2014). In my research, visitors were invited to define engagement on their own terms and object encounters were the focus.

Over five days (from 28 November to 2 December 2016) at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, museum visitors were approached and recruited. I asked them if they would complete a 10 minute verbal interview that would be recorded by me. Respondents were given an Information Sheet for Participants which they retained and asked to sign an Informed Consent Form that I retained (Appendix). I also maintained an Observation Schedule. An Observation Schedule was created to record happenings in the gallery when interviews were undertaken (Appendix). It was a form that allowed me, the researcher, to tick preselected categories or note down information relating to behaviour of observed visitors as well as to environmental conditions (Given, 2008, p.576). This was in line with the reflections that visitors act differently in a crowded gallery (Trondle, et al., 2014, p.142) and that gallery activities can impact on visitor experience (Yalowitz and Bronnenkant, 2009, p.50). The Observation Schedule was also used to note any observable actions that the visitor did prior to as well as during the interview. However by the final round of fieldwork, I discovered that when a participant makes a nonverbal gesture or movement, it is highly appropriate to describe it on the recording. This not only captures the action but also invites the participant to respond to it. As interviews progressed, instead of observing visitors and then interviewing them, I invited them to a specific object (more detail below). This minimised the relevance of observations I made prior to the interview. Nevertheless I

have included it in the Appendix as the Observation Schedule was referred to in the Informed Consent Form and the Information Sheet for Participants.

In total, 30 interviews were recorded, some with individuals and some with couples, totalling 42 people. The fieldwork plan was to go to different galleries and ask questions of people about objects that attracted them. During pilot interviews, I attempted to ask questions about how the object would feel if it were touched or used. I also asked about the people that might have been involved in its production. However, this was regarding an object that the interviewee had already interacted with prior to the object being displayed in the museum, and the respondents thought of a specific manufacturer. It had been hoped that visitors would view an object and consider how and why it was made – what conditions were necessary for its production and how the production occur. Therefore it was decided that it would be most appropriate for the question to be asked about objects that visitors had *not* previously interacted with. As there would be variety in the different people being interviewed, to ensure minimal variety in the objects it was planned that several interviews would be conducted at the same object. However, on my first day I was in discomfort with an injured back and had difficulty motivating myself to approach people as well as stand for the duration of more than a few hours. I only achieved two different interviews at two different sites that incorporated individual encounters with three different objects. These were a mask, shark, and an artwork. As there was only one encounter each for these objects, I could not compare responses between them.

The mask, shark, and artwork were in the Conflict and Consequence gallery, which investigates the history of Mary Queen of Scots, World War Two and the Holocaust, refugees, historical armour, weapons and souvenirs of war. There is an animal armour section where physical characteristics of animals are compared with manmade armour. Two rooms lead off from this gallery, one investigating the Holocaust and the other entitled 'A Life of Service'. Two interviews were held in this gallery, one in the main gallery and another in the room investigating the Holocaust. The first interview featured the shark (Figure 3.1) and the mask (Figure 3.2). The mask label reads: 'Protection for the eyes and brain. Costume helmet, 1987, prototype made for the film *Willow*.' The second interview featured an artwork (Figure 3.3), for which the

accompanying label text is: 'Marianne and her mother were imprisoned in several different concentration camps. At the end of the war they were moved to Bergen-Belsen, where they witnessed much suffering caused by typhoid, lice and starvation. "We were shocked to see piles of dead bodies everywhere." *A Dead Body*, 1945. Marianne Grant, signed Mausi/45. Watercolour on paper.' These objects did not lend themselves well to the prepared questions, as they were not something used daily nor readily handled.

Figure 3.1 Conflict and Consequence gallery. Photograph by Oonagh Quigley, courtesy of Glasgow Museums.

Figure 3.2 Display of mask, the focus of one interview. Photograph by Oonagh Quigley. Artwork by Bruce Hansing, © and courtesy of Bruce Hansing.

Figure 3.3 Display of artwork, the focus of one interview. Photograph by Oonagh Quigley. Artwork by Marianne Grant, © and courtesy of the artist's family.

Instead, two different test sites of specific objects, in two different display cases in the same gallery, were selected. These were a vessel (Figure 3.4 and 3.5) and three carved stone balls (Figure 3.6). To ensure that a variety of responses could be compared, two

different sites were chosen. The objects were in display cases with other objects. These objects were used by everyday people and had the potential to point towards how museum visitors could consider social history objects. These objects were chosen as they are vaguely functional or could be considered to be handled. They were also hundreds (vessel) or thousands (carved stone balls) years old, so interactions would not be mediated by living memories of participants using the objects, an aspect identified in pilot studies to be avoided.

The objects were in the Scotland's First People gallery on the first floor. This large gallery investigates prehistoric Scotland through objects, large photographic reproductions, audio-visual, audio, and labels. As one walks through the gallery one hears different audio tracks, which range from the sound of fire, to children laughing, to another with a woman speaking in a language that sounds like Scottish Gallic. There are several large objects, including boat parts, a ladder and hogback stones, as well as smaller objects such as tools, jewellery, weapons, and bowls.

The vessel was part of the crannog display, which details life in a crannog, a manmade island on water. The particular crannog was in Loch Glashan, Argyll, which was a central location in the first Scottish kingdom of Dalriada. The label reads, 'Earthenware pottery vessel, 8th to 9th century, Loch Glashan, Argyll.'

Figure 3.4 Display of crannog. Photograph by Oonagh Quigley, courtesy of Glasgow Museums.
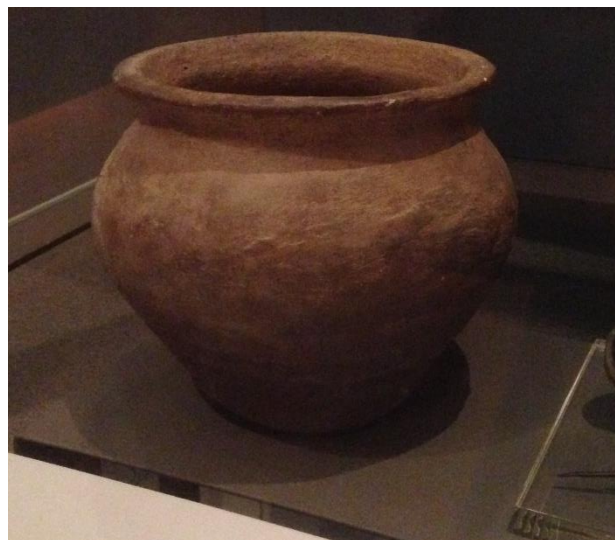
Figure 3.5 Display of vessel, the focus of several interviews. Photograph by Oonagh Quigley, courtesy of Glasgow Museums.

Figure 3.6 Display of three carved stone balls, the focus of several interviews. Photograph by Oonagh Quigley, courtesy of Glasgow Museums.

The stone balls were in the Places and Meaning display that explored the relation of Scotland's early people to the land. It mentions how elements of the land were used and valued, for example as source material for axes or use in social exchanges. It also details motivations of using stones on the land to mark boundaries or create spaces for religious purposes. The label reads: 'We're not sure what these carved balls were used for. Their beautiful carvings and shapes suggest that they were highly prized, and had an important purpose'.

The carved balls were previously researched and their sensory properties analysed. An archaeologist used the carved stone balls in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum collection as a basis for his argument that objects are constantly re-contextualised in the culture they are encountered in (MacGregor, 1999). He investigated the balls (which have different designs and carvings) through sensory means, which ranged from viewing from a distance and up close, to touching, spinning and tossing the balls (MacGregor, 1999, pp.265-266). He found that interpretation of material culture is predominantly through a socio-political or functional lens, noting the absence of considering material culture through a sensory means (MacGregor, 1999, p.263). Although his work relates to the same objects that I studied, there are no further similarities. He did not use the same approach of interviewing visitors in the museum,

he could touch rather than only viewing the objects inside a display case, and his research focus was not on visitor engagement.

Demographics were not formally collected. In order to demonstrate the variety of the interviewees, the following was identified through the Observation Schedule notes. Interviewees consisted of 21 females, 22 males; 17 were young adult (approximately 18 years old to 30 years old), 17 middle aged (approximately 30 to 60 years old) and nine older adults (over approximately 60 years old). As the demographics are not a research focus, they have not been compared to other demographics gathered in other studies on Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, or of the general museum audience. There were couples (one there on their wedding anniversary), friends, sole visitors, and one father and son. One respondent was in a wheelchair and identified as a person with accessibility requirements and had impaired hearing. Respondents were from Australia, Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, Scotland, and the United States of America.

Several participants were interviewed in front of both of the selected objects, and others in front of one. Table 3.2 lists the total of interviews and their object encounters. One participant stopped the interview as he had a telephone call and had to leave and two were not interviewed in front of the vessel or the carved stone balls. Note, as there were interviews undertaken with more than one person there is a difference between the number of interviews and the number of people in the interviews.

Table 3.2 Details of object encountered in interviews

Total number of interviews in front of objects	27
Interviews in front of vessel only	12
Interviews in front of carved stone balls only	12
Interviews in front of vessel and carved stone balls	3
Number of people interviewed in front of carved stone balls	19
Number of people interviewed in front of vessel	23

Data analysis

Once interviews were finished, they were transcribed and analysed using grounded theory. The 30 interviews were transcribed by listening to them at a slowed down speed and typing out the words. Interview length and observations made on site were included in the transcript. For example:

Setting

Total time: 5 minutes 44 seconds

Any activities happening in the museum gallery: participant has his back to activity of museum staff placing something in a cupboard (so he didn't see, but it was a bit noisy) and there were also drilling noises from the construction in the ground floor gallery that could be heard

About how many people are in the gallery: not overly crowded

Is it cold/warm inside: .warm

What is the weather like outside: cold

Participant

Male/female

Young adult/middle aged/older adult

After interview notes

After the recorder was switched off the respondent talked about how great the Canadian Museum of Civilisation was, how it had a whole village recreated, instead of just a street that is re-created at the Glasgow Museum of Transport, Riverside.

Grounded theory was used to analyse the interviews. All interviews were used when doing an open code analysis, although the first two interviews were not conducted in

front of the selected objects, and one interview was terminated before object interactions were explored. An established qualitative researcher argues that coding 'approaches the analytic act as one that assigns rich symbolic meanings through essence-capturing and/or evocative attributes to data' (Saldana, 2016, p.40). It coexists with other theories, neither discounting nor precluding other theories (Saldana, 2016, p.41). It is a 'method of discovery' that stimulates researcher reflection on data as well as a way to gain clarity about the world through data analysis (Saldana, 2016, p.42). The goal with grounded theory analysis is 'to offer the reader a conceptual explanation of a latent pattern of behaviour that holds significance within the social setting under study' (Holton, 2007, p.268). In order to arrive at this explanation, the interview transcripts were coded.

In this PhD, the coding strategy was one typical of grounded theory, in that an open coding was first performed followed by selective coding (Benaquisto, 2008, p.86). Open coding identifies concepts from the raw data by going through the data with no preconceived ideas about the data or what it could reveal, and coding whatever concepts emerge devoid of concern for how the codes relate to the research question or to each other (Benaquisto, 2008, p.86). A selective coding is more focused than open coding and occurs when the researcher reviews the data with specific categories or research questions in mind (Benaquisto, 2008, p.87).

Several rounds of coding were undertaken in this research process, described below. All coding was done by hand on print outs and codes listed in Excel spreadsheets, in order to make global reviews of codes. Although there are computer programmes available to use when coding, grounded theory practitioners argue software can distance the researcher from the data or undermine the creativity of researchers (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007, p.24). Also, computers are a tool and a programme is only as valuable as your own understanding of how an analysis would proceed (Gillham, 2005, p.147). I trialled use of NVivo but found the interface limiting in the level of interview segments visible on the screen (see Figure 3.7).
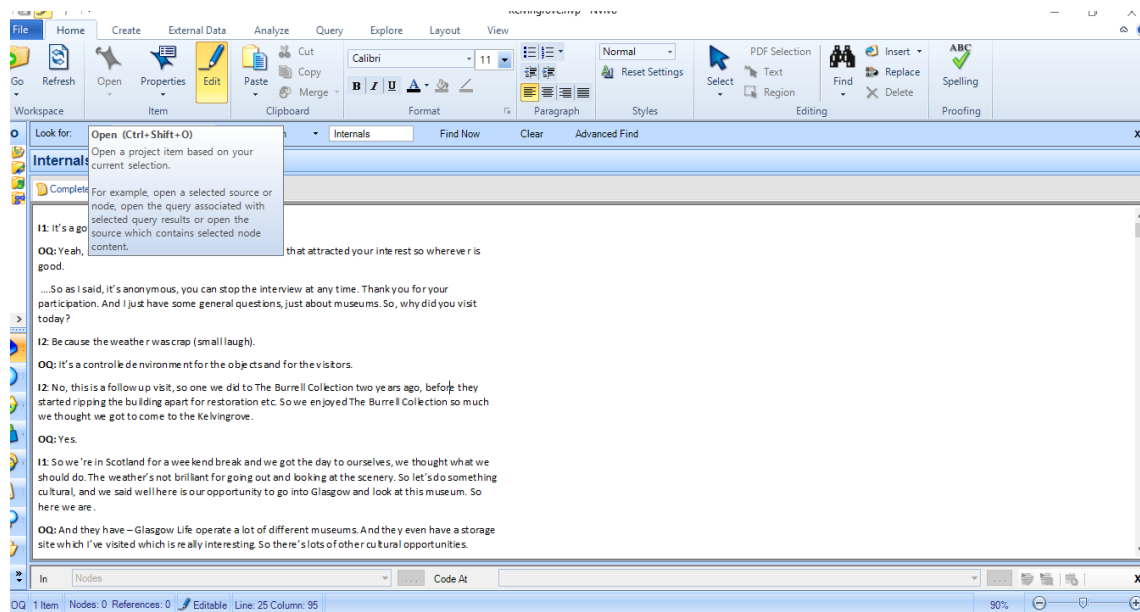
Figure 3.7 Screenshot of NVivo interface

The result of the open coding was that there are many themes (137), some of which are general while others are specific. Where inferences or assumptions were made, these were marked with an asterisk (*). I have sought to honour what was said by interviewees and to note what interpretations I have made from their responses. For example, when asked what sort of objects make her stop in a museum, a participant responded: 'I like something that talks about history of people and how people have lived and yeah, so anything to do with displays of living, displays of rooms that are set up, like Rennie Mackintosh room downstairs. That'll make me stop. Or objects that people used in everyday life. I'm not really a fancy schmancy type of person'.[6] One of the codes composed from the above responses was object attraction – social history over fine art*. All of the findings from the open code will not be reported, see Chapter Four for findings that relate to background questions, label related questions, object interaction questions, touch related questions, and engagement with the object.

After the open coding, the next step was to do selective coding. This specifically reviewed the responses with a phenomenological lens. In order to ascertain if there were similarities between responses to the same objects, the interviews were not

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[6] G8

reviewed in a chronological order but rearranged according to the object that was the focus of the interviews. Selective coding by object clusters revealed more themes as well new commonalities and differences not observed in the open coding. Following the review of data, and reading more literature, a more refined language of considering object manifestation and embodiment was articulated and iterations of coding were repeated. The specifics of this are detailed in Chapter Four.

An additional selective coding process was carried out, through reviewing interviews for emotion. This proved more difficult to identify in the interviews. It was tentatively assumed visitors would respond to objects either in a manner relating to emotional or objective means, for example age, origin, or other facts. Interviews were reviewed looking for examples when people spoke about facts, and as a complement to that, more emotional experiences. It was assumed it would be simple to ascertain the separate themes in the interviews. However it was not. At times people spoke about specific objects and times in their lives in emotional and experiential terms. It was not possible to separate these out as they rely on each other for the whole museum encounter. Another example of the difficulty of teasing out fact versus emotional was evident in how some people interact with objects. One participant emotionally focussed on the appearance of the object. When asked if she thought about the people that might have made the vessel, she responded, 'Yeah, I would just really love to know why, or what they were doing with them. Like this one's decorated on its, on one of its sides, like, on the round side, and I wonder if they were, I don't know, like, an activity to get more skill? Or somebody just really enjoyed doing them (laughs). Or what they are'.[7] Therefore museum experience is neither facts nor emotion, but an intertwining of these facets. That the data resisted an attempt to impose certain themes on it was significant as it reinforced the integrity of how my analysis was carried out as quotes could not be found to support an insubstantial bias.

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[7] G16

Reflections

A well-considered methodology entails research, thought and self-reflexivity. This section explores several aspects including ethics and power dynamics, choice of recording device, how data was represented, transcription reflections, limitations of fieldwork, and how my selected methodology and findings can be evaluated.

An ethical treatment of participants, interview data and other findings underpinned the methodology. Therefore, my research did not harm participants, research was undertaken with informed consent, all processes were transparent, and confidentiality was maintained (Kumar, 2005, p.216). Another ethical factor was to ensure the research project was clearly communicated to the participants (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p.319). To this end, the Information Sheet for Participants was given to interviewees for them to retain (Appendix). In addition, interview questions that were influenced by phenomenology were composed in language that was deemed easy to comprehend. As the interviews were anonymous and consent was required, the privacy, values, and confidentiality of respondents were respected. Names of respondents were not recorded (although signature was required on the Informed Consent Forms). Instead a number was matched to the interview and the Information Sheet for Participants. Participants were given a right to withdraw consent to take part in research. Therefore, if the respondent decided to withdraw, they have the relevant details on the Information Sheet for Participants in order to contact me and reference their specific information. Power imbalance was considered at every step of methodology development; for example, during question development, an early question asking participants how often they visited museums in a year was discarded. It was realised that it did not directly contribute to the investigation and also that the question could potentially be considered as a value judgment by a post graduate level museum researcher on participants.

Interviews were recorded with a microphone, in addition to me noting down my observations. This was done for four reasons. Firstly, giving respondents surveys to complete can remove the participant from reflecting on the experience. Secondly, I wished to capture all the responses, and both writing and sound recording

respondents' words assisted with this. Thirdly, it is easier for a respondent to share their experiences if they were talking, rather than thinking then writing. And finally, the respondent could be asked by me to indicate elements in the exhibition space, and this was easier to do if the respondent was not writing something down. The interviews were recorded with a microphone. In comparison, a research group from King's College London used video, interview and observations to research visitors interacting in museum spaces (see Heath and vom Lehn, 2008; vom Lehn and Heath, 2006). They argue one of the advantages of video is the ability to repeat or slow down recorded physical movement (vom Lehn and Heath, 2006). While video offers a recording of how people physically behave in a space, there are issues around it, including where to place camera angles and other framing limitations (Luff and Heath, 2012). In addition, this PhD attempts to describe the intimate encounter a person has with objects. This may not necessarily be observable through how a visitor physically interacts with a display on a larger scale. Therefore the interview questions were used as a tool to gauge the experience that participants were undergoing in the museum. I wished to interact with the people in the space where they are encountering objects, and not have a barrier of a screen between me the researcher and participants. Similar to Heidegger's argument that 'the typewriter tears writing from the essential realm of the hand' (Ingold, 2010, p.310), a camera would remove the immediacy of visitor experiences from the essential realm of the researcher. Therefore a 10 minute, semi-structured interview recorded with a microphone was the form of dialogue chosen for fieldwork.

I address two reflections on how data was represented. The first relates to how interviews are named. As the methodology included several interviews sessions prior to the final fieldwork, I made a conscious decision to label audio files with the letter referencing the location in which they were interviewed and a number that reflected the order in which they were interviewed. Therefore the interviews are Liverpool (L1-10), Jaipur (J1-4) and Glasgow (G1-30). This was done for two reasons. Firstly, responses to material may be different between sites, as there is different material on display. Secondly, as interviewing progressed, both questions (detailed previously) and

my interview technique (detailed in Chapter Six) were optimised and the later interviews were improvements on the initial interviews.

The second reflection on how data is represented is in regards to interviews with more than one participant. If there was more than one respondent, there was a level of interaction between them. Some allowed the other person to talk, others talked at the same time or finished each other's sentences, and others had a dialogue where I became an observer. The latter situation could indicate their comfort with me as an interviewer. There were times when one respondent questioned the other respondent, or was not aware of a particular perspective of the respondent. This suggests the questions refer to topics that are not commonly talked about between the two people. It was apparent at times in interviews that one person was silent, while the other person spoke.[8] It was also apparent that there was interaction between the respondents.[9] At times they asked questions of each other that I would not have thought of asking. As there was such interplay, I was not confident in attributing specific thoughts and responses separately to each of the different interviewees. It has been identified that museum experiences are social and influenced by the members that make up the visitor group (Houlberg Rung, 2013). The respondent may not have thought or said that particular answer while not in the company of the other person. Therefore respondents will not be separately analysed within the same interview and when a respondent is stated, it refers to both respondents in the interview, unless noted otherwise.

Transcription is a selective and interpretative translation of an interview, the resulting written document is absent of the emphasis, tone, pace, and pauses that are present in a dialogue (Gillham, 2005, p.121). Consequently I desired to capture as much expression as possible and included emm and umm in the transcriptions. This was because these are different sounds and I wished to faithfully record what people said, and were also types of thinking aloud sounds. Also noted in the transcripts were incidents of sarcastic tone or laughter.

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[8] G1, G3, G7, G15 and G29
[9] G5, G7, G12, G17, G18, G23, G26, G28, G29, G30

As per recommendation from a qualitative researcher guide, I maintained a journal while I carried out fieldwork, transcriptions, analysis and reflections (Saldana, 2016, p.21). It is especially recommended for the lone researcher, as discussion with team members is not an option and reflections can assist to clarify or expand on premises that are coming from the data (Saldana, 2016, p.38). This allowed any bias or assumptions on my part to be characterised and recognised; for example, I realised that when I was transcribing I had an abject focus on responses to Heideggerian related questions. Committing thoughts to paper also encouraged a rigorously ethical approach, one of the necessary attributes for coding (Saldana, 2016, p.38). Again, the use of a journal assisted in identifying a potential bias when coding for emotional responses. Also a journal was maintained in the field to record my disposition, attention span as well as other factors that could impact observation and general researcher approach to participants (Given, 2008, p.574). Indeed when interviewing participants, I had an injured back. As the arrangement for fieldwork was only possible in that week, the research continued. The urge to find participants in order to achieve the target amount of interviews for that day encouraged me to approach all visitors. And it was through this that I realised my tendency to approach visitors that I thought looked friendlier or more open to taking part in the interview. Therefore a bias was identified and addressed.

While transcribing I became aware of a hyper vigilance when typing out the responses to object interaction questions and a bias towards what the participants answered to these questions. It was important to put this focus on possible outcomes regarding object encounters to one side when doing an open code. Other themes can, and did, emerge from the interviews and I did not want to obscure these unexpected themes in a blinkered approach to the Heidegger related material. Therefore while it is recommended to keep a copy of key questions as you code (Saldana, 2016, p.22), for the initial open code this was not done, in order to ensure there were no biases when analysing the material. The second coding process, however, was more targeted.

Regarding limitations, inherent in this research set-up are two. The first is that there will be different responses around what people consider engagement. However the subjectivity and range of responses indicate that there is spectrum of engagement.

This potentially confirms that there is no single understanding of what 'engagement' means, and ultimately enables, through my phenomenologically informed analysis of the research data derived from interviews, a visitor-derived (rather than an a priori/hypothesis-led) characterisation of engagement (see Chapter Six).

The second limitation is that visitors were approached and then asked to go to particular display cases. This created an artificial interaction as the visitor had not stopped of their own accord and become 'engaged' with the object but had instead been led to the object. In addition although the questions were thought about in depth, several did not work in the final fieldwork. These were 'did this object seem familiar to you? and 'did you spend time examining the physical properties of the object or think immediately about its use?'. As participants were led to a specific object, the questions did not flow nor make immediate make sense as I was inviting the participant to look at the object. In an ideal situation, people would be identified by some means that they are engaged with a specific object and then asked questions about their experience. However, the work undertaken in this research project provided some consistency in that a variety of experiences have been recorded in front of the same object. This aspect is considered below in the context of evaluation criteria.

An integral part of data analysis is the evaluation of the analysis. There is complexity around evaluating qualitative research as some methods focus on validating data gathering and analysis without addressing the creative elements of qualitative research (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.299). Therefore two different approaches will be described and used to gauge reliability of the methodology used in this thesis, outlined below.

One means of evaluating a grounded theory study is to ensure the grounding of analysis and theory construction is within the data, outlined by six criteria (Creswell, 2013, p.262). It is recommended that the central element of the theory is the study of a process (Creswell, 2013, p.262), which is explicit in this thesis – the study of museum visitor engagement. In addition, the researcher recognises and states their stance and response (Creswell, 2013, p.262). This has been undertaken in this chapter through a

statement on researcher stance at the beginning of this chapter as well as a reflection on how I responded to the research process, mentioned in this chapter as well as Chapter Six. The four other criteria will be articulated in Chapter Four, Five and Six as they will demonstrate how a coding process developed from the fieldwork data towards a theory, offer a visual presentation of the theory, and a proposition that outlines the theory as well as pondering further questions (Creswell, 2013, p.262).

Another method of evaluating grounded theory is to examine the use by criteria of originality, resonance, usefulness and credibility (Charmaz, 2006, pp.182-183). The use of grounded theory in this thesis has originality as it offers new insights in visitor engagement and extends from current knowledge on visitor experiences (Charmaz, 2006, p.182). In order to demonstrate resonance, the study must illustrate the complexness of the studied process, uncover 'liminal and unstable taken-for-granted meanings', map findings onto more global contexts as well as be comprehensible by participants or people that have undergone similar experiences (Charmaz, 2006, pp.182-183). The criteria of usefulness refers to the practical applications of findings or a contribution to other areas as well as a contribution to 'making a better world' (Charmaz, 2006, p.183). Originality, resonance, and usefulness will be demonstrated in Chapter Six.

Credibility requires logical links between the data and analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p.182). Chapter Four will detail the categories that emerged from the data as well as argue for certain characteristics of engagement. Within the confines of the PhD, a limited number of interviews were undertaken and this has limited credibility as the sample did not achieve 'intimate familiarity with the topic' (Charmaz, 2006, p.182). The interviews were conducted at an object I had selected (for specific reasons) and that I brought the visitors to, they were not at the object when I approached them. The outcome of the Glasgow fieldwork was a study of museum visitors' interaction objects that they had not previously seen. At the start of planning methodology, I had initially wanted to ask visitors questions about objects they were engaged with and were drawn towards. This is typical museum behaviour, which many respondents described, they will walk through a gallery and stop at something that catches their eye. However, this sort of observational and follow up interview was not feasible in the

timeframe of this project. While the interviews were not at objects that had made participants stop and want to look, the research could point towards ways of interpretation that may make visitors more engaged with object. Significantly, many respondents stated they were engaged with the object, and several stated they were engaged following the reflections they had when I questioned them. Therefore the outcome of the Glasgow fieldwork was a study of museum visitors interacting with objects that they had not previously seen, and how they became engaged through considering the object.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the means of taking phenomenological texts and articulating some of these concepts into interview questions. The chapter summarised optimisation and execution of my fieldwork as well as my stages of analysis. The next chapter will go into details regarding the findings of the fieldwork interviews. Initially I presumed that three questions could reveal *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* interactions. The maturation of my reflections on how objects manifest – and how varied and complex are the ways in which visitors encounter objects – is evidenced in the next chapters that describe the findings and layers of analysis that revealed characteristics of engagement.

Chapter Four: Findings

> It looks very old but extremely well formed. Looks like a very utilitarian piece, very common place, something people would use every day to prepare food. Very much a part of their everyday lives. [10]

Overview

This chapter gives detail of fieldwork findings, undertakes analysis of interviews, and draws themes from the responses of museum visitors. Findings are reported in this chapter and are then further analysed in Chapter Five. This chapter opens with a section that details research participants' responses to answers. The next section reports data analysis of my interviews, seen through a phenomenological lens. The third section, characteristics of engagement, explores patterns that emerged in engaging object encounters. The final section summarises examples from participants regarding their previous experiences of engagement, and conversely of not being engaged.

This chapter explores two of my research objectives: to review how visitor engagement has previously been defined, considered, and understood, and to explore and develop the consideration of engaging object encounters from a phenomenological, and specifically a Heideggerian, stance. The adoption of phenomenology permits the lived experience to be explored in detail. It allows a focus on first person accounts, the examination of the everyday and a way for visitors' expression of emotions, memories, imagination, curiosity, as well as multisensory responses to be assessed and analysed.

Data are articulated in both qualitative and quantitative forms. Data are described through individual examples and via broader themes that emerged from commonalities and differences between these individual cases. This helps to overcome the disadvantages of only celebrating 'individual variety in cultural studies analyses rather than to contextualise and analyse' (MacDonald, 2007, p.152). Using a

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[10] G9

combination of qualitative and quantitative discussions strengthens the data analysis: qualitative analysis contributes meaning to what the data represents, and quantitative data can reveal the patterns that develop from the individual cases (Leinhardt and Knutson, 2004, p.145).

This chapter includes description of my coding and explanation of my data analysis. This allows the reader an insight into my research process as a means for evaluation of the research process. As mentioned in Chapter Three, I evaluate use of grounded theory with criteria suggested by two different researchers (Charmaz, 2006 and Creswell, 2013). The term credibility refers to the demonstration of the connections between data gathered, the analysis, and the concepts formed from the data (Charmaz, 2006, p.182). The following sections detail how I arrived at themes from open and selective coding and how these findings relate to engagement. Additional criteria for evaluating grounded theory relevant to this chapter include illustrating how coding occurs, how the coding worked toward a theory, an outline of the theory and a visualisation of the theory (Creswell, 2013, p.262). I achieve this by describing the coding process, reviewing how the coding of data contributed to a theory, outlining the characteristics of engagement and visually representing the theory in a spectrum of engagement (Figure 4.6 on page 132).

As only one interview each was conducted in front of a skull sculpture[11] or a painting,[12] these interviews will not be used in analysis for engaging object encounters. Rather, interviews undertaken in front of the vessel and the carved balls will be used. For brevity of reading, the term object will be used to refer to either the vessel or the three carved balls in the following chapters. It is recognised that the three balls are different from each other, however ease of reading will be enhanced if object is used as a catchall term for the three carved balls.

A last point to make before reporting findings is a note on questions asked in fieldwork. My fieldwork included semi-structured interviews to encourage open and fluid responses. A close ended survey may not have gathered the rich and complex

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[11] G1
[12] G2

responses that will be explored in this chapter. While this organic style of conversation stimulates visitor openness, the absence of a uniform structure can lead to omissions. These omissions can be accidental or by design. In the field, accidental omissions were due to interview fatigue, for example in one interview[13] the respondents talked at length about how they found archaeological material in their work and they were not specifically asked if they were engaged with the object that was the interview focus. Omissions by design were made when questions in the field disrupted the rhythm of the dialogue. Thus, what was planned to occur in the field did not always translate in the field, or proceed as predicted. The questions that were planned and were asked, or not asked, in the field are listed in Table 4.1. While only responses to the questions asked can be analysed, they still reveal much of object encounters, as detailed in this chapter.

Table 4.1 Interview questions used in fieldwork November 2016

General question area	Specific questions
Background questions	Why did you visit today – have you visited here before – when? Did you have any expectations of your visit? Do you read labels? What would you think about a museum with no labels? What types of object makes you stop and look at a display case?
Object interaction	What did you think about that object? What did you think it's intended use was? Was it something you would pick up and use? Did it seem familiar to you? **Did not ask** Did you spend time examining the physical properties of the object or think immediately about its use? **Did not ask** Did you think about what people could have used or made this? Did you think about the past or future when looking at this? Did you think about touching the object? If you could touch the object, what do you think it would feel like? Were you engaged with this object? What would it be like to be that object?

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[13] G30

Engagement	Can you tell me about an engaging exhibition or museum that you have visited? (prompt for words if necessary) Do you remember not being engaged by an exhibition?
Wrap up	Do you have any questions for me?

General responses

This section is informed by material found from the open coding of the interviews. It reports answers to background questions, label related questions, object interaction questions, touch related questions, and engagement with the object. In addition to listing responses to the specific interview questions, it also provides general reflections. The responses give context to the museum experience, a background to my coding, and also provide a foundation for the more in depth analyses later in this chapter.

Background questions

When asked the question, 'why have you visited the Kelvingrove today?' several respondents said it was because they were on a trip to Glasgow. However they did not elaborate on why tourists visit museums; perhaps they thought this was implicit. This aligns with the argument that motivation for museum visits can be so self-evident that visitors do not articulate it when asked (Falk, 2016, p.361). When asked 'what sort of object makes you stop in a museum?' visitors supplied a range of answers, which included type of the object or their own personal preference. Visitors were asked if they had any expectation of their visit, in an effort to gain knowledge of what informed their decision to enter the museum. The majority of responses revolved around education, information and seeing objects. It is of interest that while their expectation is education, it was not a prevalent theme in their example of engaging experiences. Many respondents did not speak of learning something but of experiencing something. This could indicate education is at the forefront of a person's mind when thinking about museums, but when they recall an engaging experience it consists of other elements. Researchers have identified people are motivated to visit the museum for educational, social, spiritual, or emotional reasons (Morris, 2012, p.9).

Most of the responses in this fieldwork regarding museum expectation relate to education. However the responses given of examples of engaging experiences (explored in a later section) include spiritual and emotional elements. Perhaps people are more reflective after a museum visit has been completed and then mention spiritual and emotional aspects of their visit. The questions of expectation was posed in a museum prior to an object encounter. And the engagement examples were provided from past experience of visitors, which might have allowed them a space to reflect on the experience.

Label related questions

When asked do you read labels in a museum, 12 people answered yes,[14] 12 stated they read if they are interested in a particular object,[15] three read selectively,[16] one wanders then finds something to read,[17] and one did not read labels.[18] The high proportion of museum visitors reading labels is not unprecedented. In a study that recorded in gallery conversations, just under half the participants quoted from labels (Allen, 2002, p.294). In several interviews, I brought the respondent to a display case and asked what they thought of the object. Many people had not read the label, and many people mentioned the label in their response – either by questioning the age, saying they hadn't had a chance to read the label, or by reading it aloud.

Labels can reveal other uses of an object that might not be immediately apparent from its appearance. One participant required labels to give context, which he believed was not observable from visual inspection only, 'because a lot of the items you'd expect in a museum have a cultural aspect to them'.[19] He illustrated his argument with an object on display at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum; a spoon that appears to be a typical domestic item but was used in an anti-nuclear protest. Thus, even if the type of object is familiar to the visitor, the label can provide background for why it is on display. When encountering objects with a familiar use, people would prefer to read

[14] G8, G11, G13, G14, G16, G18, G21, G23, G25, G26, G28, G30
[15] G1, G2, G5, G7, G10, G12, G15, G17, G19, G22, G24, G27
[16] G6, G9, G29
[17] G20
[18] G3
[19] G26

labels that allow them to understand why that particular object is in a museum. Even if a visitor knows that a bowl holds something, they would like to know its importance or relevance for its placement in the museum. When visiting a museum in Malaga where all the labels were in a language not spoken by the participant, he felt lost without labels to explain why certain objects were on display, 'I was going around a museum and not really knowing what I was looking at. You know, there's some pottery, great! Some bowls, some more bowls, great (in sarcastic tone)! I've no idea what's going on'.[20] While another interviewee considered paintings intentional and thus not in need of labels, objects required more explanation. When replying to an absence of labels, she replied, 'if it was paintings that would be fine, but if it was things like this, like, ah, artefacts, that would be pretty boring because if you don't have a label, a jar is just a jar'.[21] And another interviewee exclaimed, 'you need, explanations of what you're seein'…one mummy becomes – you know, oh another mummy, not another mummy'.[22] It appears even with objects that are recognisable, visitors desire to know the reason for it to be in a museum and what is the history of the object.

Subsequent to the label question was the notion of a hypothetical museum with no labels and how people would respond to it. The hypothetical scenario revealed 13 visitors desire information and context about the object.[23] If there were no labels, one person felt they would not have learned anything,[24] and another said labels make the museum worthwhile.[25] Many participants were fiercely opposed to no labels and reacted negatively to a hypothetical museum with no labels. People stated a museum with no labels is not complete,[26] would be confusing,[27] is not a good idea,[28] would be difficult,[29] or would dislike it as it would not be a good museum experience. [30] People

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[20] G26
[21] G10
[22] G13
[23] G5, G6, G13, G15, G18, G19, G21, G22, G23, G25, G26, G27, G30
[24] G20
[25] G26
[26] G6
[27] G2, G7
[28] G13
[29] G30
[30] G20

declared they would feel disappointed,[31] cheated,[32] lost,[33] sad,[34] or that they had missed out.[35] They reflected on how they would not stay long in a museum with no labels[36] or leave quickly.[37]

Responses that were not so overtly negative were also given. These ranged from casual comments that visitors would just walk around,[38] would not mind,[39] to more positive comments that it would be interesting.[40] Some challenged the museum with the response that the object on display would have to be good enough to interest the visitor without labels,[41] or that the museum 'atmosphere' could provide meaning.[42] Other interviewees challenged themselves as they suggested it would encourage them to think more,[43] that they could concentrate on looking at the objects,[44] while one participant indicated their own confidence in fine art as they felt labels might not be necessary for paintings.[45] Other facets of gaining context included being provided a headset,[46] written guide,[47] or by asking museum staff.[48] Participants also proposed they could imagine[49] but would like to know something of objects.[50]

The notion of having the visitors' own interpretation requiring validation from the museum was also observed in other studies. While viewing a segment of a film in an exhibition, two visitors reflected on its content and mode of production, and one of the visitors expressed a desire for more information by the museum to ensure he had

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[31] G12, G18, G19
[32] G12
[33] G15
[34] G16
[35] G30
[36] G1, G11, G24
[37] G9
[38] G3
[39] G7
[40] G14
[41] G17
[42] G29
[43] G24, G29
[44] G22, G24, G28
[45] G10
[46] G1
[47] G12
[48] G7, G19, G22
[49] G8, G12
[50] G5

successfully understood the intent of the exhibition (Leinhardt and Knutson, 2004, p.11). An experimental exhibition with minimal text that required visitors to imagine the narrative found that several participants enjoyed this while a few were concerned if they had correctly understood the intended narrative (Gunderson and Back, 2018, p.314). Therefore it is not unprecedented for visitors to require validation of their interpretation, in the absence of guidance from the museum, of what they encounter.

Tension between responses that were given by visitors and researcher observations of the object encounters was evident. What is interesting about these answers and the value the respondents placed on information, was that following the question, the interview went on to document an object encounter with relatively little information from the adjacent label. Although the visitors were guided by interview questions, these did not provide information. The questions did encourage interviewees to think about the object in a way they might not normally have. There is a difference between how people consider they would react and how they have reacted. It underlines the complexity of how people relate to objects and validates the use of interviews in front of an object to capture a 'real time' object encounter as people may not fully recall their experiences. Thus supporting the argument that gallery object encounters reveal more than post visit reflections (Stainton, 2002, p.214).

Object interaction questions

There was a large variety of responses to the question which asked participants what they thought about the object. This suggests the question was open enough for people to give any answer that they thought of, and were not limited to how they could articulate their object interaction. When the answers to the question of use were open coded the broad themes that emerged were to propose use, examine in detail, contemporary comparison, mention label, or question motivation of maker. These commonalities are examples of how the object manifested to visitors (see later in this chapter).

When asked if the visitor would pick up and use the object in front of them, seven participants said yes,[51] four made a contemporary comparison,[52] and two mentioned the museum use of the object.[53] While four respondents would not think of picking up and using it[54] and two interviewees would only pick up the object to inspect it, and not use it.[55] When answering the question regarding what time the object made people think of, 23 respondents answered past,[56] five answered future,[57] five answered present,[58] and six made contemporary comparisons.[59] Also mentioned was that the age was not what the visitor expected[60] and unique to the interviews in front of the carved balls, seven respondents pondered about the possible uses of the object.[61] Most interviewees in front of the vessel considered people during their object encounter, apart from three interviews.[62] Several respondents expressed other themes, nine mentioned how the object was made,[63] six questioned use,[64] two spoke of the physical link to the maker to the object[65] and one respondent felt that artefacts do not demonstrate motivation of makers.[66] The object oriented philosophy themed question, 'what would it be like to be this object?' garnered many interesting responses but no commonalities. The subjectivity of the answer is a benefit as they reveal thoughts from the visitor about the museum and objects. Several of the respondents spoke about the intended use (what the object was made for) or the museum use of the object. When comparing answers from encounters with the vessel and the carved stone balls, there were no major differences apart from responses to questions asking would a visitor pick up and use the object and what time period the

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[51] G8, G9, G10, G16, G22, G17, G24
[52] G12, G19, G23, G24
[53] G6, G7
[54] G13, G15, G18, G20
[55] G14, G29
[56] G5, G6, G7, G9, G11, G13, G14, G15, G16, G17, G18, G19, G20, G21, G22, G23, G24, G25, G26, G27, G28, G29, G30
[57] G12, G13, G24, G28, G29
[58] G19, G24, G28, G29, G30
[59] G10, G16, G20, G25, G27, G30
[60] G12, G19, G23
[61] G5, G6, G8, G15, G21, G22, G24
[62] G3, G21, G29
[63] G5, G8, G11, G13, G23, G24, G25, G28, G30
[64] G5, G15, G16, G22, G24, G28
[65] G16, G59
[66] G10

object elicited. More people said they would pick up and use the vessel as compared to the balls. More people mentioned the past when considering the vessel. For reader interest I have not conflated the responses and the results for the vessel and the carved stone balls are represented separately.

Touch related questions

The answers to the question regarding touch demonstrated how the interviewees interpreted a question differently than predicted. Many people responded around the lines that the museum forbids touch. In the field, this concern was circumnavigated by offering the visitors magic gloves which they could still feel with but not break or degrade the condition of the object. Some people answered from a personal point of view, that they were a tactile person and liked to touch things. Therefore, the object itself may not have encouraged the touch response, it could be inherent in the interviewee. Also of interest were responses where interviewees stated they did not want to touch. One was reticent to touch anything in a museum,[67] and another stated if he was not using the object, he did not need to touch it.[68]

When asked if visitors would like to touch the vessel or thought about touching the vessel, six answered no[69] and one visitors said they never touch things in museums,[70] 14 said yes,[71] four respondents mentioned the museum forbids it,[72] two did not directly answer,[73] two mentioned shape,[74] one used hands,[75] one respondent said a visual inspection is adequate,[76] one respondent would prefer to touch the adjacent object,[77] and another made a comparison between weight and perceived power.[78]

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[67] G20
[68] G11
[69] G3, G6, G11, G13, G18, G26
[70] G20
[71] G5, G7, G8, G9, G14, G15, G16, G19, G21, G22, G23, G27, G28, G29
[72] G7, G9, G12, G26
[73] G10, G24
[74] G19, G25
[75] G12
[76] G11
[77] G13
[78] G25

A reticence to touch museum objects influenced the question, 'what would it feel like to touch the object?'. Some interviewees required coaxing to talk about what an object would feel like if it was touched. The physical aspects of the object was mentioned by 18 respondents,[79] four referred to use and manufacture,[80] and two made a comparison to known materials.[81] There were three instances with more abstract reflections on what the object would feel like to be touched,[82] including how it would connect past and present people or how the weight of an object can indicate potency and power. Whereas more enthusiastic responses included that the carved balls are 'so tactile, they would be so much fun to touch'[83] and another interviewee wanted 'to feel the pattern and the carving and I'd absolutely love to pick it up and see how heavy it is and to see all sides'.[84] A respondent reflected the vessel has 'quite a nice shape to hold'.[85] One participant noted the tension of touch and not damaging the vessel, 'you want to experience the texture of it, but you want to preserve it because it's so old'.[86] It is assumed this care for conservation is the reason for resisting touch of a museum object.

A summary of the responses are tabulated below. Not all interviews are included as I either did not ask questions regarding touch[87] or the participants did not directly answer.[88] Approximately one third of the people interviewed were not positive about touching the object, while about two thirds were positive about touching the object.

Table 4.2 Summary of touch related codes in object encounters

Category	Object encounter	Total
Positive about touch	G5, G7, G8, G9, G12, G15, G16 vessel and balls, G19, G21, G22, G23, G24 vessel, G25 vessel and balls G27, G28, G29	18
Not positive about touch	G3, G6, G11, G13, G18, G20, G26	7

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[79] G5, G6, G7, G8, G10, G11, G13, G14, G15, G16, G17, G18, G21, G23, G24, G25, G28, G29
[80] G6, G8, G9, G28
[81] G3, G12
[82] G12, G20, G25
[83] G16
[84] G22
[85] G25
[86] G23
[87] G14, G17
[88] G10, G24 carved stone balls

Engagement with the object

When asked if participants were engaged with the vessel, interviewees either answered yes,[89] or no.[90] The participants of one interview were engaged with the vessel only as part of the display and not by itself[91] and one response was complex. When asked if participants were engaged with the carved balls, interviewees either answered yes,[92] or no,[93] and one response was complex.[94] As previously mentioned, due to interviewer fatigue, the question was accidently not asked in two interviews.[95]

In order to analyse possible characteristics of engagement, the responses were coded as either yes or no (see Table 4.3). As G26 reported they were engaged with the whole display and not the specific object, it was coded as not engaged as the research focus is on the intimate object encounter, and not the whole display. However the response is of relevance and will be referred to in later sections. The interviewee G25 was verbose and did not specifically reply yes or no to the engagement question, when asked in front of the vessel and the carved balls. However both encounters were coded as being engaged. Although the participant did not explicitly state he was engaged, he was not unengaged. The answers are recounted in a footnote[96] to demonstrate the engaged nature of the reply.

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[89] G7, G8, G12, G14, G16, G19, G20, G23, G27

[90] G3, G10, G18, G24

[91] G26

[92] G5, G8, G15, G16, G21, G22, G24, G28, G29

[93] G6, G11, G13

[94] G25

[95] G17, G30

[96] **OQ**: Would you say that you're engaged with this object (vessel)?
I: Ah, I, I quite love the idea of thinking that it has been, like it's still here after all these years, I mean, it's something that culminates, all you know past objects, in particular. You know, seeing, going into a museum and seeing, you know, thinking how people created it or using it would react to us, just staring at it, in front of glass, it'd be funny, I don't know. It's crazy to think about it. But you know, it was used a long, long time ago and right now we're just seeing it exposed in a museum.

OQ: Do you feel engaged to this object (carved balls)?
I: Ah, I must say, that of this whole room, this is probably the most fascinating, like, this section here, the stones. For example, I haven't maybe looked there, but you know, I stopped here for quite a lot cause I don't know I just found them really, really interesting. I think they reminded me of something but ah, it's quite hard now to recall it. It's, kind of ah, it's, not too hard to find this kind of shape, it's quite common, so.

Table 4.3 Summary of visitor being engaged or not in their object encounters

Object	Visitor was engaged	Not engaged	Not asked
Vessel	G7, G9, G12, G14, G16, G19, G20, G23, G25, G27	G3, G10, G18, G24, G26	G17
Carved balls	G5, G8, G15, G16, G21, G22, G24, G25, G28, G29	G6, G11, G13	G30

The coded responses to visitors being engaged or not engaged with the object they have encountered is visualised in Figure 4.1. An equal number of visitors were engaged with the vessel and carved balls, and there were several respondents not engaged with either vessel nor carved balls. These answers have been listed in more detail than other responses as they form the basis of the examination of what elements are found in an engaging object encounter.
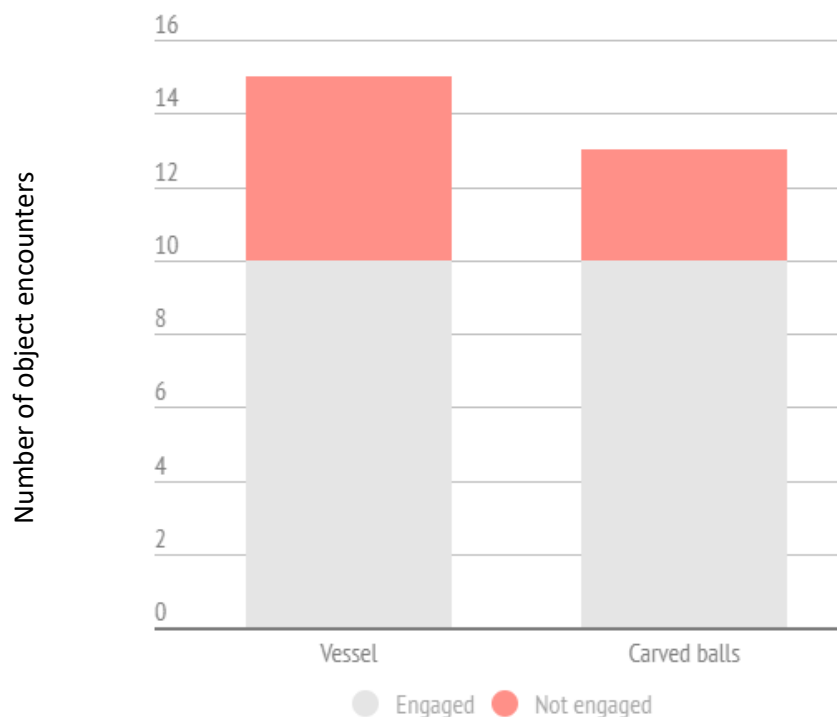

Figure 4.1 Responses to the question of object engagement

The responses to questions asked in fieldwork provide a foundation for more complex analysis. They were cited to demonstrate different ways that people responded in museum and the complexity of the museum experience.

General reflections

I made several reflections following open coding. One refection concerns how engagement could operate on a spectrum and two other reflections address concerns I had of either leading participants or of introducing topics artificially to the object encounter. Reflections relating to the fieldwork and analysis are listed below, while broader reflections on my research approach and methodology limitations and opportunities will be discussed in the final chapter.

As I was asking people questions, I had a mild concern they may attempt to answer how they assumed I would want them to answer. However, there was a refreshing amount of variety in responses. This was evident when two participants reflected on the three carved balls.[97] The father stated the balls were in a development of style from right to left, while his son stated the development was from left to right. Visitors make their own meaning when they encounter objects, rather than the object having an 'objective and measureable attribute' that every person can comprehend (Hampp and Schwan, 2014, p.365). This rich variety allowed for interesting analysis and contributed to the fieldwork derived exploration of engagement.

Another aspect of variety was noted regarding engagement. An interesting element of engagement was when people talked about museum related phenomena, but not as a response to an engagement question. Some interviewees remembered an overall exhibition, objects on display or the museum. While the interviewee didn't specifically define the interaction as engaging, it somehow engaged them as they held a strong memory of the object or exhibition or museum. Thus, engagement might operate on a spectrum, at one end a visitor is not engaged, and at the other end, a visitor is highly engaged. Not being engaged, a visitor would not stop at an object nor look at it. This requirement of stopping was noted by an interviewee who stated she was engaged with an object, 'rather than just walking by'.[98] Highly engaged would be the type of engagement described as 'transcendent or deeply meaningful experiences with a museum object' (Latham, 2013, p.6). And when people remember, laugh about, or

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[97] G29
[98] G27

have some sort of emotional reaction to objects or exhibitions they are somewhere between the two extremes on the spectrum.

I also held a concern over introducing topics to visitors that they would not have considered if they had not been asked by me. However, respondents answered no if they had not thought of something when asked. For example when asked 'Did you think about the people that might have made or used this?' a couple answered 'not really' and 'no, not instantly no'.[99] In another example, when asked if they thought about people, the answer was 'I didn't, but now that you say that, yeah, definitely'.[100] Therefore participants will note if a topic has been introduced into the conversation minimising concern over the interview questions artificially introducing concepts to visitors. In addition, unprompted responses from interviewees also confirmed the use of the questions composed to explore object encounters.

The interview questions that are based on object interactions started with a question, 'what do you think about this object?'. Several respondents launched into a conversation about the object that covered the intended use, people who had made it, people who had used it, comparisons to contemporary uses of the object, or comparisons to contemporary manufacture of the object. In addition, these unprompted responses pre-empted subsequent questions. The highest number of unprompted reflections in front of objects regarded use (18 respondents),[101] time (11 respondents),[102] and people (eight respondents).[103] There were several unprompted responses along the lines of what the object would feel like to touch (three respondents),[104] if they could pick up and use the object (two respondents),[105] or touch the object (one respondent).[106]

The prevalence of use, time, and people were elements in the questions developed through a phenomenological approach. This indicates that these factors *are* pondered

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[99] G3
[100] G24
[101] G5, G6, G9, G11, G12, G13, G15, G16, G17, G19, G20, G21, G22, G24, G25, G27, G28, G30
[102] G11, G12, G19, G20, G22, G23, G24, G25, G26, G27, G30
[103] G9, G16, G24, G25, G26, G27, G28, G30
[104] G10, G25, G29
[105] G19, G30
[106] G19

when visitors encounter an object and adds weight to my questions composed from a phenomenological stance as factors that do occur in real life object encounters. The prevalence of these themes unprompted by visitors demonstrates people do consider these facets of objects and that the interview questions used did not artificially create these categories as themes of object encounters. That phenomenology was validated as an approach to investigating immediate object encounters supports my research. The next section continues the application of phenomenology, in the form of using it to selectively code the interviews.

Analysis with phenomenological lens

Selective coding was undertaken with a phenomenological lens. Specifically, the phenomenological approaches outlined in Chapter Two were used, which asked how the object manifested to the visitor and by what means did the visitor have an embodied multisensory encounter. This was performed in order to address the research objective of whether object engagement can be understood from a phenomenological stance. Answers to specific questions taken in isolation may only indicate a reaction is happening due to the interview questions and may be self-referential. An approach with more research integrity is to determine aspects of object encounters through the analysis of what is occurring when a visitor is in front of an object. While answers to the specific questions are of interest, the interwoven and rich responses that underpin *all* of the visitor reflections during their object encounters could reveal characteristics of engagement. In addition to having integrity, as the results are general they may lend themselves to practical outcomes in different settings more readily than disconnected answers to a series of questions. Therefore selective coding with a phenomenological lens was applied to all responses and not only to answers in response to object interaction questions.

Below I discuss two main threads of analysis: how the object manifests, and embodiment. How these relate to engaging encounters is explored in the characteristics of engagement section later in this chapter. Each thread is detailed in how I arrived at the particular mode of coding through a review of theory as well as the presence, or absence, of the approach being used in museum studies literature as

a means to consider objects. Once the codes are described, I report the specifics of each code as identified in the interviews. The richness and depth identified in the interviews validates phenomenology as an effective means to capture facets of emotion, memory, imagination, and curiosity as well as multisensory responses to objects.

How an object manifests

While Heideggerian notions of *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* were used to compose questions as a means to consider how objects could manifest to museum visitors, in the field the approach proved challenging. One question had unexpected answers and two were not asked. As previously mentioned at the start of this chapter, two questions did not flow with the conversation. These did work in the test interview where a participant was questioned in front of an object they had stopped at, on their own. However when these questions were asked in front of an object the visitor had been brought to, they rang false.

Regarding 'Was it something you would pick up and use?', it was envisaged if participants answered yes it would be a *Zuhandenheit* interaction as the object would be considered handy and ready for use. Whereas if participants said no, the object would not be something considered handy and it would have a *Vorhandenheit* manifestation. A complexity that was not foreseen was that participants did not answer with an explicit yes or no. Some participants said yes or no, and others spoke of its fragile nature or state as a museum object or made contemporary comparisons to a recognisable object. In order to gauge the level of familiarity and usefulness of the object, 'Did it seem familiar to you?' was posed. It was envisaged if they answered yes it would be a *Zuhandenheit* interaction as the object would be considered familiar. Whereas if participants said no, the object would not be something considered familiar or handy and it would have a *Vorhandenheit* manifestation. The question 'Did you spend time examining the physical properties of the object or think immediately about its use?' aimed to arrive at how the visitor had considered the object, were they immediately considering the use of the object, or were they visually examining it. It was envisaged that an immediate consideration of use would indicate a *Zuhandenheit*

interaction. A *Vorhandenheit* interaction would be one that did not involve use and only involved the visitor staring at or visually examining the object.

As two questions were not posed, responses were not collected that could be analysed. Regarding the question that was asked, the responses were not as expected and did not avail themselves to be analysed for *Zuhandenheit* or *Vorhandenheit* states. Consequently there was not an explicit means to ascertain if objects were manifesting in *Zuhandenheit* or *Vorhandenheit* ways. Therefore it became necessary to nuance the concept of how an object could manifest and I explored more of Heidegger. Specifically one of his later works where he discusses the concept of a thing through considering a jug (Heidegger, 1971).

In the essay titled 'The Thing', Heidegger dissects when a thing is a thing, and when a thing is an object (Heidegger, 1971). Heidegger agues an object is an entity that represents itself – the object – only (Heidegger, 1971, p.165). While a thing is 'something self-sustained' (Heidegger, 1971, p.164) that is made in a 'process of setting, of setting forth' of production (Heidegger, 1971, p.165). The jug manifesting as a thing is related to the usability of the jug, the ability of it to be useful, and to evoke use and to respond to a human requirement (Heidegger, 1971, p.169). In response to his proposal, when do things appear as things, Heidegger reasons it is when one steps 'back from the thinking that merely represents', which results in things manifesting as objects (Heidegger, 1971, p.179). And when one instead embraces 'the thinking that responds and recalls', which results in things manifesting themselves as things that have use (Heidegger, 1971, p.179). Applying this to museum object interactions, an object could manifest as itself only, and be considered an object that is looked at but not reflected upon (a thing being an object). Conversely, an object could manifest a deeper reflection, a reaction beyond only appearance that evokes a reflection on how it was created or used, or how it has been set forth (a thing being a thing). Thus, object manifestations will be considered by the modes: an object representing itself only or an object evoking reflection. It is noted that while Heidegger uses terms thing and object, this thesis will continue to use the term object as a catchall naming term for material displayed in a museum.

Heideggerian thought on object manifestation from his essay 'The Thing' has not previously been reported in museum studies literature. There are some similarities to an object evoking reflection, or representing, in literature and these are described in Chapter Five where results are contextualised. This concept of something representing just itself, (manifesting as an object) or instead something that evokes reflection was applied to the interviews.

Thus, interviews were analysed to ascertain if these types of interactions were occurring. How did the displayed object manifest itself to the visitor, was it something that represents, did visitors glance and make passive comments about the object? Or was the object something that evokes deeper consideration and reflection, a more active interaction where visitors made connections beyond the visual appearance of the object as a museum display item? I describe examples where the object represents itself, where the object evokes reflection, and when both occur simultaneously. A breakdown of how the object manifested in the object encounters is in the table below.

Table 4.4 Summary of object manifesting codes in object encounters

Category	Object encounters	Total
Evokes reflection	G5, G7, G8, G9, G12, G14, G15, G16 both vessel and balls, G19, G20, G21, G22, G23, G24 both vessel and balls, G25 both vessel and balls, G26, G27, G28, G29	22
Represents	G3, G6, G10, G11	4
Represents and evokes reflection	G13, G18	2

Examples of the object representing in the case of the vessel were, when it was referred to as 'just a pot', 'just on show' and does not offer the opportunity to 'learn to know how they used it in that instance',[107] how it 'wouldn't really do anything for me',[108] and 'on its own, it's just a pot next to some other pots'.[109] One respondent spoke about how the vessel was not a conduit to the people that made and used it.[110]

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[107] G3
[108] G18
[109] G26
[110] G10

She argued 'a pot can tell you a lot about them but not that much. Like if I started to think about those, the people that would've used it, it's not like...I mean a pot can tell you a lot about them but like not, not that much, not enough that it would really be like, ah, illuminating. I mean some people disagree, I know. They're like, the things that they use define their life but I don't really think so'. Therefore this was coded as an object encounter where the object represented and did not evoke reflection as the object did not inspire any connections to the visitor's experience nor were there any imaginings of possible histories of the vessel.

An object representing itself also took the form of the object being limited to only being a museum object and the visitor not considering other facets of the object. For example when an interviewee was asked if he would pick up the carved balls, the answer was 'No. It's a display item'[111] and another was also opposed to the idea of touching the objects.[112] A participant would not consider touching the objects and even when offered a means to interact with the carved stone balls, answered he preferred to visually inspect, 'first have a look at it and then, I can see all details, there's no need to inspect them and have a feel of them'.[113] Similarly, reticence to interact with the object was noted when a participant was asked would he like to touch the carved stone balls. He replied 'No. No, I wouldn't like to. No, I wouldn't like to'.[114] Interview segments were coded as represent if the responses were not in depth or if it was evident that deeper consideration was not occurring. In one case, answers were so brief that reflection of the carved stone balls was not evident.[115]

It was found that when an object evokes reflection, it can inspire deeper responses and elicit thoughts about various topics. Below are details of evoked reflections that relate to social fabric (both past and present), appearance, time, and favouring of object. An interviewee was even inspired to re-create the process of carving a stone ball to understand the object more: '...I kind of want to, to make one and try it out and

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[111] G6
[112] G6
[113] G11
[114] G13
[115] G11

see what, what you would be able to do with it. Emm, and what you would want to do with it'.[116]

When an object evoked reflection, participants mentioned the social fabric of the object. For example, the 'utilitarian' nature of the vessel and how 'it's something I could see people using all the time'.[117] And another interviewee considered 'what people, you know the technology they had at that time, how they could make something like that'.[118] In an extension of the social fabric of the origin of the object, people also responded to the object through its contemporary state of doing work relevant to museum social fabric. For example, an interviewee stated the vessel connected 'two eras of time and two people groups that are so different',[119] and another participant pondered 'how people created it or using it would react to us, just staring at it, in front of glass, it'd be funny'.[120]

Another facet of evoking reflection were thoughts on object appearance. These ranged from how it relates to today, the vessel being 'very similar on scaled down size' to a mortar and pestle,[121] to how a visitor could impact the appearance, 'I think it would take quite a lot of moisture…drop something on it, would change colour'.[122] People were enthusiastic about touching the contours of the vessel, 'I like it, I like the form of it',[123] 'it's a very appealing shape so I would probably turn it around in my hands a bit and put my hands inside and think about somebody making it and forming it',[124] 'craftsman seemed to actually want to make something that was good to look at, as well as useful',[125] and 'it's the sort of shape you'd like to hold'.[126] The form of the carved stone balls was also commented upon, 'if those three balls were to bounce around for some reason, I think the first one on the right side from looking at it, would

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[116] G16
[117] G9
[118] G27
[119] G20
[120] G25
[121] G23
[122] G7
[123] G16
[124] G8
[125] G26
[126] G19

bounce much better. Because it has more contour'.[127] The vessel was considered 'beautiful'[128] and 'kind of plain'.[129] Remarks on the appearance of the carved balls included 'cold stone',[130] 'pretty' and 'somewhat inspiring'[131] and 'what is the significance of those markings?'.[132]

In encounters where participants experienced reflection, there were comments on time ranging from the past to the present and even included the future. There was also awe at being beside something so old, 'to think it survived intact…all these centuries',[133] 'it is in amazing condition!',[134] this 'object that has kind of lasted for years',[135] 'looks very old but extremely well formed',[136] 'it's still here after all these years…it's something that culminates',[137] and 'never really thought about that sort of era in Scotland'.[138] A reference to the present was '…I feel kind of, like, I wonder what people would use them for now if they were actually like being manufactured and for sale'.[139] And looking forwards in time, the carved balls had a 'futuristic shape'[140] while the vessel has an 'elegant' shape 'which could make you think of the future, what we might think up next'.[141]

The final aspect of evoking reflection that was identified in coding was a favouring of the object. Remarks included 'I think they're quite beautiful…they're amazing',[142] 'had I seen that in a charity shop, I'd have bought it…It would've drawn me there because I could've taken it away and touch it, feel it and buy it',[143] 'I think they're amazing! I really like them'.[144] Several participants preferred a specific carved ball, for example

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[127] G5
[128] G16
[129] G25
[130] G11
[131] G22
[132] G15
[133] G18
[134] G19
[135] G20
[136] G19
[137] G25
[138] G26
[139] G16
[140] G13
[141] G12
[142] G8
[143] G19
[144] G16

'this one I want to play with the most because it's knobbly',[145] 'I'm particularly interested in the one on the right with the symmetrical sort of bulges',[146] 'I'm attracted to this one and I do want to touch it!...I feel like it's flaunting itself almost (all laugh). Touch me! Touch my curves'[147] and 'my favourite is the left one!'.[148]

Reviewing the coding results, it is noticeable that an object can both represent but also evoke reflection from the visitor, as observed in interviews.[149] Many of the responses of a particular interviewee were coded as being cases where the object manifested in a represent manner.[150] The responses were brief, not in depth and it was not evident that deeper consideration of the object were elicited. The examples above demonstrate that an object evoking reflection provide rich answers by the visitor, which are the opposite of the brief answers visitors provided when the object represented – an exception was the reflection that the vessel was not illustrative of maker motivation.[151] When asked about time and the carved stone balls, a participant replied 'The right hand one I would say is a futuristic shape, but the other two, past I would say. Certainly the right hand, is the kind of the thing the Jedi, type thing'.[152] This was coded as evokes reflection as it was an imaginative reaction to the object and the object was viewed by more than a means of representing itself as carved stone ball. Segments of another interview were coded as represent as they were not in depth responses nor was it evident that deeper consideration was evoked, when asked about the use of the vessel the reply was 'I would say a pot. Aye, it wouldn't really do anything for me'.[153] When asked about people, there was more of a reaction to the object, and it was coded as evokes reflection, 'I would say, people have used it. And to think it survived intact...all these centuries...you know, I think its's amazing'.[154] It appears there is flux between two states of the object manifesting in a representing manner or evoking reflection.

[145] G12
[146] G24
[147] G28
[148] G29
[149] G13, G18
[150] G13
[151] G10
[152] G13
[153] G18
[154] G18

The presence of the two states in one interview could be due to coding. However, coded interview segments have been quoted to demonstrate transparency and allow for readers to asses coding themselves. Putting to one side possible miscoding, the dual state could indicate the potentials of objects to the visitor. An object can manifest in different and complementary ways simultaneously. This could answer a question posed in a previous chapter regarding slippage between different states of how the object could manifest to people. While the spectrum of represent/evokes reflection is not *Zuhandenheit*/*Vorhandenheit,* the findings indicate that represent/evokes reflection are not discrete binary states but that interchange between the two is possible.

This section is detailed in order to demonstrate the logic of relating the concept of object manifesting to the interviews. The detail has also been shared to illustrate how a phenomenological lens could be applied to data analysis of interviews. The next section goes into detail on the other phenomenological lens used in data analysis – embodiment.

Embodiment

As outlined in Chapter Two, embodiment in this research is considered as bodily movement either physically performed or mentally envisioned. In fieldwork, embodiment was identified by several rounds of review searching for different types of movement or descriptions of movement. The embodied responses of visitors are described in two segments: physically performed and mentally envisioned. The iterations of reviewing interviews relating to the broad theme of embodiment, reading embodiment related museum literature, and realising a means of articulating behaviours identified in visitors is reported in detail. This is in contrast to the selective coding of object manifestation as it was not previously applied in museum studies. Therefore, I wish to be transparent about my coding development and demonstrate how previous applications of embodiment informed my research, as this was not possible with object manifestation selective coding as there was an absence of its application in literature. Indeed, this demonstrates the supposition phenomenology is

a practice. I did not realise the potential of how embodiment could be applied in detail until I was carrying out the act of selective coding with a phenomenological lens.

Physically performed embodiment was coded through anything physical being noted, which included gestures of people as well as comments that related to their actions. For example the following would be coded as gesture: if the visitor moved around the cabinet or used their hands to indicate something while talking. The discussions and reflections visitors made were also coded for anything relating to action. This included when people spoke about navigating through museums, and was used as a category to separate the intimate and immediate physical motions of visitors when they were in front of an object, as compared to how people physically move, stop, and behave in a museum space. Physically performed codes were identified in ten object encounters.[155]

Regarding mentally envisioned embodiment, one aspect of this was identified in open coding. It is the characteristic of being positive about touching the object, even though the object is displayed away from touch, this characteristic is reported in general responses section. During selective coding, specifically searching for mentally envisioned embodiment related reflections, the concept of absent memories as related to the object arose. It also emerged that visitors imagined actions in the past that were related to the object. It was different to responses regarding touch as it was not relative to their own personal embodiment, but instead imagined bodies that might have previously interacted with the object. Visitors spoke about the people connected to the objects, as well as the previous uses of the object, and reflected on how the object was made. While these were being considered, more reading into embodiment, whether writings of Merleau-Ponty or applications of embodiment to museum research, revealed a possible avenue for coding.

Reflecting on time and an individual's relation to other people, Merleau-Ponty considers the cultural world and how objects are closely linked to their purpose (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.347). So much so, objects can become imbued with the past

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[155] G5, G8, G12, G16, G24 (both vessel and balls), G25 (both vessel and balls), G28, G29

users. He argues 'In the cultural object I feel the close presence of others beneath a veil of anonymity. Someone uses the pipe for smoking, the spoon for eating, the bell for summoning…' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.348). He further argues that when one encounters an object, more than an observation of the physical nature of the object can occur. When one is in front of an object it has a physical presence, and the object can also conjure up sensations that relate to phenomena that are not physically present, an 'elusive presence of a background of sensation that is as much absent as it is present, as much invisible as visible' (Steeves, 2001, p.377). Thus, there is a potential for objects to encourage people to imagine possible embodied pasts of the object.

The absent past embodied by an object has been discussed in museum studies literature. An analysis of visitors to Bristol City Museum found that an object can act as a 'living extension of human beings from different places and times' (Ting, 2012, p.180). It was also experienced by a researcher using a phenomenological approach to study a house museum and its archive. During an investigation of Charleston and Monk's House, residence of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, a researcher found herself immersed in a 'close physical contact' with Woolf through discovering Woolf's stored glasses in the collection (Hancock, 2010, p.116). The unwrapped remnants of Woolf 'invite us to consider *her* materiality: the physicality of her head; the surface of her skin; the bony integuments of her skull' (Hancock, 2010, p.116). The writer was evoked to such a degree that she can imagine the actions of the previous owner of the glasses, she senses 'Woolf's vision as corporeally "enfleshed"; as visual sensation, registered molecularly, through the live material fibres of the body' (Hancock, 2010, p.118). By reading about how different researchers applied embodiment, I found the means to consider it in the selective code.

The interviews were selectively coded for actions relating to imagined past experiences of the object: when visitors referred to absent phenomena such as processes that might have been involved in the manufacture of the object; or people that might have previously interacted with the object or the previous uses of the object. Note that there is some overlap with the object manifestation coding, but not all evoking reflection codes refer to imagined embodiment codes and vice versa. Listed

below are codes relating to object manufacture, object use, and the people that interacted with the object.

There were many reflections on how the objects were made, such as 'handmade',[156] 'they would have sat there and carved them',[157] and how the object made the visitor 'think about somebody making it and forming it'.[158] People went into more detail about how the object was made when encountering the vessel. Reflections included 'kind of incredible the symmetry of it just because it was made so long ago without spinning wheels',[159] 'I was looking at it thinking was it spun, then I'm looking at the pot, and once I realised how old it was, it was probably just made from coils and windings',[160] and '…it looks like it would've been handmade and probably coiled' bearing remnants of the maker with 'people's fingerprints and stuff in them as they're making them'.[161] One participant made a judgement from the aesthetic as to why the object was made, 'don't think it was made for an ornament, it was made to be something very useful'.[162] There was awe expressed at the fact that the objects were manufactured in the past, 'exceptionally well made for something that is that old',[163] and 'it's just amazing the things that can be made, things like that…'.[164] Several interviewees commented on the exertion required to create the balls, '…someone's gone to some artistic effort',[165] due to their 'round' nature would have been 'harder to make',[166] and 'I mean how much time would it take to carve in the stone'.[167]

Quotes from interviews that mentioned people varied. Some visitors referred to the makers' aesthetics, for example comparing the vessel form to today, a participant theorised 'perception of beauty is always the same'[168] while another speculated the

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[156] G7
[157] G8
[158] G9
[159] G20
[160] G23
[161] G16
[162] G19
[163] G26
[164] G13
[165] G24
[166] G5
[167] G28
[168] G25

'…craftsman seemed to actually want to make something that was good to look at, as well as useful'.[169] The purpose of the object was related to people, as 'something to help give life to the people using it'.[170] One visitor categorised the makers, 'I would think they were working people, yeah, worked with their hands, made things, but made things that they needed…'.[171] Ponderings on how the people that were related to the object lived was observed in two interviews. One participant was encouraged to 'think maybe what the living conditions were and what the community was like'.[172] While another pondered at length, 'I just love, would love to know, how they were actually, like what were they doing and what it was used for and what their lives were like…particularly, cause, I mean it says that it's from a crannog and I think why, why they lived on a crannog rather than on non-manufactured land?'.[173] Visitors also reflected on the motivation of the people that were connected to the objects, for example 'I'd like to know what's behind it, who used it and why they used it, where they used it and how efficient it was'.[174] And one interviewee pondered the motivation of the carving of stone balls as related to movement of people at that time '…you're not doing a whole lot of travel'.[175]

While several comments that related to people were in response to the specific question about people, participants also introduced the topic themselves. When answering what it would be like to touch the object, one response was 'it's a very appealing shape so I would probably turn it around in my hands a bit and put my hands inside and think about somebody making it and forming it. And then using it'.[176] Also in relation to the question of what the object would feel like was the comment 'it's not like totally smooth, it's been handmade, you know, it's not manufactured. Somebody's actually built it'.[177] And in response to what attracts her in a museum, an

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[169] G26
[170] G9
[171] G19
[172] G15
[173] G16
[174] G23
[175] G28
[176] G9
[177] G27

interviewee said 'I like something that talks about history of people and how people have lived' and 'objects that people used in everyday life'.[178]

Responses that related to use were either the function of the vessel or suggestions of use of the carved balls. Proposed vessel uses ranged from 'collecting water',[179] 'serving or storing',[180] 'something people would use every day to prepare food',[181] 'a practical item and it was made for holding whatever, grain, water, whatever, made for a purpose',[182] to one participant stating 'don't think it was made for an ornament, it was made to be something very useful'.[183] Proposed functions for the carved balls ranged from 'gifts, or some, some, object of prestige or standing in the hierarchy',[184] 'probably weapons',[185] 'ceremonial',[186] 'game',[187] petanque',[188] something to 'play with',[189] to 'an activity to get more skill'.[190] One respondent pondered '…they've got these patterns or designs on them. And is that for a reason? Or is that for what they were used for?'.[191]

Visitors mentioned the categories of make, people and use in different combinations, as detailed in the table below.

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[178] G8
[179] G3
[180] G7
[181] G9
[182] G12
[183] G19
[184] G6
[185] G13
[186] G8
[187] G11
[188] G21
[189] G29
[190] G16
[191] G15

Table 4.5 Summary of imagined embodiment codes in object encounters

Category	Interviews	Total
Make	G5	1
People	G10	1
Use	G3, G18, G22	3
Make, people	G25 stone balls, G29	2
Make, use	G7, G12	2
People, use	G14, G21	2
Make, people, use	G6, G8, G9, G11, G13, G15, G16 vessel, G16 stone balls, G19, G20, G23, G24 vessel, G24 stone balls, G25 vessel, G26, G27, G28	17

The lived experience of an object, who used the object, who made it, and how the object was used were evident in the interviews. These interactions were not immediately evident when interviews were first reviewed. It was only when a phenomenological approach to consideration of how visitors spoke of aspects related to embodiment that the above codes were discovered. Thus a phenomenological approach is a valuable mode to investigate encounters and how visitors experience the museum. As a means of data analysis, it offered originality as it was a vehicle to arrive at new insights about object encounters.

Characteristics of engagement

How do these findings relate to engagement? The first chapter outlined the complexity of engagement and how various researchers define in it different modes. My research aims to deliver a fieldwork derived characterisation of engagement with a phenomenological stance of centralising visitor experience. Therefore this section reviews themes found during data analysis of object encounters and compares them to whether the participant identified as being engaged or not. Findings from general responses as well as findings from an analysis with a phenomenological lens were compared with states of engagement. The concept of engagement as a spectrum, mentioned earlier in this chapter, is used as a framework to nuance how engaging object encounters could occur. The section after this reviews findings relevant to overall engagement, whether with exhibition, museum or site.

Once the responses to specific questions were collated, they were assessed in terms of the interviewee stating if they were engaged or not engaged with the object in front of them. No strong patterns emerged when reviewing the engaged/unengaged visitor responses to threads that questions that asked about visitor thoughts, use, time, people, object oriented philosophy, label, and object attraction. However, a clear pattern emerged between engaged/unengaged visitors and their responses to the question around touch and will be discussed. Therefore of all the threads identified from reviewing the general responses to the interview questions, only one delivered a high correlation to a state of engagement. However when comparing threads identified in the selective coding with a phenomenological lens there were correlations between engaged/unengaged visitors and how the object manifested, as well as embodied responses the object elicited. I now reflect in detail about being positive about touching the object, how the object manifests, and embodiment. I then outline characteristics found to be part of an engaging object encounter.

Positive about touch

Visitors were asked if they wanted to touch the object. As detailed in the section earlier in the chapter, 18 object encounters involved interviewees being positive about touch, while seven object encounters did not feature the interviewee being positive about touch (Table 4.2). These codes were aligned with whether the interviewee was engaged or not, and the results visualised in Figure 4.2.
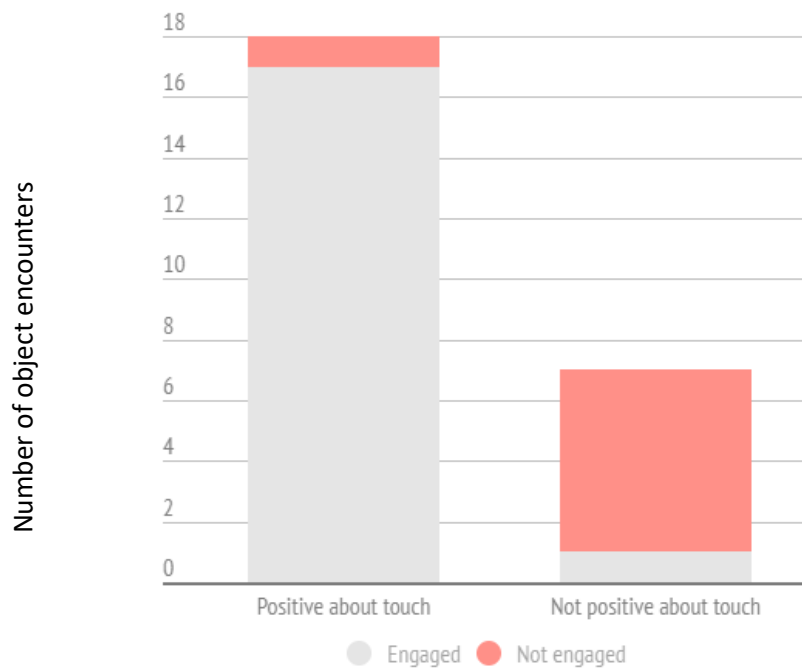
Figure 4.2 Comparison of object engagement to being positive about touch

The graph demonstrates there is a link between people being positive about touch and being engaged with the object. Of the 18 object encounters where interviewees were positive about touch, 17 answered they were engaged and one was not engaged.[192] Of the seven people that were not positive about touching the object, six were engaged and one was not engaged.[193] The two incidents where interviewees gave responses that were not similar to the majority of other participants will be examined in more detail.

An interviewee that encountered both the vessel and the carved stone balls was positive about touching both but was only engaged with the carved balls.[194] She stated that the vessel 'would feel, yeah, I think it would be really interesting, I'm using my hands again here, emm, to feel the weight of it in your hands'. When asked if she was engaged with the vessel, she answered 'Look I probably would walk past it fairly quickly and I would just glance at it, I would glance at everything in the case, emm, yeah. So I guess probably not engaged with the object'. However, the interviewee had

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[192] G24
[193] G20
[194] G24

already stated she was attracted to 'just whatever catches my eye, yeah. And I guess, things that are aesthetically pleasing, probably'. It appears the vessel was not engaging to her sense of aesthetics, while the stone balls were. She stated that context was not required for her regarding the carved stone balls as 'they're pretty to look at'. Therefore even though she was positive about touch, the vessel itself was not engaging to her. It could also be a case where the visitor appreciates the aesthetics of an object that has little meaning to them, in an effort to make the object encounter worthwhile or enjoyable (Ting, 2010, p.190).

One interviewee was engaged with the object, but was not positive about touch.[195] While this may negate the correlation of being positive about touch and being engaged, he argued he is 'apprehensive about touching things in museums because I'm all about, like, preservation'. Specifically, he stated 'I have this weird thing in museums, where like I don't like to touch things, even like interactive things, I have like an issue about it'. His absence of wanting to touch denotes his care for objects, and for him could even demonstrate his level of engagement.

These characteristics are an attempt to find common elements to engaging object encounters and there will be variety in the responses as people are different. It is hoped that by explaining the cases which do not fit with a neat correlation, the subjectivity and individuality of different people will be honoured. It is also hoped that the complexity of how people encounter objects will be communicated.

There is a correlation between being positive about touch and engagement and it will be deemed a characteristic of engagement. Being positive about touch indicates an engaging object encounter, and not being positive about touch indicates an object encounter that is not engaging.

How the object manifests

The object interactions that were coded for whether the object manifested as representing itself and/or eliciting reflection were collated with the state of visitor

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[195] G20

engagement. The different findings are compared in the graph below. It should be noted that coding was undertaken without considering which interviewees had stated if they were engaged or not. It was only subsequent to listing the results, where the alignment of the object representing itself only to not being engaged and the object evoking reflection to being engaged emerged with such high correlation.
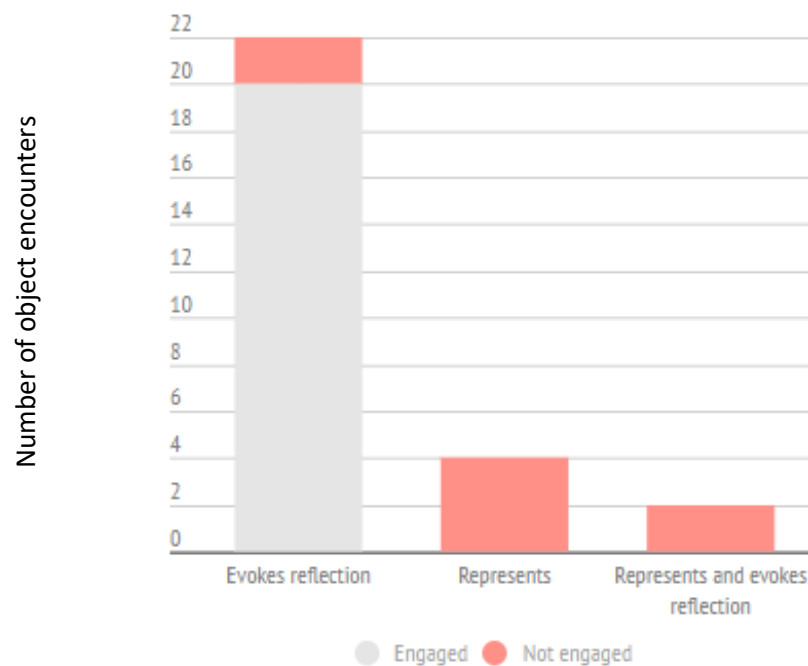
Figure 4.3 Comparison of object engagement to how object manifests

By viewing Figure 4.3 it is apparent there is a relationship between an object evoking reflection and visitors being engaged with the object. Of the 22 visitors who responded with reflective object comments 20 were engaged, with two exceptions.[196] The complexity of the unengaging encounter experienced with the vessel in interview G24 is discussed in the previous section. It may be while the encounter with the vessel elicited reflection, the vessel itself is not engaging to her. This highlights the variety of subjectivity when investigating engagement. Whereas other participants were not engaged with the object in isolation, but only as part of a display.[197] The two interviewees argued that the vessel 'on it's own, it's again not hugely interesting. But as part of a display, emm, it is interesting' and 'if it was part of a logical sequence, for

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[196] G24, G26
[197] G26

example, an actual, this is the life cycle of making the dyes, then I would be more engaged with it, as part of that life cycle. But on its own, it's just a pot next to some other pots'.[198] Therefore a characteristic of engagement is when an object manifests to a visitor in such a manner that it evokes reflection.

Visitors that experienced the object manifesting as representing itself were not engaged. All six participants where the object represented itself were not engaged. Perhaps the passive mode of object interactions, either with short answers that were not in depth, or not reflective, demonstrate a visitor is not engaged. Therefore when an object manifests in a way that represents the object only, it is a characteristic of not being engaged.

The finding that objects can manifest simultaneously as both representing itself and evoking reflection, suggests that engagement may indeed operate on a spectrum.

Embodiment

Embodiment was selectively coded and it was identified that people physically performed embodied responses, and mentally visualised embodiments relating to imagined embodied pasts of the object. This section compares the findings to whether or not the visitors were engaged.

Are visitors that physically performed embodied responses to objects engaged? The object encounters where visitors walked around the cabinet, pointed at the object on display, or in other ways physically gestured during the interview were compared with whether the participants reported being engaged or not. The results are graphed in Figure 4.4. While a high amount of engaged visitors physically performed (nine), a higher amount of engaged visitors did *not* physically perform (11). Unengaged visitors both physically performed (one) and did not physically perform (seven). Visitors physically performed both when engaged and not engaged with the object, although the majority of unengaged encounters involved no physical performances. It was not

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[198] G26

deemed a characteristic of engagement as there was no clear correlation as observed with other modes of object encounters.
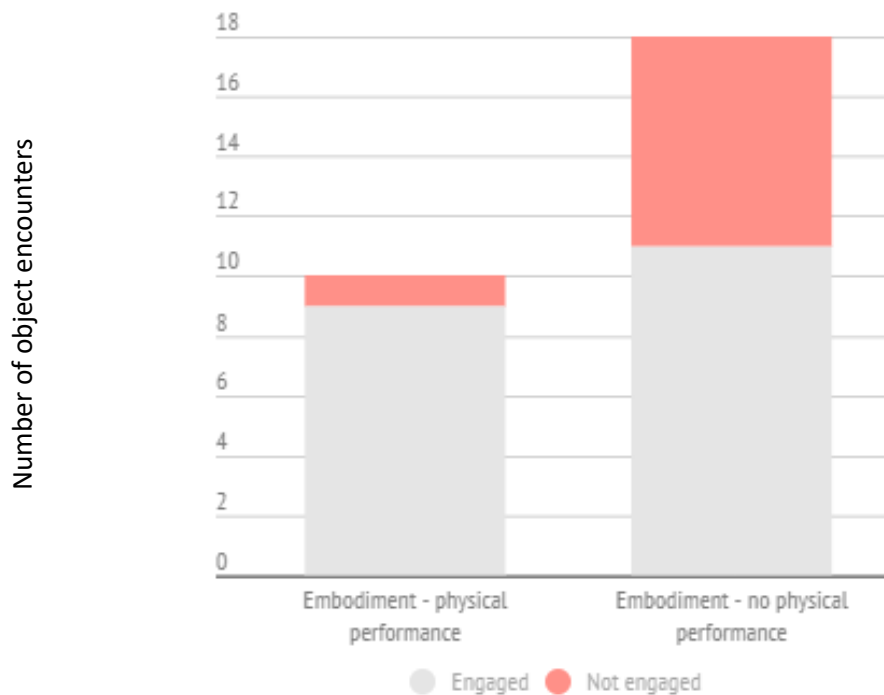
Figure 4.4 Comparison of object engagement and physical performance

Physical performance may be an element of how people generally behave when encountering objects, whether they are engaged or not with the object. Alternatively, the museum environment itself may be influencing how people move. In a study on how people understand objects, gesture was used less by people when they were interacting with the object in a display case as compared to when they were interacting with objects through other media (Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco, et al., 2016, p.185). This was explained by the possibility that the display case formed a psychological barrier (Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco, et al., 2016, p.185). This may explain why not every participant in my research physically moved as some people may have overcome the barrier more so than others. The bodily movement of visitors is outside the scope of this thesis. It is recognised that how people move in a gallery can even depend on the layout. An exhibition with artworks densely hung in a manner

reminiscent of nineteenth century curation, forced visitors to stand in one spot and look around rather than the typical walking through a gallery past each artwork (Leahy, 2014, p.286). However, these global movements will not be examined as they are complex and the result of many interconnected factors. How visitors use and react to space in the museum is influenced by their preferences and behaviour and can at times be in opposition to 'institutional practice and architectural design' (Leahy, 2005, p.115). However, the minutiae of the object encounter, which are related to engagement, will be the focus of my research.

Interviews were coded for mentally envisioned and not physically performed modes of embodied responses. The three main categories that emerged were references to objects being made, the people that interacted with the objects, and the various uses of an object. These categories were compared with whether the visitors identified their object encounter as engaging or not. The results are set out in the graph below, the categories have been shortened to make, people, and use for ease of visualisation.
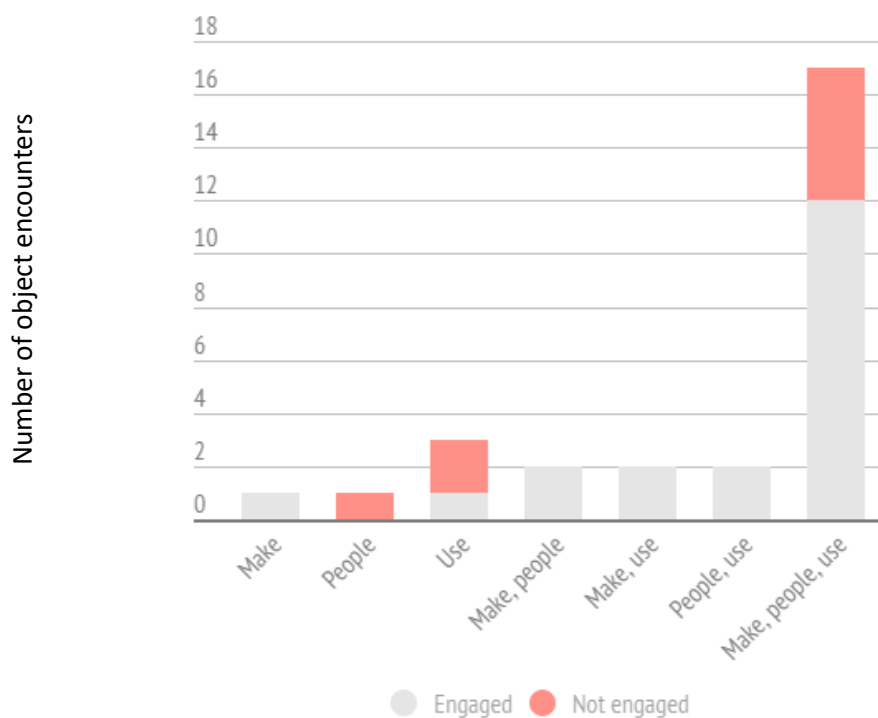

Figure 4.5 Comparison of object engagement to imagined embodiments

As can be observed in Figure 4.5, all three categories of make, people, and use were mentioned by 17 participants. The different categories were mentioned in isolation, make (once), people (once) and use (three times). Combinations of the different categories were also mentioned, make and people (twice), make and use (twice) as well as people and use (twice). Engaged object encounters featured interviewees mentioning make by itself (once), use by itself (once), make and people (twice), make and use (twice), people and use (twice) and make, people and use (12 times). Unengaging object encounters featured interviewees mentioning people by itself (once), use by itself (twice) and make, people, and use (five times).

Just over two thirds of interviews that mentioned all three categories of imagined embodiment – make, people, use – were engaged. However under one third of the interviews that mentioned all three categories were unengaged. It is of interest that the four of the five unengaging object encounters were not positive about touch.[199] As pointed out in the section that compares how the object manifests and engagement, all unengaged object encounters contained examples of the object manifesting in a manner where it represents itself and does not evoke reflection. And so it is, that in all the unengaging encounters where all three imagined embodiments were mentioned, the object also manifested in a mode where it represents itself. That a visitor can encounter an object in simultaneous modes again demonstrates how complex engagement is. These results have been included to problematize the concept of engagement and to illustrate the depth of reflection on how different factors combine and complement in the process of engaging encounters.

Thus, while it was common for engaged people to refer to the imagined embodiment, it was also observed in unengaging object encounters. In addition the total of engaged visitors that mentioned only one or two categories is eight, which is very close to the amount of visitors, 12, that described all three categories. Therefore this is not as definitive a characteristic of engagement as being positive about touch or the object manifesting in a manner that evokes reflection.

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[199] G6, G11, G13, G26 (G24 vessel was positive about touch)

131

Imagined embodiment are still included as being a characteristic of engagement as there is some correlation between their prevalence and visitors having engaging object encounters. As mentioned previously, these characteristics are not discrete binary states but more akin to a spectrum, and have complexity and fluidity. Therefore imagined human activity is a tentative characteristic of engagement, in particular responses that relate to all three categories of people connected with the object, manufacture of the object, and uses of the object.

Characteristics of an engaging object encounter

Fieldwork derived material was used to create a concept of engagement. There is some fluidity around the characteristics of engagement. The presence of a characteristic does not always indicate engagement, and the absence of a characteristic does not always indicate a lack of engagement. However, there is a high correlation observed between the presence of the characteristics and engagement, therefore they may operate on a spectrum and not as discrete binary states.

Engaged visitors desire to touch the object, imagine possible embodiments of the object, and experience reflections. Visitors that are not engaged do not want to touch the object, do not imagine embodiments of the object and regarding how the object manifests, the object does not evoke reflection but represents the object itself to the visitors. A combined spectrum of engagement that lists the different characteristics of an engaging, or not engaging, object encounter is illustrated below.

Object represents   Object evokes reflection
Imagination not elicited   Imagination elicited
Not positive about touch   Positive about touch
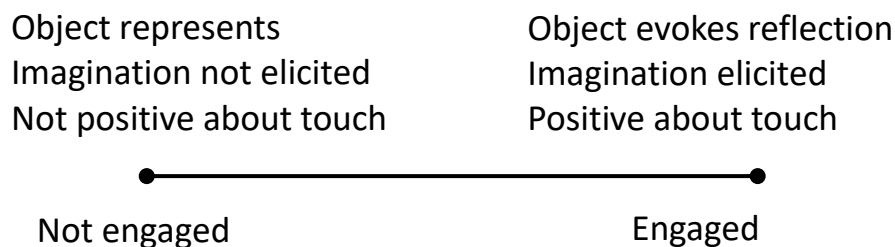
Not engaged   Engaged

Figure 4.6 Spectrum of engaging object encounter

Visitors tended to feel engaged if the object did more than represent itself and were positive about touch. An interesting finding is the engagement that visitors felt which

related to the imagined embodied past of the object – the people that had used, made, and interacted with the object. The connection to historical episodes through considering past people in engaging museum encounters was suggested by an Australian curatorial team. They argued that objects 'invite us to observe and understand the material conditions of existence in particular times and places and further to imagine the meanings, sensibilities and experiences produced as people engage with those material conditions' (Wehner and Sear, 2010, p.153). These findings will be further contextualised in the next chapter.

Engaging and unengaging experiences

The previous section analysed object encounters for characteristics of engagement. This section analyses what respondents provided when asked to give previous examples of engaging or unengaging experiences. I describe examples of engaging experiences and unengaging experiences and then compare these with each other, as well as with characteristics of object encounters.

There was a range of responses to questions about examples of engaging experiences. Some related to a specific object, an exhibition, or a whole museum. This variety was also observed when museum visitors were asked about what memories they had after visiting a particular gallery in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (McManus, 1993). Participants in my research spoke about sites or buildings, for example a re-created village (Beamish) or Ellis Island or Sagrada Familia. This confirms the notion that being physically present on a site engages visitors on a sensory and emotional level (Bagnall, 2003, p.93). Other responses were not specific and related to display method or categories of material (for example paintings or modern art). The subjectivity of engagement was apparent with two specific sites, the National Portrait Gallery, London and the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow. Both these sites were given as examples of engaging and unengaging experiences by different people.[200]

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[200] National Portrait Gallery, London was provided as an example of being engaged by G11 and not being engaged by G14, while the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow was provided as an example of being engaged by G20 and not being engaged by G19

Different types of museums engaged people for different reasons. Respondents gave answers that related to types of museums, specific exhibitions, specific objects, or specific museums. The variety of what museums engaged people was vast, not one museum was repeated by other participants. However most of these visitors with their varying interests had engaging object encounters in the interviews undertaken as part of the fieldwork. Therefore even if expectation and personal experience and preference is taken into account, it is still possible to facilitate an engaging experience with a variety of experience and preference in the visiting public.

The interviews were analysed for the nuances of engagement. One interviewee commented it is hard to define and subjective as 'it means different things for different people'[201] which eluded to the variety of responses recorded. Some respondents only named sites and did not expand further on why a place was engaging.[202] Other respondents generally referred to the architecture[203] or specifically spoke of the process of construction,[204] the grandeur of the whole site at Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania,[205] or interacting with a building by whispering into walls at the National Gallery, London.[206] Several responses alluded to display methods, either general,[207] audio interpretation,[208] interactive techniques,[209] how an artist oeuvre and process was communicated,[210] how a re-creation can create a transportive experience, and how displays can minimise the barrier between objects and people.[211] One interviewee mentioned being able to approach and be near objects,[212] this is of interest as the participant identified as being in a wheelchair and spoke about the opportunity to get close to the airplanes at National Imperial War Museum, Cambridgeshire as engaging and evocative. Content featured in many examples, in a

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[201] G24
[202] G2, G6, G12, G23
[203] G24, G29
[204] G27
[205] G8
[206] G28
[207] G24
[208] G1
[209] G10, G20, G21
[210] G25
[211] G9
[212] G26

general way,[213] or mentioned as material that facilitated engagement as it reflected the personal interest of the participant.[214] From these responses, it appears engagement can be due to a combination of content, display method, and the museum building itself.

Regarding unengaging experiences there was a variety of answers to what was not engaging and specific museums were not mentioned at the same degree as observed with engaging examples. Perhaps this is because the experiences have to be extreme in order for the visitors to remember them. One interviewee reflected that unengaging experiences are 'less memorable'.[215] Some responses reveal what people expect of museums. One visitor expected many paintings to be displayed at the Kelvingrove, and was disappointed and not engaged when she did not see as many as she predicted.[216] Another visited a Grand Design exhibition, which they felt was too commercial.[217] It is probable that it was a trade show, although branded as an exhibition, and did not deliver what the visitors expected of a typical exhibition.

The interviews were also analysed for the nuances of what makes an experience not engaging. The answers fell into three main categories, content, display method, and how people approached content. When considering content, people did not appreciate a lot of art,[218] modern art,[219] portraits,[220] old paintings,[221] a multiple of similar objects,[222] or taxidermy.[223] Participants noted display method, for example if the display looks old and dated,[224] if there is not enough on display,[225] if there is too

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213 G3, G5, G15, G17, G24
214 G1, G5, G7, G8, G13, G19, G21, G22, G25, G26, G29, G30
215 G24
216 G21
217 G30
218 G27
219 G1, G3, G5, G6, G7, G11, G18, G19
220 G14
221 G29
222 G7, G26
223 G9, G23
224 G24, G29
225 G11, G16

much on display,[226] and one participant commented that the bright colours of walls distracted his experience of the art works.[227]

Once I collated the engaging and unengaging experiences, I compared them to each other, and also to characteristics of object encounters. Examples of engaging and unengaging experiences provided by people that were engaged with objects were reviewed, and no patterns emerged. Similarly, examples of engaging and unengaging experiences given by visitors who were not engaged were reviewed. No patterns emerged. Responses were also analysed for any correlation between theme, context of engaging examples, type of object attraction, label behaviour, and museum expectation. No strong patterns emerged from these comparisons either. However when comparing the responses to engaging and unengaging examples, patterns did emerge. Three major differences were: display method, content, and how visitors approach content.

People were engaged when the display method brought them closer to the material on display, for example visitors mentioned interactives, no barriers between object and people, building interpretation and re-creations. Conversely, display methods that were mentioned when people were not engaged were things that hindered movement in the museum or having an unobstructed encounter with an object. For example display methods that are too transparent to the visitor and made it difficult for the visitor to find and interact with the object were: bright colours of walls distracted from art works, in reference to National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh,[228] dated display,[229] empty rooms and not enough on display, in reference to art galleries,[230] or too much on display.[231] Another display method that impacts on engagement is an easily navigable museum, for example the Burrell Collection was half closed for renovation and had no direct route through it[232] or the Dali painting being difficult to find in

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[226] G12, G18, G24
[227] G20
[228] G20
[229] G24, G29
[230] G11, G16
[231] G18, G24
[232] G23

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.[233] A final element that made a museum not engaging was the absence of interpretation or narrative that allowed visitors to differentiate between objects, whether pots[234] or taxidermy.[235] Some means of interpretation may be required for certain visitors in order for them to be guided through the museum experience. Therefore in very general terms, people feel connected to objects when they are engaged, and when they are not engaged there are barriers to being connected to objects.

A second difference between engaged and unengaged experiences was content. Specifically, people were engaged when their favoured material was on display and people were unengaged when material they did not like was on display, for example taxidermy[236] or old paintings.[237] Indeed one interviewee spoke of how she was having an unengaging experience as she was seeing things she was did not like until a favoured object appeared in the gallery. She reflected, 'I was walking around the art gallery in Edinburgh and I was thinking, oh dear, they're all very religious paintings, very big, dark, heavy, religious painting which don't do anything for me. And then I walked into the next room and just by the side of the door, about that big, Rembrandt's self-portrait, and I just thought "well, that's worth the visit", yeah'.[238] Thus content is relevant to experience, as indicated by many respondents stating that objects of personal preference attracted them in museums.

How visitors approach content could be another way of considering hindrances to object encounters. Two examples, one of being engaged and the other of not being engaged, were identified from interviewees that were at a museum as part of their university courses. These respondents had expressed their reason to visit the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum as either a break from studies[239] or for inspiration.[240] Therefore both have chosen the museum independent of course

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[233] G25
[234] G26
[235] G28
[236] G9, G23
[237] G29
[238] G19
[239] G10
[240] G16

requirements, as both examples below are when their visit to a museum was a compulsory part of their studies.

An engaging experience was given regarding a visit to the Enlightenment Gallery at the British Museum.[241] The interviewee stated it 'didn't really feel much like learning, it felt more like you were playing'. The lecturer informed the students that "there's a mermaid in here, so go find it". She recalled 'And it's just, that exhibit is kind of, very much like, like Pandora's Box, because you go from thing to the next and you're like "what the heck is this?!". And then you go on to the next one. And you never quite know what you're looking at, and you never really know. And then I think it's kind of fun because you get to explore more, and you find things, and you're like "ahh, I found it!" and you've no idea what it is but it doesn't make any difference because you've found something. Yeah. It's very much a discovery visit.' She enjoyed the exercise as it was one of play and discovery. While another participant was not engaged with a university based classes at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.[242] She said,'…they'll tell you to go to one exhibit in particular… and that's never very fun because then, emm, I don't know I don't like going into a museum and looking at one thing that somebody else chose and then leaving. It's boring and you're too focused on assignments. Any time I'm like required to go to the museum I guess, it's not that interesting'. The motivation for visiting the museum was not one for pleasure and not of her own control and interfered with how she would rather encounter the objects.

When visitors spoke about engaging and unengaging museum experiences, four factors are repeatedly mentioned. The first three were mentioned in unengaging museum experiences while all four arose in discussions of engaging museum experiences. There were:

- Content
- Display method
- How visitor approaches museum
- Museum building

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[241] G16
[242] G10

The responses to the questions about past engaging experiences did not provide as much detail as the characteristics of engagement, and are more general in nature. Perhaps with additional questions about a shared museum site, the concept would have been more thoroughly explored. Nonetheless, several general facets of an overall engaging experience at a museum were identified from interview analysis. Therefore display method, content, and how visitors approach content can influence if visitors are engaged or not.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of the findings of interviews and the coding choices are explained in a transparent manner. Findings ranged from answers to specific questions to a more general analysis of how a museum experience can be understood from a phenomenological stance. This has been articulated through analysis of how an object can manifest to a visitor as well as what embodied responses occur when a person interacts with an object. An engaging museum experience has been characterised from fieldwork-derived descriptions of the exhibition experience. This has been demonstrated through characteristics of engagement being described and an analysis of engaging and unengaging experiences that visitors provided.

Chapter Five: Characteristics of engaging object visitor encounters

> When I see something like that I usually do, create in my mind some visuals, of people, ancient people, because it's an ancient looking object, ancient people and how they might have used it. In their daily lives. [243]

Overview

Building on the previous one, this chapter contextualises my fieldwork findings by assessing the aspects of engagement which were discovered. The characteristics of engagement from an object encounter will be compared to discussions of object encounters in the literature. Also reviewed relevant to literature are the descriptions visitors provided of their engaging experiences with more than objects – whether an exhibition, museum, or site. As per the grounded theory evaluation criteria described in Chapter Three (Charmaz, 2006, pp.182-183), the comparison of the findings from this project to other literature demonstrate insights that my research provides regarding engaging object encounters.

Characteristics of engagement

The following sections contextualise the three characteristics of engaging object encounters that my research has identified. These are how the object manifests, being positive about touch, and imagined embodied pasts in relation to how the object was made, people that interacted with the object, and how the object was used. Examples of engaging and unengaging experiences were analysed in my research and as a reminder it was found that generally engaging experiences are ones where visitors favour the content, the display method minimises barriers to the material on display, the museum building is easy to navigate or impressive, and the ways through which the visitor approaches the museum visit are preferable to the visitor. It is noted that literature rarely refers to visitors not being engaged, thus there is an absence of

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[243] G9

comparisons to unengaging experiences. Therefore not being positive about touch is not discussed below. Similarly, imagined embodiments *not* being elicited in object encounters are not discussed. The only characteristic found in unengaging object encounters that is evident in literature is the concept of an object representing itself and not evoking reflection, and this is reported in the object manifestation section. The characteristics of engagement under discussion are summarised in separate sections for ease of reading. This does not imply, however, that the characteristics occur in isolation; indeed some examples of object encounters in the literature span different characteristics, but for clarity of reporting they are summarised in separate sections. In addition to contextualising examples from literature, the ways in which the characteristics of an engaging encounter have, or could be, articulated in the exhibition environment are also noted.

How the object manifests

When a visitor is in front of an object, how does that object manifest to the visitor? My research identified two different states of object manifestation: represent and evokes reflection. This finding has not previously been articulated in museum visitor studies. That said, there are examples of engagement in literature that could be considered as the object evoking reflection. These are described below and fall into two main categories – either abstract reflections on museums or visitor studies carried out in museums.

The first example of the abstract reflection is Ingold's reflective work on weaving a basket, where he encourages a re-consideration of artefacts and a recognition of the act of making of artefacts (Ingold, 2000). He argues, 'the more that objects are removed from the contexts of life activity in which they are produced and used – the more they appear as static objects of disinterested contemplation (as in museums and galleries) – the more, too, the process disappears or is hidden behind the product, the finished object. Thus we are inclined to look for the meaning of the object in the idea it expresses rather than in the current of activity to which it properly and originally belongs' (Ingold, 2000, p.346). His reflections on artefacts within the museum context relate to how my interviewees considered the objects. The 'disinterested

contemplation' of 'static objects' can be applied to the responses in which visitors considered that the object manifests in a way that represents the object only. For example, several interviewees did not demonstrate in depth nor deeper consideration of the carved balls. While other participants did not consider the vessel as something that was fashioned with human hands, or used by people in their day to day life. The process of the vessel was not experienced by these visitors, only the finished product, which in their words was 'just a pot'.[244] However, when the object evoked reflection, the visitors connected with the currents of activity of the object which included reflections on social fabric, appearance, time, and favouring of the object.

A second example of abstract reflection is Greenblatt's argument on the concept of resonance. It is the capacity for an object to 'reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand' (Greenblatt, 1991, p.42). The formal boundaries of the object could be considered when an object represents itself, it is viewed as a thing only, precluding any emotional, imaginative, or multisensory potentials. And the ability of the object to expose the forces it emerged from aligns with the theme of an object evoking reflection.

A third example is the dream space that Kavanagh proposes, where 'visitors make personal associations and objects can trigger an infinity of different thoughts to come to the visitor' (Kavanagh, 2000, p.3). Examples of the object evoking included participants making connections between the object and their own experiences as well as musing about the object. Therefore the concept of object manifestation that emerged from my research has some similarity to abstract reflections on museum objects.

The concept of an object engaging visitors in a similar mode to the theme of evoking reflection was also found in five studies of museum visitors. Identified in research on transformational experiences and museums, was the finding that a student encountered a space shuttle time capsule and felt the vastness of space, time, and

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[244] G23, G26

people (Soren, 2009, p.237). This could be also viewed as the object manifesting in such a way that it evokes reflection in the form of the magnitude of the universe and human history. Similarly, the deep connection or numinous experience identified in museum visitors (Latham, 2013) could be thought of as the object evoking reflection. A study, described in Chapter One, found museum visitors can have a range of experiences, from object (responding to the object itself), cognitive (learning from encounter), introspective (reflecting and extending meaning from encounter), to social (interacting with other visitors) (Pekarik, Doering and Karns, 1999, pp.155-156). Object, cognitive, and introspective could also be considered as experiences when the objects evoked reflection in visitors. Evoking reflection can be considered an element of the verbal responses identified by Fienberg and Leinhardt in their research into conversation and learning (Fienberg and Leinhardt, 2002). While analysing visitor conversations, they used the following predetermined categories: listing (describing appearance of objects), analysis (reflecting on 'underlying features' or 'abstract concept'), synthesis (use of experiences and knowledge to construct concepts), or explanation (assist oneself or others to understand an object or idea) (Fienberg and Leinhardt, 2002, p.170). Listing aligns with the concept of an object representing itself while analysis, synthesis, and explanation align with an object eliciting reflection. It is of interest that my research identified broader themes of how visitors interact with objects. There are differences in research approaches, as I interviewed visitors and did not focus on learning. However, my open approach of grounded theory allowed unexpected themes to emerge from interviews, rather than using predetermined categories as an approach to data analysis. And finally, a study that is detailed in Chapter One describes a researcher with a focus on visitors interacting with exhibition design (Roppola, 2012). One of the categories she identified, and terms broadening, relates to an object evoking reflection. This is when a visitor has a personal, transformative, and reflective experience (Roppola, 2012, p.74). Thus the concept of an object evoking reflection has some similarity to findings of research on museum visitor experiences, although no previous researcher has applied Heidegger's argument of 'The Thing' to consider object manifestation.

What means can be used where an object manifests in such a way to a visitor that it evokes reflection? What display practice enhances an object, so that it is not only representing itself as an object but instead engages visitors? The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York featured clothes and furniture in the exhibition 'Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century' (Katzberg, 2012). Posed mannequins, staging, lighting, and props demonstrated themes of rivalry between the sexes and showed how French design had a role in seduction (Katzberg, 2012, p.131). The themes of the exhibition were communicated in eleven different *tableaux vivants* that articulated a narrative of eighteenth century social practices (Katzberg, 2012, p.131). The means of bringing alive the exhibition themes as well as portraying the objects in modes of their use is significant. The clothes and furniture did not manifest as objects that represented only themselves, but encouraged reflection as the objects were described as being a 'spectacular display' (Katzberg, 2012, p.131). In order to achieve this type of response, curators could create posed montages or re-creations of how material was used or worn. Display materials can complement and challenge the displayed object to go beyond an object representing itself but instead to evokes reflection from the visitor. This was differently explored at the Medical Museion, Copenhagen through use of plaster in an appearance of soft, malleable supportive folds that formed a bed upon which a heart specimen lay (Pilegaard, 2015, p.77). This was achieved with the aim of eliciting the weight of the glass specimen case as well as the folds, summoning notions of fat layers surrounding the heart, the exterior material echoing interior features of the object (Pilegaard, 2015, p.77). Differently again, and through a number of different exhibitions, the Royal Danish Library investigated means of book display with a focus on 'bodily and spatial aspects' experiences by visitors (Hale and Back, 2018, p.341). One avenue of 'transporting' the visitor from the museum space into the space the book explored, was made through display of books beside other objects, including a stuffed polar bear and portrait busts (Hale and Back, 2018, p.341). Therefore material that is used to display objects can be employed to evoke reflection from visitors.

Positive about touching the object

A range of literature has addressed object engagement in museums in terms that are positive about touch. Yilmaz, et al., assessing student learning experiences in Turkish museums, found that student prefer sites which offer opportunities to touch material over other museums (Yilmaz, Filizb and Yilmaza, 2013, p.988). Another study, involving students at the Museum of Design in Plastics, England, identified participants felt engaged after touching objects (Hardie, 2016, p.40). Willcocks argues that Central Saint Martins students who were allowed to touch textiles were enabled to "realise the potential of the material" and that touch made an aesthetic not normally favoured "more interesting" (Willcocks, 2016, p.60). The desire for and popularity of touch is also seen in the traces left on museum objects, as Wingfield describes for a large Buddha statue in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery: it is so popular with visitors, many people touch it – as evidenced by worn down and shiny areas on the statue (Wingfield, 2010, p.57). The ability to touch museum objects facilitates a connection between a visitor and the experiences of the people that relate to the object (Wood and Latham, 2011, p.52). In addition to being able to experience objects in a tangible and intimate manner and access a way to connect with the previous owner, touch also allows a person to verify what their initial visual inspections suggested (see Classen, 2012, p.141; Saunderson, 2012, p.160). Touching material can also bring the visitor closer to the mystical and religious elements of the object (see Classen, 2012, p.142; Geisbusch, 2012). Touching and handling objects contributes to learning, enjoyment, positive changes in health (Chatterjee, 2008), and the evocation of memories (Pye, 2007, p.19). Touching ethnographic objects plays a role in maintaining and sharing cultural identity (for example see Gadoua, 2014). I recognise too but do not explore taboo around touch and the valuing of one sense over others in western society and in the general museum (see Candlin, 2008; Classen, 2012; Edwards, Gosden and Phillips, 2006; Howes, 2005; Howes and Classen, 2014). Thus touching objects and engagement are interlinked and are found in literature. This confirms the finding of being positive about touching the object as a characteristic of engagement.

How can touch be facilitated in a museum setting, a space where touch it is typically prohibited? One exhibition team overcame this with multisensory stations adjacent to

displays. A National Museum of Australia exhibition featured an embroidered map where visitors could feel the stitching and an engraved convict love token that could be touched (Wehner and Sear, 2010, p.159). Tactile suggestions towards material on display was also used by an exhibition team at the Royal Danish Library, Copenhagen, who employed phenomenology to create a multisensory exhibition that aimed to minimise text and instead use other means of interpretation (Gunderson and Back, 2018). The central point of the exhibition was an image of a landscape that was once the site of a violent Danish-Prussian battle, the image being supported by projection, light, sound, and objects that visitors were invited to touch (Gunderson and Back, 2018, p.306). The objects were cannonballs and selected to highlight what was absent in the image, once a scene of a bloody conflict where now only grass and trees are observable (Gunderson and Back, 2018, p.306). Visitors could sit on a bench with artificial grass in an effort to conjure up the tactility of the field in the image (Gunderson and Back, 2018, p.306). The participants felt immersed, present, and were attentive to the experience (Gunderson and Back, 2018, p.309). A participant spoke of how touching the artificial glass linked them to the natural aspects of the landscape (Gunderson and Back, 2018, p.310). Another method to circumvent the museum limitations of no bodily contact, is to imagine what touching the object would be like. For example, during an engaging object encounter, Dudley was aware she could not touch the object and instead conjured up how the object would respond to touch, what it would feel like, how it would sound if tapped, and how heavy it would be if she picked it up (Dudley, 2012, p.1). Imagination could be encouraged by asking visitors questions about the materiality of the object through interpretation, or guides present in the museum (Wood and Latham, 2011, p.61). In summary, in exhibitions, touch can be offered to visitors either through tangibly interacting with the object itself, objects that are similar to displayed material, or objects that can somehow evoke displayed material. Means to conjure thoughts of touch in visitors that do not depend on physical interaction include interpretation, either written, or delivered by a guide.

Imagined embodiments

This section explores the theme of imagined embodiments of the object – my research identified visitors who reflected on the process of people making the object, people

related to the object, and uses of the object. The presence of similar findings in literature and possible means of facilitating these responses in exhibitions, are discussed below.

Imagined embodiments – make

My research identified that engaged visitors considered aspects of how objects are made. Objects as a link to their makers has been observed in museum studies literature, but not necessarily from visitor reflections but rather from researcher reflections. In her study on how interpretation can influence the response of visitors to Chinese ceramics, for example, Ting argues that 'an object embodies the sensations, feelings and personal experiences of those who created, used or valued it' (Ting, 2010, p.189). Ting goes into great detail about the imagined makers she can envisage when considering a Chinese vase, the different workers that were involved with throwing, trimming, polishing, firing, and painting the object (Ting, 2012, pp.178-179). She argues for the 'living extension of human beings from different places and times' when reflecting on the vase. Although Ting mentions the past users and makers of the objects, which resonates with my identified characteristics of engagement, they are from her own reflections and not those of the visitors she interviewed. Museums objects have also been argued to allow visitors a conduit to 'how something was made, the beliefs it represents, and why it has been considered rare or beautiful, baffling or monstrous' and that these 'intangible aspects of an object's life are often among its most engaging traits' (Fraser and Coulson, 2012, p.224). Like Ting, however, Fraser and Coulson do not provide visitor reflections on how objects were made. Making is referred to in a study but not as part of visitor responses. Taragan, an Islamic art and architecture specialist describing a candlestick in al-Aqsa Museum, Jerusalem, related the appearance of the object to how it was made through the candlestick inscriptions revealing the history of its creation (Taragan, 2012). Therefore while studies mention manufacture, it is in a descriptive manner not a visitor articulated reflection, as with my research.

What is available to curators to suggest to visitors the process of making of the object on display? A design practitioner notes a type of design termed the process design.

Process design communicates how something is made, how it works or its origin, by illustrating different stages of its creation (Molineux, 2014, p.128). For example art and history museums can create displays that illustrate how an engraving is crafted or how a textile is woven (Molineux, 2014, p.128). The activities of manufacture could be articulated through multimedia, or associated objects, or samples from different stages of the process. One example of display of process was observed in an exhibition from Australia that revealed aspects of the techniques involved in making and designing textiles (Budge, 2017). 'Japanese Folds' was an exhibition held at the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, in 2015 and featured objects involved in the different stages of folding and unfolding clothing in origami techniques (Budge, 2017, p.34). Clothes were also displayed in various stages of folding (Budge, 2017, p.34). Revealing stages of manufacture can encourage visitors to consider how the object, which is being observed in a finished state, is made.

Imagined embodiments – people

The potential for objects to evoke considerations of people that were formerly connected with the object has been observed in literature. Indeed it was the basis for creating the imagined embodiments code in the previous chapter: in a house museum, objects possess the power to be a conduit to their former owners (Hancock, 2012, p.116) and an object can also be a physical and animate link to people from different places and times than the object is currently in (Ting, 2012, p.180). By itself it is not novel, however it is not observed in combination with the other characteristics of engagement. Also it is noted the types of responses relating to potential past memories to people have not been articulated in such a way as the respondents did in my research.

In order to demonstrate the novelty of findings and their articulation, I compare my research to studies that use phenomenology to research visitor engagement. The theme of objects evoking people is mentioned in a study that partially used phenomenology (Latham, 2013, p.6). Although it would at first appear Latham's research aligns with mine, there are several differences. As detailed in a previous chapter, the recruitment and interview methods are different. During numinous

encounters, people experience 'unity of the moment, object link, being transported, and connections bigger than self' (Latham, 2013, p.8). The object link theme detailed how participants interacted with 'history, people, or actions' from the past and all participants wanted to touch the object (Latham, 2013, p.9). This is significant as my research identified a characteristic of engagement as one where an object evokes imagined people, use, and manufacture connected to it. Another characteristic of engagement was that participants were positive about touching the object they are engaged with. Therefore while the language and interpretation of the findings is different, there is some commonality between Latham's research and mine. Unity of the moment is the 'overarching whole of the numinous experience, being transported can be through time or space and connections can be to self-identity, family members, the past or the sublime' (Latham, 2013, pp.10-11). These themes were not identified in my research. This may be due to the types of object encounters being of a different level of engagement, and not an intense 'numinous' experience. However some of these themes have resonance with the examples people provided of their most engaging experiences in my fieldwork. In addition, the intimate encounter was the study of my research, and not necessarily reflections on self-identity which were deemed out of scope in this research project.

The same researcher also identified people as the theme of object encounter in another study (Latham, 2015). In order to investigate what visitors consider as the real thing in a museum, participants were recruited through social media and flyers in museums (Latham, 2015, p.4). Following a phenomenological approach to analyse participant interviews, four themes emerged of how visitors understand the real thing: through relating to oneself; through connecting to other people, times, event and things; the presence of the real thing; and how is it presented and the surroundings (Latham, 2015, p.5). Visitors experienced the themes in a combination of these ways (Latham, 2015, p.6). This hints at the myriad modes of object encounters as well as indicating that how objects are displayed influences the museum experience. Comparing the four themes to my findings reveals some similarity. The first theme, relation to self, was not within the scope of my research. However the second theme – connection of the participants to 'other beings (living things), events, the past, and

ways of life' – did relate to my research scope (Latham, 2015, p.5). The finding is comparable to the characteristic of imagined embodied past, especially the people and use related to the object. Also the theme is akin an object evoking reflection from the visitor. Regarding the third theme, presence of the real thing, participants in my research were brought to an object, and there were not many remarks about the actual presence of it. The fourth theme of how it is presented speaks to site and interpretation. Although this was not explicit in the object encounter responses, it did emerge as a theme when visitors spoke about examples of their engaging, and not engaging, experiences.

Is there a means of exhibition design that can evoke the imagination regarding people connected to a displayed object? An immersive exhibition at the Royal Danish Library uses a variety of techniques to place visitors in a photograph of a previous battle site (Gunderson and Back, 2018). This allowed the visitors to relate to people that would have been in the landscape. One participant noted that the expansion of the projection situated him in the landscape and he imagined himself in the experience of a soldier (Gunderson and Back, 2018, p.310). And another participant was emotionally connected through the soundscape and mentioned her empathy to the conditions of the soldiers (Gunderson and Back, 2018, p.311). The embodied memory held by objects related to the previous owner of the object, specifically a person who was killed during Bloody Sunday was noted by a visitor to the Museum of Free Derry (Crooke, 2012). This was achieved through a museum guide speaking about the objects. And although different to my research set up, a heritage interpretation that was neither in a museum nor relating to displayed objects, evoked the absent memory of a person (Kidd, 2017). This was achieved using an immersive narrative combining audio and projections and requiring participants to navigate their way through an outdoors experience (Kidd, 2017, p.3). Therefore absent people can be evoked through use of projection and sound in the museum combined with objects, a museum guide speaking about the objects, or even in the absence of objects, by facilitating a narrative.

The embodied memories of object use have been spoken about in literature. A National Museum of Australia focus group found that participants 'wanted to see real things from other times and places, and they wanted information about how other people's bodies had interacted with these objects' (Wehner and Sear, 2010, p.153). This points towards visitor's aspiration for experiences that include the characteristics of engagement – for objects to conjure up the imagined embodied use of the object. Reflecting on potential of objects, Bencard notes that they can evoke embodied memories of use by museum visitors reflecting on form and how objects lend themselves to physical action. For example, 'the rifle summons the soldier both because of our representational relationship with the rifle, but also because it is shaped to fit his (our) hands; the amputation saw summons both the surgeon and the patient – the handle on the saw blade is made for gripping and evokes a gripping response in us; the surgeon's cane with bite marks evokes the taste of leather, metal and pain – and so on' (Bencard, 2014, p.37). Similar to the absent embodied people evoked by an object, the concept of absent embodied use is referred to in literature. At times researchers refer to use and people but not to manufacture, the combination of these three identified in this research. Therefore my finding extend on what is reported above.

In what ways can exhibitions remind visitors of the use of an object that is on display away from where it was previously used? National Museum of Australia curators were eager to use objects to connect visitors 'to others life worlds' (Wehner and Sear, 2010, p.143). In order to evoke the uses and context of the object of interest, the curators used several means including associated material that was displayed adjacent to the object. For example a camera taken on an Antarctic expedition was displayed with camera equipment, food, and different materials that had sustained the explorers as well as material that spoke to the scientific work undertaken by the expedition team (Wehner and Sear, 2010, p.155). This could be considered of encouraging visitors to consider the use of the object by associating it with materials that evoke how the object was employed. Pilegaard argues that exhibition design could potentially overcome the physical barrier of a display case and instead facilitate ways of a visitor

encountering objects by creating a 'sense of proximity' (Pilegaard, 2015, p.72).

Supporting display material was used to arouse notions of object weight in addition to creating juxtapositions of material. Steel surgical instruments were displayed on a 'bed of clear silicone gel', the instruments were so heavy they slowly sunk into the gel (Pilegaard, 2015, p.80). The sinking induces ideas of the heft of the instruments, and the insertion of them into a soft material has resonance with their use as tools that cut into flesh (Pilegaard, 2015, p.80). Therefore the association of material around the objects could elicit imaginations of the use of the objects.

General engaging experience

The characteristics of general engagement found in this research, content, display method, building and visitor approach, were also found in literature. Regarding content in the museum, practitioners recognise the potential of objects to engage and encourage museums to display 'diverse, personalized' material that speaks to different visitors (Simon, 2010, p.iii). A study of museum visitors found that people were interested in objects that had 'personal significance and value' for them (Dahl, et al., 2013, p.161). And another study identified that visitors attend to objects that interest them (Bitgood, 2013, p.13). Display methods have been researched and recommended as conduits to enhance engagement (Bedford, 2014; Black, 2005; Monti and Keene, 2013; Roppola, 2012; Savenije and de Bruijn, 2017). The importance of being able to easily navigate the museum building contributes to engagement (Bitgood, 2013; Roppola, 2012, p.74). The mode of architecture can also create an engaging experience, for example angular walls and evocative soundscapes in the Canadian War Museum stimulated feelings of being in a conflict (Soren, 2009, p.236). In reference to how a visitor approaches the museum visit, visitor motivations and expectations are recognised as being related to engagement (Perry, 2012; Stylianou-Lambert, 2009). Thus my findings of characteristics of general engagement have been previously noted, supporting my findings.

Social experiences were not identified in my research. Interactions with other people are often described in literature around museum engagement (Falk and Dierking, 2014; Falk, Moussouri and Coulson, 1998; Heath and vom Lehn, 2004; Houlberg Rung,

2013; Leinhardt, Crowley and Knutson, 2002; Leinhardt and Knutson, 2004; Pekarik, Doering and Karns, 1999). In my research, the interaction between interviewees was noted, however when reflecting on engaging experiences, the interviewees did not readily list the experiences as being social, or mention other people present. Perhaps the absence was due to the focus of research on the object encounter. The object encounter is an intimate experience by a person, and may be impacted by the company of another person, but is primarily a personal connection between a person and an object. This intense personal focus may have influenced how participants were then considering their engagement examples. Although they did share a variety of responses that ranged from specific objects to exhibitions or the whole building. The questions regarding examples of being engaged or unengaged were open and did not ask more detail about other people that were present, but allowed the visitors to speak of the experience in their own terms.

Another absence found when comparing literature to my research, is the type of engagements people spoke about. I have suggested the concept of an engagement spectrum, however no participants spoke of intense engagement that has been described in other studies. For example, a mystical experience, a loss of ego, loss of sense of time, or being transported through time and space (Latham, 2013) was not identified. As visitors were invited to an object and asked questions in front of it, it may not have been as engaging as their previous engaging encounters. Also when asked about examples of being engaged or unengaged, the visitors were asked on the spot and did not have time to consider facets of the experience. The study by Latham recruited participants by asking them to respond to a flyer, thus preparing the participants and also filtering participants as people who identified as having a particularly engaging experience (Latham, 2013). Further research could gather more findings on general engagement and the absences noted may be yet identified using my methodological approach.

General engaging experience and the characteristics of engagement

How do examples of general engagement that participants provided relate to the engagement characteristics identified in the object encounters? Do any of the

examples provided relate to how an object manifested to the interviewee, or display any embodied responses? Not all responses related to an object, however several examples speak of something that evokes reflection rather than an object only representing itself. There are also examples of imagined human activity being evoked.

Incidents of an object manifesting itself in way that evokes reflection were found. One of the participants gave an example of a gallery in Edinburgh referring to 'a painting that I can always go back to…and I can sit and just look at and think, it's amazing'.[245] He further reflected 'it just catches your eye' and gives a sense of 'peace'. This example speaks of a visitor responding in an evocative way to an object, rather than the object representing itself. Another engaging object encounter was when a participant spoke about her experience at the American Museum of Natural History where she was entranced by an ancient skeleton. She was studying biology at school when she visited, and the abstract concepts of the biology class were articulated through the skeleton. Referring to the concepts, she 'could connect it with the museum and that was, for me, why I really liked this part, not the other part with all the pictures'.[246] Again, the object evokes reflection from the visitor, rather than being an object that only represents itself.

An example of the imagined past being embodied was found when an interviewee spoke of her engaging experience at the Mill City Museum in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She re-counted: 'It's a museum within the ruins of a flour mill…you get to see a scene of that time…and people's actual accounts of their experiences working there or things they heard from their grandmothers…and you see the production happening. And it just, blew my mind'.[247] The participant spoke of the people related to the flour company as well as the modes of manufacture that were related to the site. These are aspects of the engagement characteristic of imagined embodiments relating to human interaction – specifically people and use. Another example of the characteristic of engagement relating to embodiment was a reflection on Sagrada Familia. A participant reflected, 'the story behind it, you know that it was, still an ongoing thing from all

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[246] G22
[247] G7

those years back and you, yourself, I guess part of history, you know, seeing it being built in front of you'.[248] The interviewee referred to the making of the site, and her reflections also relate to past people being imagined. Therefore there are some similar elements of engaging object encounters when considering examples of engaging experiences.

How do the examples of not being engaged relate to the characteristics identified in unengaged object encounters? There was a complexity when mapping characteristics of unengaging object encounters to examples of unengaging experiences. This was due to characteristics of an unengaging object encounter being an absence – either of imagined embodied pasts being elicited or an object evoking reflection. Many participants do not say what they had *not* experienced, only that they had negative experiences. However the spectrum of an object representing itself only (unengaged) versus an object evoking reflection (engaged) could be applied to some of the participant comments. One visitor replied to the question of unengaging museum experiences, 'Some smaller ones, yeah, some have just thrown some old stuff together and called it a museum. It's just junk'.[249] Perhaps the reaction to displays lacking interpretation is that without a narrative, the object represents itself rather than evoking any other response. The National Portrait Gallery in London was provided as an example of an unengaging experience as 'it was a bit boring for me to see all these faces…so I left after 10 minutes'.[250] Instead of the portraits eliciting a response, they represented themselves as paintings, which the interviewee did not find engaging. An unengaging experience related to contemporary art was 'if it's too modern…too abstract, too crazy, then it's saying absolutely nothing to me. I saw it, OK, then I walk past'.[251] Again the visitor does not relate to the object, it is something that represents and does not connect with the visitor. Thus, there are some relatable aspects of unengaging object encounters in the examples of unengaging experiences.

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[249] G12
[250] G14
[251] G6

Further to the comparison of general engagement and characteristics of engaging object encounters, is the potential for objects to engage visitors, but not for the museum itself to engage visitors. Several respondents remarked that the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum was not engaging, however they had an engaging encounter with an object in the museum.[252] One interviewee from Paris had expectations from her previous museum visits, and did not find Kelvingrove engaging as there weren't 'enough paintings'.[253] However she was engaged with the carved stone balls. When asked about unengaging museums, a couple pointed out the taxidermy objects in the Kelvingrove. They remarked in agreement with each other that 'there's no place for that here', 'some of them were haunting' and 'they should be left to rest'[254] while they reported being engaged with the vessel. In the last example, a participant had visited the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum prior to the interview and mentioned an area under renovation during the interview 'didn't really impress me' as it was 'probably thirty years old or something'.[255] In addition, he found the space difficult to navigate, it was 'quite a labyrinth' as 'the structure of the museum is quite complicated'. Content and wayfinding in the building were elements that impeded engagement with the museum as a whole. However, engagement with an object was not impeded. This opens up possibilities and differences between the characteristics of engagement and a more global engagement with a display, exhibition, or museum. A person may engage with an object or an exhibition, but not engage with other exhibitions in the museum, or the museum itself. In addition, a participant mentioned she was engaged with an exhibition but not with an object in the exhibition. When asked about being unengaged, she recalled an object that did not engage her in an exhibition she favoured. She stated 'there was a great big log in Brisbane, I mean it was part of an exhibition that was quite good'.[256] Therefore a person may not connect with elements of an exhibition, but will connect with the overall exhibition.

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[252] G21, G23, G25
[253] G21
[254] G23
[255] G25
[256] G8

Conclusion

In this chapter I have further explored object visitor encounters by comparing my findings with literature. I also compared findings around general engagement from examples visitors provided of being engaged and not engaged, with the literature. In addition I compared the characteristics of engaging object encounters with general engagement. The next chapter will offer further possible contributions of these findings.

Chapter Six: Engaging object visitor encounters and beyond

> Yeah, just cause of the story behind it, you know that it was, still an ongoing thing from all those years back and you, yourself, I guess part of history, you know, seeing it being built in front of you. You know, I'll remember that, mightn't have a chance to go back and see it when it's finished but at least you know that it was still, sort of a living, breathing work of art, you know. That it was still, emm, being in the process, you know, still being made.[257]

Beginning

This chapter concludes my research project into engagement. It has been noted that the 'interaction between visitors and things in museums remain essentially invisible' (Trondle, et al., 2014, p.141). This thesis attempted to make visible something of the interaction. Below, I examine the research aim and objectives that drove the PhD, the answers that were found and what remains unanswered. The contribution section reviews how my findings relate to literature, consider the use of phenomenology, and how findings could be applied in museum practice. I reflect on the research process as well as the growth of my own research practice that both informed and was developed by the process. I also suggest future research directions. This chapter content also addresses several evaluation criteria. Researcher response (Creswell, 2013, p.262) is addressed by my development as a researcher. Further questions (Creswell, 2013, p.262) are tackled in the future research section. Originality, resonance, and usefulness (Charmaz, 2006, pp.182-183) are highlighted through contributions and future research.

Responding to research aim

This section contemplates my research aim and objectives, how each thesis chapter addressed them, and whether or not they were answered. As stated in the first chapter, the overarching aim of my research was to investigate museum visitor

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reactions by adopting a general phenomenological approach to allow for personal, multisensory, emotional, and other potential modes of experience to be expressed. It was open in its approach and did not set out to prove a fixed concept of engagement. The research set out to explore engagement from a visitor perspective and concentrated on interactions between a visitor and specific objects. The research aim to investigate museum visitor engagement was achieved by tackling the research objectives:

- To review how visitor engagement has previously been defined, considered, and understood.
- To explore and develop the consideration of engaging object encounters from a phenomenological, and specifically a Heideggerian, stance.
- To examine whether or not 'engagement' can be characterised from fieldwork-derived descriptions of an exhibition experience.

Regarding the first objective, I established the landscape of research into museum visitor engagement through a literature review in Chapter One. This surveyed how engagement has been defined and studied by different groups. The first chapter also suggested a means to address the objective of considering engagement from a phenomenological approach, namely using it to investigate specific object encounters. Chapter Two described phenomenology and argued it is a superior framework for researching object encounters. In order to explore visitor engagement and object encounters in the field, I used the methodology of phenomenology and grounded theory. Chapter Three described how I distilled phenomenological thought into a series of interview questions, tested them, and how I approached fieldwork. The chapter also detailed my data analysis. Grounded theory was used to analyse the interviews, combined with a phenomenological lens which allowed for unpredicted themes to emerge. Phenomenology provided a language to how people encountered objects, it was the foundation of object manifestation arguments from Heidegger and embodiment reflections from Merleau-Ponty that allowed for two main areas of object interaction to be discovered in the interviews. Chapter Four put forth the findings and the reasoning for the codes identified in data analysis. Extending from the

report of results, Chapter Five contextualised them relative to the literature. Excitingly, in response to the third objective, it was possible to delineate elements of an engaging object encounter from fieldwork derived descriptions. Attributes of overall engagement, whether with/in an exhibition or a museum, were also discovered.

The characteristics of an engaging object encounter include the object manifesting in a way that evokes reflection from the visitor, that the visitor is positive about touching the object, and that the visitor imagines possible embodied pasts relating to the object; specifically, how it was made, how it was used, or the people that related to the object. Elements identified as being common to overall engagement with/in an exhibition or a museum, were that the display method connected the visitor with the material on display, the visitor favoured the content, the manner in which visitors approach the content, and the influence of the museum building on the experience.

There were findings that could affect validity and generalisations. Some participants behaved similarly in both engaging and non-engaging object encounters. This was observed with examples of physically performed embodiment being noted across all encounters. I argued this was not an error of my coding in Chapter Four. However the finding warrants more investigation but could affect validity of what I found and translated as meaningful features of an engaging object encounter. Regarding generalisation, it could be critiqued that the phenomenological terms of object manifestation and imagined embodiments of objects are general. While they are not overly prescriptive, they do relate to lived experience and their emergence from the data was validated in Chapter Four and Five. An advantage of their broad terming is that they lend themselves readily to exhibition development.

When comparing the research aim and answers, there are still areas to be addressed. I will review what was partially answered as well as consider questions that my findings raised.

Can visitor engagement be understood from a Heideggerian stance? Unfortunately, the questions designed around concepts of *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* did not lend themselves to being asked in the field in the particular research set-up. Therefore

in the case of the fieldwork undertaken in this PhD, visitor engagement was not understood from a Heideggerian stance in the terms of questions asked. That does not infer that engagement cannot be understood from a Heideggerian stance. Firstly, in situations other than my fieldwork set-up the *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* questions could be posed. Secondly, using Heideggerian thought on object manifestation through his arguments of the essay, 'The Thing', engagement was understood in a novel and rich way. And thirdly, visitors were positive about touching the objects they were engaged with. Perhaps this could indicate that the visitors are considering the objects as useful and handy, potentially indicating the objects are manifesting in a *Zuhandenheit* (readiness-to-hand) manner.

While the focus of my research was object encounters, questions were also asked of visitors about what they considered engaging and unengaging. The comparison of these responses further illuminates the findings of engaging object encounters. I found that a visitor can find an exhibition engaging, but an object in the same exhibition not engaging. Also that visitors were engaging with an object, but not the museum the object is displayed in. This articulates a possible departure point for the characteristics of object engagement and the concept of engagement. When first approaching this research, engagement was considered in the working terms of a museum visitor being attracted by an object to the extent that they stopped and spent time encountering the object, either viewing, considering it and/or talking about it. Now that I have delved into the study of engagement and probed deeply into the answers people gave of immediate object encounters, and past recollections of overall experiences in museum, I realise engagement is multifaceted and that the characteristics of engagement I identified are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Especially as a person can be engaged with one object, and not engaged with the museum as a whole. In addition, examples provided by visitors when asked about engaging experiences ranged from an object to an exhibition to a certain museum or type of museum in general.

The finding that visitors who provided dissimilar examples of engagement had engaging encounters with the same object is noteworthy. In a study of satisfying experiences visitors had at Smithsonian museums, it was found that satisfying

experiences are a result of the type of exhibition experienced, the quality of the experience and 'individual preference' (Pekarik, 1999, p.164). Therefore what a person is looking at, what the person likes, and the quality of the object encounter influences what sort of experience the person may have. The finding that people that provided different examples of engaging experiences, yet had an engaging experience with the same objects indicates a factor is influencing how they engaged with the object in front of them. Also of note is that the objects had accompanying labels with minimal information. It is noteworthy that visitors with various preferences and experiences were engaged with the object they were interviewed in front of – suggesting the phenomenological influence in the questions asked, or contemplating the questions encouraged of visitors, may well have facilitated the engagement.

Participants were asked about their experiences of engagement to garner more material on how people consider the concept. The variety of answers demonstrated that the term is broad and can be thought of in different ways. For example, the responses ranged from a specific object, an exhibition, whole museum, to an historic site. Subjectivity of engagement was evident when people spoke about unengaging experiences – a museum that was engaging for one person, was unengaging for another. Comparison between responses to engaging and unengaging examples revealed the multifaceted nature of museum experiences, as display method, content, and how visitors approach content all influence how someone reacts to a museum. Even though useful material was gleaned from the questions, strong themes of engagement did not emerge, apart from the desire for an interpretation framework. It is of interest that characteristics of engagement were identified from object encounter responses, and this was not as prevalent with examples of engagement as no strong commonalities in the variety of answers from engaging and non-engaging examples. Perhaps the immediate and intimate nature of object visitor encounters allowed for the range of responses while reflections of past experiences of engagement did not.

This research project nuanced engagement to some degree using phenomenology, but there is still much to discover. Unanswered threads include properties of overall engagement, where and how object encounters sit in the experience of overall engagement, and the application of *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* concepts in

visitor engagement research. As indicated in the previous chapter, characteristics of engaging object encounters do not directly align with examples of engaging exhibitions or museums that participants provided. In addition, visitors can be engaged with an object but not the museum. Or a visitor can be engaged with an exhibition, but not a specific object within the exhibition. How do discrete object encounters influence overall engagement? How does overall engagement influence discrete object encounters?

Contributions

The facets of an engaging object encounter are of interest to museum studies fields of visitor studies and engagement. The aspects of the object encounter may interest researchers who theorise about object agency and the potential of objects – in disciplines that include museum studies, material culture study, anthropology, and phenomenology. The use of phenomenology will be significant to researchers in social sciences that aim to explore the facets of how people experience things, events, and other people. The findings could also be applied in museum practice. These three contributions are explored below, engaging object encounters, use of phenomenology, and applying the findings.

Engaging object encounters

Modes of interacting with objects observed in my research are already present in literature, substantiating their identification and my research. The concept of object manifestation – representing itself only or evoking reflection – that emerged from my research has some similarity to abstract reflections on museum objects (Greenblatt, 1991; Ingold, 2000; Kavanagh, 2000). The concept of an object eliciting reflection also has some similarity to prior research findings on museum visitor experiences (Dudley, 2012; Fienberg and Leinhardt, 2002; Latham, 2013; Pekarik, et al., 1999; Roppola, 2012; Soren, 2009). Supporting my own research finding of being positive about touching the object as a characteristic of engagement is that touching objects and engagement are interlinked in a range of literature (Chatterjee, 2008; Classen, 2012; Geisbusch, 2012; Hardie, 2016; Pye, 2007; Saunderson, 2012; Willcocks, 2016;

Wingfield, 2010; Wood and Latham, 2011; Yilmaz, Filizb and Yilmaza, 2013). The characteristic of an object encounter that evokes past embodiments of how the object was made is referred to in literature (Fraser and Coulson, 2012; Taragan, 2012; Ting, 2010). One point of difference is that manufacture is typically tied to the object via description and researcher reflection rather than through visitor articulated reflection, as with my research. By itself, then, this idea is not novel; however it is not commonly discussed in combination with the other characteristics of engagement. I identified that visitors engaged with objects through the object evoking the people related to it. This theme is observed in previous research (Hancock, 2010; Latham, 2013; Latham, 2015). Similar to imagined embodiment of use being evoked by an object found in my research, the concept of embodied use is referred to in literature (Bencard, 2014; Wehner and Sear, 2010).

Several of the characteristics of engaging object encounters as identified in this research, are present in existing literature. Indeed, one study that emulates all three characteristics relating to imagined past being embodied in an object is an experimental exhibition that used a phenomenological means of interpretation (Gunderson and Back, 2018). While the research group did not identify the characteristics of engagement in the way my research has, their phenomenological approach did facilitate the characteristics of engagement. This validates a phenomenological approach to considering object encounters as it fosters visitor engagement and supports the suggestion that the phenomenologically influenced questions facilitated engagement to some extent in this fieldwork.

While the types of encounters found in my research are also found in literature, there are critiques on museum objects that propose objects are limited in a museum. For example, regarding the characteristic of imagining past embodied use and people, is the finding that engaged visitors encounter museum objects as something that was used and related to people is of interest. An object in a museum collection is not bounded or limited, visitors can still interact with an object and consider it as a functional and useful thing. That participants related to possible past users and uses challenges the argument that displaying an object in a museum voids its 'multisensory uses and meanings' (Classen, 1997, p.401). Another characteristic of interest is the

manner of the object manifesting itself in a way that evokes reflection. While there were some exceptions in the visitors to this level of engagement, the finding that objects inspired thoughts on how it connects to social fabric or the visitor own experiences, indicates objects are not restricted in their museum environment to the extent Walter Benjamin argues (Gourgouris, 2006, p.219). Perhaps the object manifestation that Benjamin experienced was one where the object represented itself, and was considered only as something that is part of a collection. The object did not evoke reflection, as was observed in this research when people considered the object in various ways. It also confirms the fluid nature of objects, as objects can simultaneously represent just themselves while also eliciting reflection from visitors. The outcome of object richness and complexity confirms arguments found in literature (for example Basu, 2017; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).

Use of phenomenology

Different research groups have applied phenomenology in museums, however not to research engagement (see Arnold, et al, 2014; Joy and Sherry, 2003; McLauchlan, 2013; Monod and Klein, 2005; Tam, 2008). This thesis offers similar insights when compared to other phenomenological studies of museum object encounters and experience (see Latham, 2009; Latham, 2013; Ting, 2010; Wood and Latham, 2009; Wood and Latham, 2011; Wood and Latham, 2013). A phenomenological approach allowed the dream space of the museum with its rich 'imagination, emotions, senses and memories' to be explored (Kavanagh, 2000, p.3).

Phenomenology can be used to add to theoretical knowledge of museum studies as it allows for in depth exploration of the lived experience and can be applied to any factor of visitor research. It was used to investigate engagement and object encounters in the museum as it allows for a descriptive means to capture everyday events on a personal level that is absent of researcher judgement. The personal reflections also allowed for all facets of an encounter to be encapsulated, including imaginary and emotional responses. Absence of judgment was demonstrated as if there was judgement on my part, it would be assumed it would be present in all interviews and consistent similar answers would have been gathered. This was not the case. For

instance, several people identified as being engaged with the object they were interviewed in front of, while several people identified as not being engaged with the same object. Similarly, the same museum was recorded as being an example of engagement for some respondents, as well as being an example of not being engaged for other participants.

A note on different ways that phenomenology was used. Open coding gave the finding of an engaged visitor being positive about touch. It was in response to a question influenced by Merleau-Ponty and his arguments on embodiment. Selective coding examined embodiment, either physical performed or mentally envisioned. Adopting the same analytical lens used in the selective coding with regards the characteristic of being positive about touch, it is not a physically performed behaviour as the interviewee is not able to actually touch the object as it is in a display case. However it is a mentally envisioned behaviour, but of the participant and their potential actions. Whereas the finding of imagined embodiments of an object was mentally envisioned behaviour, not of the participants, but of actions relating to individuals from the past. The open coding finding was a result of considering the Merleau-Ponty influenced question. The selective coding was a result of considering responses through the lens of Merleau-Ponty arguments. This demonstrates the versatility of phenomenology as it was applied in both interview question composition and interview analysis. It also illustrates the applicability of Merleau-Ponty and embodiment to research on object encounters.

Another facet of phenomenology that appealed was the openness of the approach to gaining a range of reactions. Emotional reactions to the vessel included 'very homely, earthy'[258] and 'it's beautiful. I mean, I'm here two thousand years later, I don't know how much it is, and I'm looking at them, and I feel like they're like beautiful, and they probably thought the same'.[259] An imaginative and emotional rich response was given by a participant in front of the carved stone balls. When asked what she thought it would be like to be the object, she stated '...I think they're probably laughing because

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nobody can figure out what the heck they're for (laughs) and they're like, we know and we're not telling (laughs). They're very mysterious objects. And quite possibly very cheeky ones...'.[260] The approach also allowed for multisensory elements to be noted. These responses may not have been possible with questions that were not influenced by phenomenology. It would also have not been possible with a survey instrument that only allowed for yes/no responses, selection of multiple choice or a numerical rating system to indicate satisfaction. Therefore, the phenomenological approach contributed towards a gap noted in the first chapter that few engagement studies focus on responses that cover curiosity or emotion (Chatterjee, 2008), imagination (Bedford, 2014), or memories (Kavanagh, 2000).

The study was successful in gaining insight into the everyday experience of a museum visit, and the description was so abundant that the data gathered was plentiful. In addition to the characteristics of engagement, there were other interesting findings that have not been included in this thesis. These include hinge objects pivoting visitor from present to past, the concept that it may be easier for responses to be fictional and abstract rather than personal reflections, maturity required to appreciate art, the experience of something being hidden yet revealed simultaneously, engaged visitors desiring ownership of objects of interest, and the drawing power of specific objects. The multitude of different themes that emerged from the interviews indicates that the phenomenological approach achieved the aim of gaining insights into the museum experience as it revealed many facets of it, too many for this thesis to analyse in depth.

Ting argues 'material culture studies should, then, look into the blurred zone of in-betweenness, where the formal qualities of objects can be fully experienced, and where personal narrations, such as desire, emotions or memories can emerge from the human stories embodied within the objects' (Ting, 2012, p.174). Phenomenology was used as a means to investigate that blurred zone. As previously argued, phenomenology was selected for three reasons. Firstly, this approach placed the researcher close to what was being studied – object encounters. Secondly, it provided

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a means to find out what the visitor was experiencing and thirdly phenomenology relates to how things manifest themselves to people, allowing the description of object encounters to be captured. These three reasons were realised demonstrating phenomenology is a useful approach to visitor studies.

Applying findings

As indicated in the previous chapter, the characteristics of engagement interweave and are not discrete. That the characteristics can intersect with each other is encouraging toward exhibition development possibilities, as one method could elicit several characteristics of engagement to be experienced. For example, to facilitate objects to manifest in manner that evokes reflection, I suggest displaying material that visitors could associate with the object in order for the object to not just represent itself, but to evoke deeper reflective responses. Similarly, the display of material associated with previous functions of objects is described as a means to facilitate visitors to imagine the embodied uses of an object. Display of associated material is also a possible means to encourage visitors to engage with the process of making of an object. And interpretation is recommended to elicit the concept of people that are associated with the objects, as well as a means for visitors to experience imaginative touch of objects. Although these display recommendations are already present in literature, one of my PhD goals was to find a theoretical reasoning for why visitors experience engagement. Therefore while the recommendations may seem straight forward, they are informed by theory and in depth research.

As mentioned in Chapter One, I hope to contribute to research-led practice, the first step of which would be for my PhD findings to be applied in a practical manner. Although participants varied in what their previous examples of engagement were, commonalities were found in their engaging object encounters. Thus, a visitor may be more likely to become engaged if one or more of the characteristics of engagement this project identified, is considered in exhibition development. A curator could go through a checklist prior to developing an exhibition. In order to creating an engaging exhibition, a curator could ask does this display:

- Encourage imagination of possible embodiments of the object

- Refer to how the object was made

- Suggest previous uses of object

- Allude to the people that could have interacted with the object

- Manifest the object in such a way that encourages reflection from visitors

The above is modelled on characteristics of engagement around object manifestation and imagined embodiments. Another characteristic of engagement relates to being positive about touching the object. Recommendations for curators are on the model of a typical museum, where objects are displayed in cabinets and not accessible to touch, therefore the aspect of touch will not be explored.

How could the above display recommendations be practically employed in creating exhibitions to encourage a visitor to go from not being engaged to being engaged? The following proposes the use of context as a means to facilitate engagement from visitors, using findings from both object interactions questions and from examples provided of visitors being engaged or not being engaged. Interpretation will be understood as the communication of the past that involves the audience, encourages participation, and assists 'visitors to develop the skills to explore for themselves and so enhance their own understanding' (Black, 2005, p.185). Several participants mentioned addition of context as a means to encourage engagement. The context could be shared through material that is associated with the displayed object or interpretation framework, and use of labels.

The requirement for a framework of interpretation to assist museum visitors with understanding something that is not immediately familiar to them was observed at Imperial War Museum North, England. The building was designed to represent how conflict can shatter the globe into shards, and contains small entrances, uneven floors, and jagged interiors with an intention to 'unsettle, disorientate and confuse' (MacLeod, Dodd and Duncan, 2015, p.317). Surveys revealed the space left visitors frustrated and challenged, therefore a means of guiding the visitor through the concepts of the building was proposed to support the museum experience (MacLeod, Dodd and Duncan, 2015, p.332). Signage and interpretation explaining the shards was

presented in an effort to recognise the unsettling effect of the building and to fold it into the experience of conflict (MacLeod, Dodd and Duncan, 2015, p.332). Therefore visitors who did not immediately grasp the architectural motivation had a means to understand the concept of the museum, thus empowering the visitor and providing means for them to recognise the disorientation of the building and to engage with this.

When asking visitors about satisfying museum experiences, one participant commented on the lack of information in an exhibition and how they became frustrated as they didn't understand and left the exhibition (Pekarik, et al, 1999, p.155). It was found that visitors to heritage sites interact with the site by creating a sense of place relative to them, they make meaning of the site through relating it to themselves and constructing plausible experiences (Bagnall, 2003, p.90). Interpretation that provides 'cognitive' hooks can encourage 'sensory impressions, emotions and reflections' (Samis, 2007, p.59). Therefore written interpretation could be a means to relate objects to people. Visitors connect with objects that are relevant to them, and the more difficult it is to understand an object or concept, the less relevant it will be visitors (Simon, 2016, p.36).

Exhibition techniques are noticed by visitors, one participant spoke at length about them.[261] And another participant remarked that 'how you present the object' would influence responses and suggested that placing material made of red velvet, or contrasting light and dark materials, or using minimal light could create a display of a 'mysterious object and you come closer and you almost want to whisper to look at it'.[262] The suggestive power of material that surrounds an object has been noted – velvet is often used in displays of precious objects such as crown jewels (Pilegaard, 2015, p.77). People notice different elements in a display, for example a respondent associated the balls with an adjacent axe. When asked about use of the balls, he reasoned 'they're placed next to them there, they are weapons'.[263] It was previously found that when confronted with an unknown object, participants looked to adjacent

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[261] G25
[262] G21
[263] G15

objects in order to assist in identifying what function the unknown object could have (Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco, et al., 2016, p.184). Interestingly, not all exhibition techniques that are noticed are readily embraced by audiences. A visitor to a Royal Danish Library critiqued that the exhibition soundscape was too well crafted in order to evoke an emotional response and that she would rather have her own freedom to decide what to feel without influence (Gunderson and Back, 2018, p.312).

The use of context to encourage visitors to interchange from unengaged to engaged in the engagement spectrum was suggested by interviewees. In two different interviews in which the vessel represented itself only to the participants, and did not evoke reflection, the interviewees made display recommendations. A couple stated 'On the other side when they've got the, where they had the great big like house, how they cooked, how they killed, to me that is a bit more interesting, that way of storytelling the house more than the pot' and the other respondent continued on the theme, 'It's more in context. That's just a pot. Were if you put in something else, you can learn to know how they used it in that instance…It's just on show'.[264] Therefore the interviewees argued for a display where the vessel was not in isolation. Another respondent suggested showing the vessel as part of a process. He stated 'I would say, if it was part of a logical sequence, for example, an actual, this is the life cycle of making the dyes, then I would be more engaged with it, as part of that life cycle. But on its own, it's just a pot next to some other pots'.[265] For these participants, exhibition technique was required for the object to go beyond representing itself only and for the vessel to be more than 'just a pot'.

Unengaging experiences may be due to an absence of an adequate framework of interpretation. A participant reported not being engaged at a Degas' exhibition at Toledo Museum of Art due to minimal interpretation. She reminisced, 'there wasn't a whole lot of elements to it and it was just like here's the picture and that's it. And it didn't really bring any context which kind of made you disengage with the picture itself because you didn't really know why he had done that or what, what he was

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[264] G3
[265] G26

thinking'.[266] The painting only represented and did not evoke deeper reflection. She felt unengaged as there was an absence of 'something that you can connect with, or even like just a human element'. Perhaps an addition of interpretation that would conjure up the human connections or Degas' motivations would readily engage this visitor and instead of the painting representing, facilitate the visitor to reflect on the painting. An element to be aware of is the amount of interpretation. An interviewee commented that while she required context to understand an object, 'you might possibly run the risk of too much information'.[267] It is recognised that it may be difficult to quantify how much information is too much. However if a museum visitor reflects upon it, it is something to consider when composing interpretation.

It was outlined in Chapter Four the importance visitors placed on labels, while also raising the notion that engaging object encounters do not necessarily require labels. However, if visitors read the labels, it can enhance their engagement. Ting asked her museum focus group to imagine Chinese ceramics in a different way and invited them to write labels that were displayed beside the ceramics in the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery (Ting, 2010, p.200). Of relevance to my research is the finding that not only did visitors stop more often to read these imaginative labels, but that the visitors themselves made up their own stories about the objects (Ting, 2010, p.200). That visitors reacted to the provocative labels not only supports the notion that an interpretation framework can enhance object encounters, but also that visitors can create imaginative encounters through text interpretation. Therefore if labels were composed that encourage the characteristics of engagement identified in this thesis, it could increase engagement.

In my interviews, context was suggested as a means to interchange from having an unengaging object encounter to an engaging one. Therefore, offering context through interpretation or display of material associated with the displayed object could enhance an unengaging encounter of an object representing to an engaging encounter of an objects manifesting in a way that encourages reflection from the visitor.

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[267] G24

Reflections

This section reflects upon how I developed my research approach and how I developed as a researcher myself. I also reflect on my methodology, by describing limitations and suggesting means to overcome these limitations.

The research aim, objectives, and answers described above is a linear write up. However, at first my research aim was to identify what makes an exhibition engaging by exploring the ways in which people perceive objects on display. After reading general phenomenology it was realised that the idea of perception is complex and that different fields study it and define it differently. A methodological approach was not easily realised in order to question museum visitors about their perceptions. Also upon further consideration, in the initial research aim there was a direct leap from object perception to engagement. In addition, the focus changed as I realised from literature and practicalities of fieldwork that certain elements required nuancing. In particular I initially considered researching engaging museum experiences. This proved too broad and general and needed to be scoped in order for meaningful findings to be gathered. The honing of engagement to object encounters allowed for a more targeted study than general engagement. Questions were asked about overall engagement in order for a general grasp of the concept to be found.

My research practice matured as I progressed through my PhD journey it emerged through journal entries and reflections in supervision meetings. Three major developments were the realisation of certain attitudes about complexity of research approaches, an awareness of restricted mode of data analysis and an increase in my own researcher confidence, both in the field and during analysis. At the outset of my PhD, I deemed a complex research approach as the most valid mode of enquiry. Chapter Three mentioned my initial methodology would involve the labour intensive transcendental phenomenological approach. I had considered grounded theory but was concerned it would not be thorough. Prior to working in the museum field, I attained a Bachelors in Molecular Biology and was a research assistant for several years. I realised my scientific training was a barrier to accepting a qualitative approach which was devoid of the prescriptive steps of the transcendental phenomenological

approach. Once I realised my own bias from my prior experience, however, I disregarded the complexity of transcendental phenomenology and instead opted for a mixed method of grounded theory with a phenomenological lens. The shedding of the preconception of intricate processes being necessary to reveal patterns, was liberating; it also saved time in adopting a less labour intensive research approach.

Another facet of my previous science background that may have limited my perspective at the outset of the project, was the tight focus of how to apply Heideggerian thought. The Heidegger-related questions used in visitor interviews were very specific. Potentially, that may be why they were not directly applicable in a situation where a visitor does not stop of their own accord at an object. In contrast, embodiment was ultimately considered in a more general way, and the embodied related interview questions provided rich material. In addition, the phenomenological lens of interview analysis when applied with embodiment in mind, yielded unexpected and novel results. Therefore a less structured, fluid, organic approach may reveal more than a specific, focused, and blinkered approach.

While in the field, I optimised my research approach in several ways. During fieldwork, my interview technique had an opportunity to develop and be finessed. At first, I was so focused on gathering responses to particular displays, the conversation with the respondent was formal and not a semi-structured interaction (in later interviews a more fluid approach to asking questions gave richer results). I learned to allow pauses in interviews, and not to repeat the question. Initially I was concerned about inserting myself too much by speaking about my own museum experiences or reflecting on comments made by participants. However, through this means of reciprocal sharing by the researcher, the power dynamics of the interaction were more balanced (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p.317). Another challenge of approaching museum visitors, is the refusal of participation. This is an element that I had to get used to with random recruiting of participants, and the more often one approaches visitors, the more one gets accustomed to being refused.

While carrying out data analysis and reviewing the interviews, I was very much focused on whether or not the Heideggerian approach could be validated for museum

use. As I became aware of this constrained mode of analysis, it became important to me to put this concern to one side when doing my initial review of interview material. Other themes can, and did, emerge from the interviews and I realised I did not want to obscure them in a blinkered approach to the Heidegger related material. Once I realised how important it is not to have a specific question in mind when reviewing the interviews, a multiplicity of rich themes emerged.

Intertwined with the recognition and release of preconceptions and previous focus on one thread of enquiry, my researcher confidence blossomed while undertaking data analysis. When I was transcribing I felt awkward about my own voice and where I felt I did not let the respondent talk at length. When I had transcribed all the interviews, I printed them out and read through the transcripts while listening to the interviews. This was a final check to make sure all words were written down correctly. When I interacted with the data by listening to a whole conversation at normal speed, all in one go instead of stopping and rewinding as when I was transcribing, the exchange between interviewees and me seemed more natural. Pauses that I thought were awkward when I was transcribing, were examples of the respondents thinking deeply to answer the questions and not say the first thing that popped into their head. Instead of listening to what I had done wrong, I started listening for what I had done right. This valuing of my fieldwork material, as well as the plethora of themes that emerged, increased my self-belief as a researcher.

The mode of how fieldwork was carried out had four unavoidable limitations that would be fertile ground for future research. These include me researching in isolation, the number of people interviewed, the artificial interaction of a visitor with an object with which they had not stopped at of their own accord, and the selection of objects used in the fieldwork.

I undertook all interviews myself and also performed data analysis by myself. The addition of other people introduces different perspectives, and a form of investigator triangulation that strengthens validity of data (Creswell, 2013, p.251). My technique of interviewing may be different to other people, and participants might respond differently to different interviewers. Therefore another researcher may gather new

material. A researcher could also glean different findings from the interviews gathered in fieldwork.

More interviews could be undertaken in front of the chosen objects. I did not reach saturation and could have continued interviewing for at least another week. However, the transcription and data analysis for an additional 30 interviews would not be feasible in my thesis timeframe. It is assumed that further interviews would confirm the findings of the 30 interviews analysed in this thesis. Additional interviews would also overcome the fact that different people react to the same objects in different ways due to their different personal and sociocultural backgrounds. It has been argued the museum experience is influenced by intersecting elements: personal, sociocultural, and physical (Falk and Dierking, 2000, p.21). Personal context includes motivation and expectations, prior knowledge, interests and beliefs, choice and control, while sociocultural context encompasses visitors interacting with themselves or with other people, and physical context recognises the significance of elements inside the museum space (objects, wayfinding, design), or elements outside the museum space (Falk and Dierking, 2000, p.128). The same phenomena inspiring different responses has been recorded in literature as well as in this thesis. For example, a curator noted the diversity of reactions in comment books or evaluation forms to an exhibition at the Wellcome Institute (Arnold, 1998). More interviews could be conducted to gather more data that could capture the range of possible responses.

In an ideal set up, visitors would be interviewed in front of an object that they had been attracted to and decide to stop and encounter themselves. In addition, interviews could be repeated with the same visitor in front of different objects that they consider engaging. The quote that opened the first chapter related to a visitor speaking of their engagement with a painting. Therefore interviews could be undertaken at artworks, as well as other objects.

The Heideggerian thought that influenced the composition of the questions related to tool use, and this influenced selection of objects to study in the interviews. It would be interesting to ascertain results from individual interviews in front of objects that were not the vessel or carved stone balls. One of the characteristics of engagement was the

visitor bringing forth non-visible people that had previously interacted with the object. This might be more conceptually available to visitors when they are encountering an object that was a tool, or something that people used or made. Therefore interviews in front of other objects, including those not tool-like, would further illuminate minutiae of object encounters, and how they differ between objects.

Future research

Research that extends from this PhD project can be considered in two main categories, the first is to extend from the findings and the second suggests ways to address elements that were out of scope.

As mentioned in the reflections on limitations section, more interviews could be undertaken either in front of the same objects, in front of other objects, or at objects visitors stop at of their own accord. This could confirm my findings and potentially identify more characterises of engagement. Research could even be extended to a situation with no objects. A multisensory and immersive digital heritage experience successfully evoked an absent person through interpretation, without museum collection objects (Kidd, 2017).

Another avenue of future research is to broaden the scope. As detailed in Chapter One, many facets of the exhibition experience were not in scope to allow for this research to be a feasible project. I will not address all of the elements described in the first chapter. I will address other people, virtual objects, challenging histories, and potentially democratising the museum.

The findings have been described in an interaction between a visitor and an object. However, several of the interviews were with more than one person. Their answers were so intertwined, it was not possible to allocate specific responses to each participant, and the answers from two interviewees were combined. How one visitor responds in the company of another visitor could be pursued. This could be researched by ensuring each answer is answered separately by both participants. Alternatively, one person could be interviewed, then another person introduced and

the interview is undertaken again. Then the sole and couple interviews could be compared for similarities and differences.

This research focused on object encounters and did not explore how people responded to virtual objects. Digital is used in heritage site interpretation and is successful in creating embodied engaging experiences (see Kenderdine, Chan and Shaw, 2014; Kidd, 2018). One of the characteristics of an engaging object encounter is how the object manifests, another relates to imagination of the embodied pasts of the object. Visitors pondered on how the object was made, what was it used as, and the people that were connected to the object. These interactions relate to a physical object but perhaps these concepts could be extended to the virtual. Digital interactions could encourage people to consider these facets of an object not physically present in front of the visitors. In the final stages of thesis writing in June 2018, the carved stone balls that were the fieldwork focus were digitised and made available online (Anderson-Whymark, 2018). The objects can be rotated, the designs observed in detail by zooming in, and one can even view the accession numbers drawn on by museum workers. It would be of great interest to ask the same questions of participants interacting with these virtual carved stone balls, as were asked in front of the balls in the museum.

In addition, there are interesting developments in neuroscience which suggest *thinking* about touch activates the same areas of the brain as when a person physically touches an object. Using Magnetic Resonance Imaging, research groups identified cognitive responses in people when they observed other people or objects being touched (see Blakemore, et al., 2005; Keysers, et al., 2004). Extending this to the museum setting, multimedia could be created that encourage people to 'feel' the virtual objects by visitors looking at the object being touched. This could potentially engage visitors in a bodily manner.

This research project asks questions of objects used in Scotland hundreds or thousands of years ago, they may not be challenging when compared to the adjacent gallery that displays armour and objects related to the theme 'Conflict and Consequence'. However the semi-structured interviews allowed for a range of topics

to emerge. For example an interviewee spoke of the conflict in Syria when discussing the armoury gallery, making contemporary comparison to the weapons they had observed.[268] It is possible the concept of challenging histories could be addressed by examining different objects.

As referred to in the first chapter, social history views history from the bottom up. A combination of this with the lived experienced human-centric focus of phenomenology lends itself to the democratising of the museum. This aspiration of people relating to people is one of the fundamental elements of the future of museum design. At a conference drawing museum designers and practitioners together, there was '…a desire for museums built at a human scale and which involve themselves in real human processes such as engendering curiosity or increased and empathetic awareness of other people and places' (MacLeod, et al., 2018, p.5). If a visitor relates to an object through a familiar means of use or making, both characteristics of engagement, then the visitor may feel connected to the object, be engaged and feel comfortable and welcome in the museum. Focusing on commonalities such as bodily experience of objects could engage visitors more readily.

End?

At the start of this thesis, I outlined my motivation for embarking on the research project. I wished to delve into the world of objects and find out how visitors understand objects with the aim of learning about engagement. And from my findings, translate them into applicable recommendations for curators to create an engaging exhibition. I have achieved this to a certain degree, however there is still more to investigate around objects and engagement. Research as a process is reflected in the quote that opens this chapter which spoke of the process of building Sagrada Familia. And as The Giant advises in David Lynch's 'Twin Peaks', "a path is formed by laying one stone at a time". This thesis has slightly extended into the path of elucidating museum visitor engagement. Much is still to be revealed around object encounters, and the

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more we know about these, then the more we can proceed to broader visitor

engagements with exhibitions and museums.

Appendix

Information Sheet for Participants

Project Title: 'Creating engaging exhibitions; phenomenological investigation of object perception in the museum setting'

Researcher: Oonagh Quigley
Email: oq1@le.ac.uk

Date:
Interview number:

Dear participant,
I am very grateful that you are willing to take part in this research project, explained in more detail below.

What is the project/survey for? My project recognises limits of the museum setting. Objects can be displayed in a situation that is removed from their everyday environment. My research seeks to enhance existing understandings of visitor engagements with displays in social history museums, using a philosophical (phenomenological) approach, in order to find out if there are ways to make objects more engaging in the museum setting.

How you were selected? You were selected because you are over eighteen years old and visiting the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

Your role in completing the project. I will ask you a few questions that will take about 10 minutes. To ensure all comments are captured I will record the survey. I will also use observations of your engagement with museum displays.

Who is doing the survey? I am conducting this research as part of my PhD studies at University of Leicester.

Obtaining informed consent. Your participation in the project is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the project at any point. If you are uncertain or uncomfortable about any aspect of your participation, please contact me to discuss concerns or request clarification on any aspect of the study.

Protecting your confidentiality. Any information you supply will be treated confidentially. All participants will be kept anonymous in any written assignments or publications and the recordings and questionnaires will be securely stored. Every effort will be made to keep participants' anonymity by giving a code number and not recording names of participants, only requesting signature for consent purposes.

Thank you very much for participating,

Observation schedule

Interview number
Time

Setting
- Any activities happening in the museum gallery
- About how many people are in the gallery
- Is it cold/warm inside
- What is the weather like outside

Participant
- Male/female
- Young adult/middle aged/senior
- Time spent looking at display
- Looks at different elements with eyes (written interpretation, different objects, around case)
- Looks at different elements with body (written interpretation, different objects, around case, moves head and body and not just eyes)
- Takes photographs?
- Using camera phone, or has dedicated camera?
- (If with others) talks about the display?
- (If with others) gestures at the display?
- Facial expression – thoughtful/blank/smiling/unhappy/neutral
- Changes body stance – folds arms/moves arms/puts hands in pockets/tilts head to one side/shifts leg position/scratches head/puts hands to face (chin/eyes/mouth)/bends down

Informed Consent Form

Participant to sign, researcher to keep
To be signed before participating in interview

Interview number:

Project title: Creating engaging exhibitions; phenomenological investigation of object perception in the museum setting

Material gathered as part of this study will be treated as confidential and securely stored. All participants will remain anonymous.

I am over eighteen years old Yes ☐ No ☐

I have read and understood the information sheet Yes ☐ No ☐

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and they were answered to my satisfaction Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study prior any time before 31 December 2017 Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to observations made by the researcher of how I engaged with museum displays being used for research Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to being recorded and my words being used for research Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree that my words can be used in any subsequent publications or use, including publication on the World Wide Web (Internet), research publications and conferences and will be shared with the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. I understand that my name will not be used or attributed to any words that I have said, and my signature (and not name) is required only for consent reasons. Yes ☐ No ☐

Signed   _____

Date   _____

Researcher to complete

Interview time   _____

Interview number   _____

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