Unfixing Repair

A critical spatial practice to disorientate
the British Museum's display

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Doctor of Philosophy

This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

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Abstract

This PhD argues for an expanded notion of *repair* which can articulate the ruptures that occur when an object in a museum collection is dissociated both from its history, and its community of origin. To do so it examines the UK based *repair* culture, with the British Museum archive as a focus. This thesis is concerned primarily with objects and artefacts contested by populations, nations and communities. It argues that in hiding damage, cracks, and subsequent *repairs* of cultural objects is to also conceal processes of colonisation, forced removal, denial of repatriation requests, and continued extractivist practices. Such practices maintain a colonial hierarchy between the technologies of preservation and *repair* of the Global North, versus those of the communities to which that object historically belongs.

In my research, I ask: *What is being repaired?* and I argue for an expanded understanding of *repair* beyond that of just *fixing* the damage, suggesting a less technological point of view that prioritises the latest technologies of *repair* over other knowledges, cultures and ideas of *repair*. Following on from this, I investigate the British Museum as an institution and technological apparatus, examining the Museum's universalising and humanitarian discourse and the operation of international organisations such as the ICOM, the UN, and UNESCO.

The PhD consists of two outputs: a thesis, where the ethical and critical positioning is defined and discussed, and a practice component, an installation proposal interconnected with the thesis, where the reader can navigate through a compilation of artefacts collected through the research.

The epistemological framework of the study is informed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos' *postabyssal* thinking,[1] which advocates for a process of methodological decolonisation which allows for ways of knowing, rather than knowledge itself.

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[1] Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

Furthermore, my research draws upon feminist literature, specifically Karen Barad's ethico-onto-epistem-ology[2] and Sara Ahmed's notion of disorientation[3] as a political praxis, as means of justifying a situated practice of *repair*, fracture, and disorientation. As such, this PhD is embedded with an ethical commitment of situating knowledge that does not presume my own neutrality and subjectivity as a researcher. Moreover, the PhD documents a shift from on site and in-situ methods of investigation, to an exploration of the Museum's online digital archive and the proliferation of virtual museum environments mediated by large technology companies, particularly within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In establishing a research framework capable of cultivating *repair*, my research aims to contribute new methods for *unfixing repair* and to address contemporary cultural discourse in museums particularly around *reparation*. The critical spatial practice developed in this PhD addresses ethical and political questions about subjectivity, epistemic ownership, provenance for spatial design practitioners involved in museums.

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[2] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[3] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

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Chapter One: Introduction

Repair

This thesis argues for an expanded notion of *repair* which can articulate the ruptures that occur when an object in a museum collection is dissociated both from its history, and its community of origin. To do so it examines the UK based repair culture, with the British Museum archive as a focus. My research consists of two outputs: a thesis, where the ethical and critical positioning is defined and discussed, and a practice component, an installation proposal documented on the website *Compiling Fragments*. The sections entitled Fragment I, II, III, IV, V connect with the documentation on the website, where the reader can navigate through a series of artefacts collected through the research. The following study argues for an expanded understanding of *repair* as that which would allow for new ways of encountering the museum object beyond that of just *fixing* the damage.

One the things that the research sets out to examine is the question of *preserving* versus *repairing* objects that are stored in a museum, and how each of these methods of sustaining what is in the museum impacts not only the way that the object is displayed, but more importantly the object's relationship with the space and the audience. The aim of this PhD is not to suggest that no cracks have to be mended in objects kept in a museum. What I am trying to highlight is that what we see when we encounter an object in a museum is not quite what it is, due to the ways that various subjectivities have mediated its journey prior to its display. To do so, I use both practice and the written thesis to propose a shift in attention to *repair* away from the idea of static fixedness, by recording and using the moment of *repair* as a schism to open up a different narrative about the object.

A [very] pragmatic aspect of *repair* is that an object is broken, is injured, and therefore may need to be fixed. Therefore, the term *repair* implies some sort of damage, as it is rooted in the Latin word *reparare,* that is 'to prepare again', hence

'to restore', 'to fix':[4] the idea of returning something back to its original state. According to the British Standards Institution (BSI), which produces technical standards for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage, *repair* involves all 'actions applied to an object or part of it in order to recover its functionality and or/its appearance' only 'if it respects significance and is based on evidence'.[5] Moreover, damage is defined as a 'non-beneficial alteration',[6] suggesting damage as undesirable change in, and the degradation of value of, an object. These definitions of *repair* underline museums' conservation research.[7] *Repair* in terms of conservation processes in museums serves as a means of care, and technologies to assess an object, in order to inform decisions about treatment and curatorial strategies. From this standpoint, *repair* links to subjective evaluations in regard to what we count as damage, value, duration and permanence, but also memory, all of which are a priori subjective and culturally specific.

Objects cannot speak for themselves. Therefore, every act of *repair* is entangled with the ideological investments of a subject, be it a restorer, a scientist, an institution, a researcher who has to take rational decisions on the object's behalf. From this standpoint, *repair* in conservation research often stands as a projection of a technoscientific ideology, which may violate the principles of the decay, life and death of objects. If we then dissociate *repair* from a neutral process of *fixing*,

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[4] 'A Tale of Two "Repairs"', Words at Play, *Merriam Webster* <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/a-tale-of-two-repairs> [accessed 9 July 2021].

[5] British Standards Institution, *Conservation of Cultural Property – Main General Terms and Definitions*, CEN BS EN 15898:2019, 2019.

[6] Damage is defined as the "non-beneficial alteration". According to Note 1 to entry; 'Although damage is non-beneficial to the object, it may sometimes be considered as broadening the significance, e.g. traces of war on an object'. Moreover, according to Note 2 to entry; 'According to the context, the French terms "degradation" and "deterioration" can also be used to describe a complete worsening of condition, possibly intentional'. In British Standards Institution.

[7] See for example 'ICOM's Code of Ethics for Museums', ICOM-CC's 'The Conservator-Restorer: A Definition of the Profession' and 'Terminology to characterize the conservation of tangible cultural heritage' in 'ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums', *ICOM*, 2017 <https://icom.museum/wp content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2021]; 'The Conservator-Restorer: A Definition of the Profession', *ICOM-CC* [blog post] <http://www.icom-cc.org/47/about-icom-cc/definition-of-profession/#.YVmbn2ZKhDY> [accessed 9 May 2021]; 'Terminology to Characterize the Conservation of Tangible Cultural Heritage', (Terminology for Conservation), *ICOM-CC* <http://www.icom-cc.org/242/about/terminology-for-conservation/#.YJkJuGZKhTZ> [accessed 9 May 2021].

it does raise the question of how these actions on the object's behalf can be released from the ideological projections of the subject in what its behalf ought to be?

Repair and *reparation* are often placed in opposition within museums: where one offers technological solutions for preserving – or even restoring – an object so that it does not deteriorate further – and the other one argues for the object to be returned to its community of origin. A discourse which often reduces the meaning of *reparation* to that of a financial compensation or by simply giving back objects to their original countries. This contested issue was addressed in the *Sarr-Savoy Report* (2018) which called for French museums to return to their countries, African cultural heritage items that had been taken without consent.[8] The *Sarr-Savoy Report*, written by Senegalese academic Felwine Sarr and French art historian Bénédicte Savoy, proposed an alternative meaning of *reparation* towards what they describe as a 'new relational ethics'.[9] An ethical stance which does not reduce *reparation* to financial compensation, but instead compensation consists in 'offering to repair the relation'.[10]

An effective *reparation*, as Sarr and Savoy state, is an evolving process which should include the recognition of the 'other' outside prejudices, but as one who is capable of working through their own histories and acts of emancipation.[11] Therefore, the subject of restitution of cultural heritage should be placed within broader questions concerning memory work and *reparation* in order to enable communities deprived of their heritage to reconfigure their own relationships with objects, and to reconstruct their histories.[12] From this standpoint, *reparation* is not just linked to financial compensation, and *repair* is not an attempt to bring an object back to an original state – but rather, both *repair* and *reparation* emerge

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[8] The report, *Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics* – known as the *Sarr-Savoy Report* –commissioned in 2017 by French president Emmanuel Macron to Senegalese academic Felwine Sarr and French art historian Benedicte Savoy. In Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics* (Paris: République Française: Ministère de la Culture, 2018) <http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[9] Sarr and Savoy, pp. 39-40.

[10] Ibid., p. 40.

[11] Ibid., pp. 39–41.

[12] Restitution is broadly defined as the return of the object from a museum collection to a party which has a prior and continuing relationship with the object. Repatriation refers to the return of an object of cultural patrimony from a museum collection to a party found to be the true owner or traditional guardian, or their heirs and descendants.

through the acknowledgment of the various complex social and personal histories associated with the said object.

Throughout this thesis I am concerned with how *repair*, as part of the British Museum's strategies of collecting, preserving and display, is entangled with a universalising and humanitarian discourse. Universalism is broadly defined as the view inherited by the Enlightenment according to which 'universal' values and morals, are representative of law, democracy, human rights. This facilitated Western narratives of progress and humanitarianism which produce unequal relationships between subjects and objects, humans and the nonhuman, failing to acknowledge the possibility of their entanglements. I address the problematics of universalism, as a rhetoric that coincides with the systemic ideologies, power structures and geopolitical forces of the British Museum in relation to *repair*.

In my research, I ask: *What is being repaired?* This question addresses the British Museum and items from its collections, as well as the ethical position of the thesis regarding the subject-object divide. More specifically, it concerns the British Museum as an institution and a technological apparatus, examining the Museum's universalising and humanitarian discourse and the operation of international organisations such as the ICOM,[13] the UN,[14] and UNESCO.[15] It also addresses broader historical and cultural processes regarding the relationship between the institution, the public and the claim of a community, such as that of the Torres Strait Islanders (2011-2012) for the return of two items of their ancestral remains. Moreover, it enables a critical examination of the mediation of technologies utilised to study and analyse artefacts such as radiography, and also engages with a specific museum item which has been subjected to various phases of restoration, an object from the Museum's Egyptian collections. Finally, it looks at the threshold between digital and physical portals to the British Museum, considering the proliferation of digital exhibition environments, particularly within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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[13] ICOM is the International Council of Museums, established in Paris in 1946.

[14] United Nations (UN), established in 1945.

[15] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), established in 1945.

Context of the Research

The British Museum and the UK based repair culture

This research has taken place during a renewed interest in concerns about inclusion, institutional racism, restitution and *reparation*, as embedded within the social, political, and economic contexts of Western museums. Recent controversy in Europe and the United States about what to do with anthropological collections of objects displayed, classified and preserved in Western museums highlights the political landscape in which museums operate today. In this landscape, the *Sarr-Savoy Report* [16] came at a moment of increased attention from diverse stakeholders on how museums deal with their colonial pasts, giving rise to activist initiatives and social movements across Europe and the United States which have been prompting Western museums and educational institutions to rethink their practices.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement against structural violence and racism towards Black people, formed in protest at the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, was a point from which matters of justice evolved into questions around cultural heritage.[17] BLM calls, amongst other things, for the permanent return of stolen artefacts to Africa, and for the British Museum to diversify its curatorial team. Although some museums in the UK have started addressing their relationship with colonial violence – the Horniman Museum, for example, has significantly addressed Frederick Horniman's colonial legacy through its relationship with the tea trade,[18] a trade built on the exploitation of people living in the British Empire – the British Museum has been refusing to engage with the issue of decoloniality. For example, after the toppling in Bristol of the statue of

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[16] Sarr and Savoy.

[17] Kwame Opoku, 'British Museum Supports Aims And Objectives Of Black Lives Matter? The Height Of Hypocrisy!', *Modern Ghana*, 15 June 2020 <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1009442/british-museum-supports-aims-and-objectives-of.html> [accessed 9 May 2021]; Lanre Bakare, 'British Museum Boss Defends Moving Bust of Slave-Owning Founder', *Guardian*, 25 August 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/aug/25/british-museum-boss-defends-moving-bust-of-slave-owning-founder> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[18] 'Frederick Horniman's Colonial Legacy', *Horniman* <https://www.horniman.ac.uk/story/frederick-hornimans-colonial-legacy/> [accessed 7 July 2021].

the slave trader Edward Colston,[19] who was personally involved with the transatlantic slave trade,[20] on 5 June 2020, the director of the British Museum, Hartwig Fischer, posted a blog with a statement of solidarity with the Black community. Fischer stated that the British Museum is 'aligned with the spirit and soul of Black Lives Matter Everywhere'.[21] This statement has been highly criticised for ignoring the increasing calls for the Museum to take effective action towards the restitution of objects and issues of diversity, as well as the acknowledgement of its role in spoliation of cultural property.[22]

In recent years anthropology and archaeology academics such as Dan Hicks, visual culture theorist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay and curators Clementine Deliss and Wayne Modest have all published books which directly address European anthropological collections' links with colonialism, while also exposing the ambiguity of how processes of *reparation* and reinstitution occur within these institutions. Moreover, social movements and initiatives such as Rhodes Must Fall, which put pressure on educational institutions to consider their relationship with colonial violence, and the Museum Detox initiative – a network of people of colour who work in museums, galleries, and more broadly within the cultural sector in the UK[23] – argue for issues such as representation and inclusion in art institutions. The Jamaica-based initiative 100 Histories of 100 Worlds in One Object also aims to create space for many voices and stories, including critical narratives from diverse ethnic audiences regarding the British Museum collections.[24] Finally, the Decolonial Collective on Migration of Objects and People, at Brown University, as well as curator Jette Sandahl's initiative to update the International Council of Museum's (ICOM) Museum Definition, evidence a

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[19] Bristol's first elected mayor and member of the Royal African Company.

[20] Haroon Siddique and Clea Skopeliti, 'BLM Protesters Topple Statue of Bristol Slave Trader Edward Colston', *Guardian*, 7 June 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/07/blm-protesters-topple-statue-of-bristol-slave-trader-edward-colston> [accessed 3 April 2021].

[21] 'A Message from Director Hartwig Fischer' [blog post], *British Museum*, 2020 <https://blog.britishmuseum.org/a-message-from-director-hartwig-fischer/> [accessed 29 June 2021].

[22] Opoku, 2013; Errol Francis, 'Breathing, Epistemic Violence and Decolonising UK Heritage' [blog post], 2020 <https://www.errolfrancis.com/blog-posts/breathing-epistemic-violence-and-decolonising-uk-heritage#_ftn6> [accessed 27 May 2021]; Bakare.

[23] *Museum Detox* <https://www.museumdetox.org/> [accessed 7 July 2021].

[24] Mirjam Brusius, '100 Histories of 100 Worlds in One Object (Kingston, 10-11 Dec. 19)', *ArtHist.net,* 2019 https://arthist.net/archive/22225.

shift in the contemporary discourse that draws attention to issues of inequality, human rights and migration, and how these issues cannot be seen outside the imperial context of the establishment and operation of Western museums.[25] [26] [27] Against the background of the pressure that the British Museum – along with many other Western institutions – has received from these initiatives and movements on an institutional level, the discussions between museums and communities are still highly mediated by institutions such as ICOM, the UN and UNESCO, which fail to take any action to address the pressure exerted by social movements and initiatives.

Hartwig Fischer, Director of the British Museum, characterised the taking of the Parthenon Marbles as a 'creative act',[28] and the Director of the V&A, Tristram Hunt, recently said that 'Our trustees are bound not to "deaccession" items; once something enters the collection, it can't leave'.[29] Both statements on the one hand highlight the denial of any effective response to the numerous calls for the return of cultural objects in recent years, and on the other evidence how the issues of restitution and *reparation* are often reduced to a binary choice of retaining everything versus returning everything, hence the fear of an empty gallery.[30] Instead, an effective discourse, according to Dan Hicks, is one which addresses the blind spots and institutional racism embedded within the very idea of a 'universal' and 'encyclopaedic' museum.[31] He thus suggests that this

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[25] Jette Sandahl, 'The Museum Definition as the Backbone of ICOM', *Museum International*, 71.1–2 (2019), vi–9 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13500775.2019.1638019>[accessed 9 May 2021].

[26] 'Decolonial Collective on Migration of Objects and People' [blog post], *Brown University* <https://blogs.brown.edu/decolonialcollective/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[27] *Museum of Homelessness* <https://museumofhomelessness.org/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[28] Hartwig Fischer, cited in Mark Brown, 'British Museum Chief: Taking the Parthenon Marbles Was "Creative"', *Guardian*, 28 January 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jan/28/british-museum-chief-taking-the-parthenon-marbles-was-creative> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[29] Tristram Hunt, cited in Judith Wood, 'Tristram Hunt: "Once Something Enters the Museum, It Can't Leave"', *Telegraph*, 27 August 2021 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/0/tristram-hunt-something-enters-museum-cant-leave/> [accessed 27 September 2021].

[30] Sally Price and Dan Hicks, 'Has the Sarr-Savoy Report Had Any Effect since It Was First Published?', *Apollo*, 6 January 2020.

[31] Anthropologist Dan Hicks discusses this in particular in the case of repatriation of the Benin Bronzes from the anthropological collections (including those of the British Museum and the Pitt Rivers) to Nigeria to argue that the priority is the recognition of the symbolic and epistemic violence that museums' intellectual community holds. See Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020); Price and Hicks.

acknowledgment is one that would potentially actualise *repair*,[32] through the transformation of museums from sites of violence or trauma to 'sites of conscience'.[33]

At this point it is important to clarify that my research aligns with the position that the restitution of colonial looted items is not a question of taking sides, which reduces the complexity of this issue to a problem-solving approach. In turn, taking a position regarding the return of cultural artefacts is beyond the scope of my research, due to my acknowledgment of the complexity of these issues, and as it is something which requires a case-by-case approach. As curator Wayne Modest has highlighted in his conversation with curators Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and Margareta von Oswald, there is a danger of oversimplifying the complex issue of restitution within a framework of nostalgia, in which to give back is a retreat to an earlier stage in history, or worse, pretending that the history of removal – and the accompanying violence – never happened.[34] *Repair*, Modest suggests, might present a different alternative, as 'the space for working through'.[35]

Hicks, elaborating on Britain's national museums' colonial spoliation of cultural property, writes that:

> The power of the museum begins with the skill of the conservator. Slowing decay to a near standstill creates the familiar illusion, that most seductive of myths, that the passage of time itself might be halted, that things can be kept the same.[36]

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[32] Hicks, 2020, p. 235.

[33] Ibid., p. 4.

[34] Wayne Modest, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, and Margareta von Oswald, 'Objects/Subjects in Exile. A Conversation between Wayne Modest, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, and Margareta von Oswald', *L'Internationale Online*, 2017 <https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/89_objects_subjects_in_exile_a_conversation_between_wayne_modest_bonaventure_soh_bejeng_ndikung_and_margareta_von_oswald/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[35] Wayne Modest, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, and Margareta von Oswald.

[36] Hicks, 2020, p. 230.

In contemporary debates in the UK around the ethics of the discipline of conservation, conservators such as Jane Henderson have tried to challenge the dominant narrative that 'keeping things for longer is better', foregrounding the complexity of power structures and the false assumption of neutrality in decisions to prolong the life of objects.[37] Jane Henderson writes:

> The complexity and uncertainty of value and its relation to what is perceived as desirable or undesirable change can lead to a heuristic shortcut that mobilises a definition of damage based on measurable effects.[38]

Following on from this, Henderson asks, 'who do we exclude when keep things for the future?', arguing for conservation practices which are less centred on the future, as the longest lifetime of an object, but which put equal attention to the cultural practices and life experiences that connect objects with people.[39] This focus on the measurable entails an investment in an object's past, in an effort to mediate and disguise signs of trauma and injury and to secure the so-called 'authentic condition' of an object, a prevailing notion in conservation research. As noted by art historian Hanna Hölling, the term 'authentic condition' connects to a sequential understanding of time in capitalist societies, in which a return to the past entails the notion of a recoverable past, often exposing the lack of an appropriate conception of time,[40] suggesting preservation as a false assumption on the basis of which Western museology has colonised objects.

Following on from this, in order to inform my understanding and knowledge about conservation research I investigated two publications, the ICOM-CC

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[37] Jane Henderson, 'Beyond Lifetimes: Who Do We Exclude When We Keep Things for the Future?', *Journal of the Institute of Conservation*, 43.3 (2020), 195–212 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19455224.2020.1810729>.

[38] Henderson.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Hanna B. Hölling, 'Time and Conservation', in *ICOM-CC 18th Triennial Conference Preprints*, ed. by J. Bridgland (Copenhagen: International Council of Museums, 2017); *The Explicit Material Inquiries on the Intersection of Curatorial and Conservation Cultures*, ed. by Hanna B. Hölling, Francesca G. Bewer, and Katharina Ammann, Studies in Art & Materiality (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

Triennial Conference proceedings and preprints[41] and the *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin*, a journal which documents the nature of conservation research conducted from 2007 to 2015 in the British Museum. As part of my research to ICOM-CC's archival material, I document imagery which indicate ways of treatments, repairs and tools utilised in conservation. This compilation is displayed on the webpage entitled 'Fragment I: Wear and Tear', and in the thesis's section with the respective title wherein I also outline Western and non-Western approaches to *repair*. The technical investigation published in the *Research Bulletin* in 2008, under the title 'A New Look at an Old Cat'[42] will be thoroughly analysed in 'Fragment II: A crack'. An in-depth historical tracing of the origins of conservation research is beyond the scope of this research. My focus instead is to show how conservation in Western museums is bound up with museums' systemic ideologies; as part of this I also examine non-Western approaches to *repair*, as an alternative point of view which would offer a way of transcending the subject-object divide and opening up a different narrative. My purpose is to justify how the backstage machinery in the Museum's laboratory wherein objects are subjected to various *repairs*, is that which also legitimatises their location in the institution, and a contentious space wherein my research is willing to intervene.

Pandemic research

It is important to outline how my research has been affected by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, as the initial plan was to proceed with series of in situ observations and documentation practices in the British Museum's galleries, storage facilities and conservation laboratories. However, the outbreak of the pandemic and the consequent national lockdowns didn't allow this linear

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[41] International standards and aims for museum conservation practices are set by ICOM-CC, the International Council of Museums, Committee for Conservation. It has its origins in a Commission for the Care of Paintings that was established in 1948, the year after the founding of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). The aim of this Commission, which was composed of museum directors and curators, was to gather information on all aspects of the examination, recording, cleaning and repair of paintings. Due to the increasing interest in conservation practices, since 1967 ICOM-CC has held their conferences every three years, and the topics discussed and published are centred around conservation problems, development of standard techniques and manuals, disaster management and preventive conservation. The British Museum has been part of ICOM-CC Triennial conferences since then. Conference proceedings and preprints are accessible in 'ICOM-CC Publications Online' https://www.icom-cc-publications-online.org/.

[42] Janet Ambers and others, 'A New Look at an Old Cat: A Technical Investigation of the Gayer-Anderson Cat', *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin*, 2 (2008), 1–12.

progression, and as a result I had to look for alternative ways to approach the British Museum by proxy. I thus shifted my attention from the physical to the digital portals of the Museum, using Google Street View, an application which was promoted by the Museum as an alternative means of accessing the Museum space from home, and was established as part of British Museum's collaboration with Google Arts & Culture. Google Arts & Culture is an online platform of high-resolution images, videos and applications that offers alternatives to face-to-face visits to experience art. Since 2011, it collaborates with more than 1,200 museums and art galleries across the world. Considering the increasing proliferation of virtual platforms, galleries, museums – particularly within the context of Covid-19 pandemic – I shift my attention to the digital environment of the British Museum in order to observe and record how the logics of the platform museum. Here, the universalising rhetoric of the Museum is examined in parallel with Google's claim to be organising the world's information. Moreover, moving my observation into the digital realm, I examine tensions between displaying objects digitally versus displaying them in the physical space of the Museum. More specifically, I focus on how these new navigational paradigms do not just represent the Museum, but, drawing from Harun Farocki's concepts of 'operative' and 'computer-animated, navigable images' I examine how digital imagery move beyond mere representation and 'start doing things in the world'.[43]

Critical Spatial Practice

The practical output of this PhD intersects with critical spatial practices, due to the central argument of the thesis regarding *repair*, which generates a bridge and unites the history of the institution with the histories of how certain objects find their place within it. *Compiling Fragments* is a proposal for an installation which compiles fragments of the research, and exhibits them as proxies and abstractions of the real museum object, which is either not accessible or is difficult to find when hidden in the archive. It comprises five

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[43] Harun Farocki, 'Phantom Images', *Public*, 0.29 (2004)
<https://public.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/public/article/view/30354> [accessed 9 May 2021]; Farocki, Harun, *Harun Farocki: Computer Animation Rules* (IKKM, 2014) [lecture] <https://vimeo.com/100092938> [accessed 20 May 2021].

sections (Fragment I, II, III, IV, V), the documentation of which is organised into five different web pages. Each of these sections appears in the thesis, with its respective title.

'Fragment I: Wear and Tear' serves as an introduction to my research approach to *repair* and displays a compilation of imagery of artefacts from the *ICOM-CC* Triennial Conference proceedings and preprints. 'Fragment II: Letters' is a compilation of an exchange of documents between the Torres Strait Islanders (TSI) community in Oceania and the British Museum requesting the repatriation of two divining skulls (2011- 2012), which the Museum denied in 2012. These documents are publicly accessible via the Museum's website, but they are also fragmented; therefore, by putting them together in order to tell the narrative of the dispute between the community and the Museum, I am trying to highlight that the British Museum, as much as the objects it exhibits, also exhibits the myth that it is the best custodian, which the thesis unpacks and critiques. 'Fragment III: A Crack' sets out to explore the Gayer-Anderson Cat, one of the most precious items in the Egyptian collection, according to the Museum's website.[44] From the outside, the object looks complete, but the close-up X-ray analysis showed that the object had suffered serious damage. The 'crack' is a vehicle to examine an alternative narrative of *repair*.

'Fragment IV: Blurriness' juxtaposes high-resolution with low-resolution images. It touches upon the issue of image resolution in relation to the rhetoric of democratisation and the accessibility of collections. Drawing upon the virtual gallery tour – made as a collaboration between Google Arts & Culture and the British Museum – I show the macroscale resolution of the camera from the satellite imagery versus the microscale resolution of the camera for the scanning of museum objects, to discuss the problematics of the rhetoric of universalism, as employed by both the Museum and Google. More specifically, I discuss how the same technical logistics, from Google Street View to museum objects when applied outside a museum context, such as in

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[44] 'The Gayer-Anderson Cat', *British Museum* <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/animals/gayer-anderson-cat> [accessed 3 April 2021].

Gaza during May 2021, indicate different operations of the same technologies outside cultural institutions.

One of the ethical positions of the thesis is to suggest that the research itself is an object which has been subject to various *repairs* through the years. 'Fragment V: Fragments of Fragments' features the space of this research within which various iterations occur. I have documented the process of my research and staged it on the wall of my room, along with all the artefacts: research, artefacts, photographs, archival material, books and diagrams, as a means of showing the ethics of my work as an intervention against this particular moment that is moving us away from *repair*. Positioning this installation as a proxy for the Museum, I stage all the artefacts in my room, where I have been developing most of this body of work since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is my means to demonstrate the ethical stance of this PhD in relation to the subject of investigation.

The term *compilation* or *compiling* instead of *archive* or *archiving* is used critically within the context of my research. Santos writes that the Western archive has a 'twofold power':

> the power to produce or select the kind of knowledge that is worthy of being stored, and the power of pretending that there is no selection at all, and that, therefore, the act of selecting and the mode of storing, in themselves do not amount to new knowledge.[45]

My research is situated critically against the archival impulse, and as a counter to this, my practice, is a way to suggest that acts of *repair* throughout this investigation are comprised of fragments of objects, and often by fragments of fragments, which are not rigidly fixed, but elusive and embedded in my own situatedness. The way that practice and research are woven together is close to what Jane Rendell has described as a 'critical spatial practice'.[46] For Rendell, the

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[45] Santos, 2018, p. 197.

[46] Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: IB Tauris, 2006); Jane Rendell, 'Critical Spatial Practice', *Art Incorporated*, 2008 <https://janerendell.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/critical-spatial-practice.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2021].

'critical' extends from theory to practice, to include those practices that involve social critique, self-reflection and social change, opening new possibilities for thinking about the relationship between art and architecture.[47] In alignment with this, the practical expression and outputs of this PhD take the form of a proposal for an installation, in which fragments of my research take the form of a spatialised narrative on *repair*, and as such I investigate what Rendell has called a 'place between theory and practice',[48] drawing also upon how the themes of *repair*, disorientation and fracture relate to my subjective position as the researcher. The themes are outlined in greater detail in chapter two.

My practice is informed by the work of spatial design practitioners, artists, curators whose practices often interrogate systems, institutions, political and social forces through spatial materialisation of these issues. Curator Anselm Franke speaks of museums as de-animating machines in the digital exhibition and research project *Animism* (2020),[49] due to the way in which any object that enters the museum and becomes the subject of conservation necessarily becomes fixed and identified within a wider classificatory order of knowledge. From a 'forensic architecture' perspective, ordinary objects such as popcorn acquire a different function and become 'earwitnesses' in the work of Lawrence Abu Hamdan's for the exhibition *Earwitness Theatre* (2018), oscillating between listening and testimony to re-stage the environment of a prison.[50] In Abu Hamdan's practice, a process of reconstruction combines survivors' earwitness testimony and the architecture of the prison in an expanded library of objects wherein stories are translated into objects to accommodate into legal arguments.

The conceptual and critical possibilities of these practices, through the means of translating an idea or event from one medium to another, have been key for

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[47] Rendell, 2008.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Anselm Franke, 'Animism', *E-flux*, 24 November 2020 [digital exhibition] <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/362949/animism/>.

[50] Lawrence Abu Hamdan, 'Earwitness Theatre' (Chisenhale Gallery, 2018).

understanding complex interactions between spatial practices and media beyond their conventional forms. An act of remediation, as a move between text and space is manifested in the work of Penelope Haralambidou, in which the theme of a book, *The Book of the City of Ladies*,[51] translates into an exhibition through a series of spatial abstractions that speak to the way the very act of writing a book parallels the construction of an imaginary city, both of which challenge misogyny.[52] Furthermore, there is a situated practice of feminism, and as such the transition between mediums is also to take a position regarding the 'female body politic' which extends to architectural practices.[53]

Eyal Weizman, of Forensic Architecture, writes:

> We need to look at architecture as an assembly of materials that continuously register the environment, the building as a sensor that records events in the world around it. We must also understand that, as a material thing, architecture is an actor too, and participates in producing history.[54]

My thesis conducts research across sites in the British Museum such as, the scientific laboratory and the gallery, and each of them is considered as both a 'register' and a 'sensor' of the political and social forces that are applied to, and through, them onto the museum object. From this standpoint, the spatial organisation of the museum is complicit with the meaning attributed to the object, and how this is received by the visitor in the gallery. To do so, I investigate particular spatial issues, paying attention to the relationship between the British Museum's spatial organisation and the exhibited object, and how this is often organised according to the ideology of damage prevention. Damage

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[51] A book written by the Italian/French medieval author Christine de Pizan (1364 – c.1430).

[52] Penelope Haralambidou, 'Extract from: "The Female Body Politic: Remodelling the Book of the City of Ladies"', in *Architecture & Collective Life* (presented at the 16th Annual International Conference of the Architectural Humanities Research Association, University of Dundee, 2019) <https://domobaal.com/resources/penelopeharalambidou/penelope-haralambidou-the-female-body-politic-extract.pdf>.

[53] Penelope Haralambidou.

[54] Eyal Weizman, cited in Andrew Ayers, 'Forensic Architecture: An Interview With Eyal Weizman', *PIN-UP*, n.d. <https://pinupmagazine.org/articles/forensic-architecture-an-interview-with-eyal-weizman>.

prevention here, relates to preventative conservation strategies, which entail the analysis of measures and actions aimed at avoiding and minimising future deterioration or loss. These concerns are directly projected onto the architecture of the space, addressing decisions such as the relationship between architectural elements of doorways, windows, ceiling height and the exhibited items. For instance, in the section entitled 'Monitoring Damage Through Space', I look at the work of conservators who have studied the relationship between environmental conditions, architectural elements and exhibited items. Moreover, I look at the analysis of the British Museum architectural layout undertaken by the architectural design practice of Space Syntax in the early 2000s. From this standpoint, my research approach to *repair* concerns also the very space of the Museum, its curatorial intentions, layout and mechanisms of exhibition design.

Tensions Between Knowledge and Practice

Drawing from the emerging discussions around design and decoloniality, it is important to note that in recent years there has been an increasing discourse on decolonisation, which often reduces the meaning of practices and movements to hollow gestures. Noting both a lack of depth and tokenism in the current discourse of decolonisation, particularly in relation to design practices, Tristan Schultz, in the Decolonising Design Group's roundtable discussion 'What Is at Stake with Decolonising Design?' argued that this is partially due to the 'techno-mediating methods though which "decolonising design" is explored', as well as a lack of critical reflection in the interrogation of coloniality. In the same discussion, Ahmed Ansari observed that he sees a productive process of decolonisation as that which requires a 'threefold move'.[55] According to Ansari, 'we first need an account of the artificial and of the condition of artificiality'; secondly 'we situate this account in relation to the problem of modernity and the modern world system, in order to develop it into something that explains what the technical foundations of modernity are', and finally we turn to 'the consideration of other, possible artificials – of alternatives to the systems of

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[55] Tristan Schultz and others, 'What Is at Stake with Decolonizing Design? A Roundtable', *Design and Culture*, 10 (2018), 81–101, p. 84.

technics we have today'.[56] Similarly, Boaventura de Sousa Santos notices the failure of the social and political forces that attempt to challenge the current state of affairs, noting how this is largely co-opted by neoliberalism, to suggest that 'we don't need alternatives; we need rather an alternative thinking of alternatives'.[57]

Henry Giroux' humanist framework of 'critical pedagogy' sees the potential permeability between disciplines as a dynamic and contested space, which resists portraying disciplines as closed, arguing that learning is a political act with political purposes.[58] Although Giroux have tried to challenge the notion of neutrality in education in academia, Santos sees a pedagogy of 'unlearning' as that which stands critically against the institutional and pedagogical contexts of academic research, signalling academia as an extractivist enterprise itself.[59] Santos asserts that a process of 'unlearning' is not a process of forgetting, but one which challenges scientific knowledge as the only valid knowledge, and in turn, 'unlearning' requires a critical stance towards disciplines, specialisation and methodologies, considering them as part of the so-called 'North'. In this way, he argues that a *postabyssal* pedagogy is that which defamiliarises the familiar, and stands critically against training, theories, and methodologies as established within academic social science.[60] My research aligns with what Santos proposes as a *postabyssal* pedagogy, however due to the nature of this body of work, as part of the institution of the Royal College of Art, I believe it is important to acknowledge this as a very long process. As Santos writes:

> the postabyssal researcher's dilemma is to have to acknowledge that she herself is the abyssal line, and that constructing the postabyssal is, above all, an act of self-destruction. The required work of self-reflexivity and self- transformation is an almost inhuman effort to bring about humanity. It will take several generations of postabyssal researchers to accomplish

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Santos, 2018, p. vii.

[58] Henry Armand Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011).

[59] Santos, 2018, pp. 154-55

[60] Santos, 2018, pp. 209–267.

the work and eventually overcome the current paradigm of extractivist knowledge.[61]

In a similar vein, Tom Holert notes the tension between knowledge, research and practice within Western educational institutions, meaning it is absorbed into a globalised knowledge economy, offering a view of art as essentially epistemic activity.[62] One of the symptoms of what Holert describes as the 'epistemization of art' is that within these contexts, artists have been routinely addressed as special human beings, distinguished as creatures who think creatively against mainstream rationality. He explains:

> contemporary art as both an institutional framework and a multitude of individual artistic practices not only proves to be complicit in fostering neoliberal notions of knowledge as an endlessly exchangeable commodity and instrument of social hierarchization but also can provide in rare but important cases the very organizational structures, theoretical devices, and material contexts to sustain multi-layered work on the dislocation and repurposing of knowledge itself.[63]

As title of his book *Knowledge Beside Itself* suggests, Holert sees the coupling of art with research as part of a knowledge economy, in which 'the politics of the self' should be critically examined in parallel with 'the politics of the knowledge'.[64] This is a view regarding the politics of our locations is also shared by the work of feminist scholars such as Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, which my research draws on in greater detail.[65] [66] One of the issues associated with the blending of knowledge and practice might be found – for instance, in Christopher Frayling's paper *Research in Art and Design*, one of the more frequently cited papers at RCA –

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[61] Ibid., p. 174.

[62] Tom Holert, Knowledge Beside Itself: Contemporary Art's Epistemic Politics (Berlin: Sternberg Press), p.10.

[63] Ibid., p.18.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Karen Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[66] Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1988), 575–99.

to be a means of justifying the relation of PhD research to practice. Frayling poses the question 'How can I tell what I am till I see what I make and do?' as an open query to address the relationality of knowledge with artistic or design practice in academia.[67] Within this context, Frayling highlights that in research *through art and design*, the meaning is presented and discussed by the individual's process of designing artefacts as part of the research, which in turn entangles knowledge and practice within the individual's process of learning. In contrast to this view, Holert has highlighted the problematics of coupling knowledge to the individual self, as a way of advancing neoliberal notions of knowledge production within academia.[68] Similarly, Santos' epistemologies of the South, and indigenous ethics warn about the dangers of 'a perverse anti-Cartesianism' where instead of 'the mind being embodied, the body becomes the letting go of the mind' subjecting the body into tecno-corporeal forms of knowledge production in capitalist societies.[69]

Extending from the way that notions of art, artist, design and designer found their place within the Western humanities canon, it is important to draw attention to the way they have also been subject to various forms of universalisation within Western museums. In chapter three, I study in detail how humanitarian discourse regarding human rights as 'a view from nowhere' ties human rights to cultural rights, hence naturalising a division of rights between Western institutions who claim stewardship versus the communities to which objects belong, but whose voices have been excluded from ICOM, the UN, and UNESCO. Neil MacGregor's curatorial proposition *A History of the World in 100 Objects* is a primary example of this rhetoric.[70] As Mirjam Brusius writes:

> Instead, it reinstated the idea of a 'view from nowhere' and everywhere at
> the same time: The museum as a place to see the world; yet without any

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[67] Christopher Frayling, *Research in Art and Design* (London: Royal College of Art, 1993), I, p. 5.

[68] Holert.

[69] Santos, 2018, p.89.

[70] Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (London: Penguin Books, 2011).

reflection on how the institution itself obtained and reframed the objects in order to create its own (seemingly universal) narrative.[71]

Moreover, a rhetoric of innovation and creativity is often embraced within museums. For instance, the Design Museum states on its website: 'Design is a way to understand the world and how you can change it',[72] a future-oriented storytelling where the logic of individual choice and responsibility reflects a neoliberal orientation of the market economy, similar to the context of art and design education, in which people pursue their own interests. In a similar manner, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, on its website, frames its focus as centred on human creativity: 'The V&A is the world's leading museum of art and design, housing a permanent collection of over 2.3 million objects that span over 5,000 years of human creativity'.[73] The British Museum's website invites the viewer to 'Discover two million years of human history and culture'.[74]

My research stands critically against models such as the STEM/STEAM agendas, or the ideology of 'design thinking',[75] in which the targeted insertion of different disciplines and approaches is seen as part of a techno-determinist rhetoric of innovation around the creativity of design as problem solving – an approach that often succumbs to a neoliberal entrepreneurial model that Eleanor Dare notes as 'underpinned by techno-determinist belief in reductionist, "universal" (as in white Western) design solutions'.[76] In this way, my research is not grounded in ways of solving a problem, but instead leans towards gestures of formulating the 'problem space', as discussed by Celia Lury.[77] Moreover, the research does not

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[71] Mirjam Brusius, '100 Histories of 100 Worlds in One Object (Kingston, 10-11 Dec. 19)', *ArtHist.net,* 2019 <https://arthist.net/archive/22225>.

[72] 'Design', *Design Museum* <https://designmuseum.org/design> [accessed 9 February 2021].

[73] 'About Us', *V & A Museum* <https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/about-us> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[74] 'The British Museum', *British Museum* <https://www.britishmuseum.org/> [accessed 3 September 2021].

[75] Donald A. Norman, Emotional Design: Why We Love (Or Hate) Everyday Things (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Tim Brown and Barry Katz, Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation (New York: HarperCollins, 2019).

[76] Eleanor Dare, 'Teaching Machines: Platforms, Pedagogies and the Wicked Problem of Design Thinking', *The Post-Pandemic University*, 1.1, 1 (29 July 2020) <https://postpandemicuniversity.net/2020/07/29/teaching-machines-platforms-pedagogies-and-the-wicked-problem-of-design-thinking/>[accessed 3 April 2021].

[77] Celia Lury, Problem Spaces: How and Why Methodology Matters (Cambridge: Polity, 2021).

engage with design solutions, in alignment with Evgeny Morozov's critique of technological solutionism; design ideas that embrace digital technologies as a tool for freedom and democracy, and technical – rather than political or social – solutions.[78]

Against this language of innovation and creativity I situate the ethics and methodological approach of this body of work and practice around Lury's concept of 'problem space'.[79] Lury argues that problems do not exist outside the action performed, and in turn the actions performed are those which formulate the problem. In this way, the space generated around a problem is a topological, dynamic space which is comprised of various methods and methodologies, as well as the subjectivity of the researcher who is performing it.[80]

In Lury's description a 'problem space' is a 'representation of a problem in terms of relations between three components: givens, goals and operators'.[81] In this definition, 'givens' are the facts which describe a problem, 'goals' are the desired outputs, and 'operations' are the actions performed towards the goals.[82] Lury argues that the space of forming a problem is a space with methodological potential in the sense that relations between givens, goals and operations are dynamic and constantly evolving.[83] Therefore, through the acts performed in the process of putting a problem together, a composition of methods 'emerges *across* a problem space, from with-in and out-with'.[84]

In the context of my research, Lury's argument on how various methods could be described as active and situated actions stemming from, and part of, problem

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[78] Evgeny Morozov, To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism (New York: Public Affairs, 2013).

[79] Lury, 2021.

[80] Celia Lury, 'Introduction' in *Routledge Handbook of Interdisciplinary Research Methods*, ed. by Celia Lury, and others. (London and New York: Routledge, 2018); Celia Lury, 'Compositional Methodology: On the Individuation of a Problematic of the Contemporary', in *Thinking the Problematic - Genealogies and Explorations between Philosophy and the Sciences - Philosophy*, ed. by Oliver Leistert and Isabell Schrickel (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2020), pp. 127–52.

[81] Lury, 2021, p. 2.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., Introduction.

[84] Ibid., p. 3.

spaces, is understood as a process of slowing down, pausing and evaluating several operations which took place during my investigation. More specifically, the agency of methods such as {*reading, writing, navigating, compiling, rendering, zooming in and zooming out, scrolling, screenshot-ing, simulating, 3D modelling, disseminating, re-constructing, re-staging and repairing*} are individually understood as specific actions which led the research.

Along these lines, my research approach to art and design practices sits more comfortably with the idea of *researching as practising* or *practising as researching*, meaning that the research and its practical outputs are discussed and produced by the very process of both doing the research and its practice as a whole, and the practical outputs cannot be seen outside the context of the thesis, where the ethics are justified. Therefore, if we imagine that the research is the internal space of the British Museum, the ideas that I have in it, together with the following chapters, the images, the practical work, bring about the unified whole – which returns us to one of the central questions of my research: *What is being repaired?*

Research Outline

In chapter two: A Process to Find One's Way, I introduce the epistemological and methodological framework of this PhD. The chapter also entails a description of my situated positions, drawing critically on feminist and decolonial theory. An account of my research journey at the RCA during the years of my PhD is outlined here, in order to reflect upon my trajectory as a researcher between the School of Communication and the School of Architecture, and during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as how my orientation has been shifted in different directions due to the various institutional dynamics and personal motivations, and how this is embodied in my situated practice. Following this, the section 'Fragment I: Wear and Tear' serves as an introduction to this PhD's approach to *repair*.

The dominance of Western museums within the context of colonialism and extractivism is a central concern in chapter three: Views from Nowhere. This chapter introduces the British Museum archive, and looks at how its practices of

collecting, preserving and displaying objects parallel a set of extractivist acts against the South; communities to whom these objects belong and people whose rights to these objects have been denied, hence naturalising a division of rights. In so doing, this chapter sheds light on how colonisation has enabled the appearance of a range of subject positions, and technologies, that together partially accounted for the transformation of existing practices within a specific geo-historical site, underlined by a universalising rhetoric. To do so I will look at the 'Declaration of the Importance and Values of Universal Museums', ICOM's Museum Definition, written in 2007. Moreover, I examine the recent negotiations around the updating of the Definition, a core document in ICOM's relationships with partner organisations and the backbone of its operation. Further, I conduct an analysis of the operations of the UN and UNESCO, and how the humanitarian discourse that is often adopted by those institutions intertwines human rights with the problematics of the so-called 'universal museum'. After the end of this chapter, the section 'Fragment II: Letters' explores in great detail the claim for the repatriation of two Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains.

Chapter four: Portals between Physical and Digital worlds analyses the spatial configuration of the Museum, and how and why my research shifted to an online investigation of the space during the Covid-19 pandemic. At this stage of my research, I had planned to conduct in-situ investigation at the British Museum. The objective of this fieldwork was to observe the spatial organisation of the Museum, to access the basements, storage spaces and conservation laboratories. In order to investigate the physical spaces by proxy, I draw upon archaeologist Stephanie Moser's discussion of the representation of ancient Egypt in the Museum,[85] the film *You Hide Me* by Ghanaian filmmaker Nii Kwate Owoo,[86] and is testimony to the Museum's storage spaces in which African objects were stored in the 1970s, as well as a series of studies made by conservators up to the early 2000s regarding the Museum's preventative conservation. The section entitled 'Fragment III: A Crack' investigates the Gayer-Anderson Cat; an item from the British Museum

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[85] Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2006).

[86] *You Hide Me*, dir. Nii Kwate Owoo (Ifriqiyah Films, 1973).

Egyptian Collection, which has been subjected to various *repairs*, and I draw attention to other potential narratives its crack may unleash.

Following from this, I look at how the Museum's rhetoric of diverse accessibility, visitor engagement and democratisation translate into the layout of the Museum, and into the involvement of spatial design practices. More specifically, I investigate the way the circulation and navigation of the British Museum is designed and how the spatial analysis undertaken by Space Syntax architectural design researchers ties in with the concept of 'public value' and 'free entry' to the Museum.

The second part of this chapter is organised as 'Self-Guided Tour', using Google Street View as an alternative means of accessing the Museum space. 'Fragment V: Blurriness' is weaved within my analysis to articulate how technology mediates the Museum's experience. 'Fragment VI: Fragments of Fragments' returns to the concept of *repair* as central to this investigation.

The final chapter of the thesis offers a summary of the research findings and elaborates on further thoughts about the thesis, with the aim of elucidating my original contribution to knowledge and identifying other areas to which this investigation might be applicable.

Chapter Two: A Process to Find One's Way

Postabyssal Thinking

Observing the declining effectiveness of current social and political solutions to combat inequality and discrimination, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in his book *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, suggests that global justice would come through an epistemological shift that guarantees cognitive justice.[87] Central here is Santos' ideas of 'cognitive injustice' as a condition where inequality exists between the different ways of knowing and different kinds of knowledge: a dichotomy that classifies and organises the world, people and knowledge. Santos defines an *abyssal* line, a depthless line that divides the subject from the object, the metropolitan from the colonial, the human from the subhuman, the North from the South in a cultural, not in a geographical sense. The Northern side of this line is ruled by dichotomies of regulation and emancipation, and the other side by appropriation and violence.

Santos points out that this boundary – the *abyssal* line – extends to the dualism embedded in modern science and philosophical traditions. These divisions are epistemologically and ontologically different, and their recognition is the first step toward what he describes as a *postabyssal* thinking: a thinking that entails 'learning with' the South through the employment of 'epistemologies of the South'. Epistemologies of the South are those which redirect attention to the body and the senses, and do not come as an alternative, but as an alternative thinking of alternatives.[88] Therefore, they propose an ecology of knowledges and have as a common ground the decolonisation of Western modes of knowledge production against all forms of epistemic sovereignty.[89]

Museums and archives are institutions which operate, build upon and transmit knowledge, in ways that are historically linked to epistemological traditions of

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[87] Santos, 2018.

[88] Ibid., p. viii.

[89] Ibid., pp. 5–8.

the North. The Western museum has been historically established and has functioned as a repository of knowledge, a knowledge that is disseminated via objects which have been collected, classified and displayed for an audience. As has been discussed by museum scholars such as Tony Bennett, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Sharon MacDonald and Stephanie Moser, the various practices and means of disseminating this knowledge in museums are political, and cannot be examined outside the power dynamics of each period.[90] From the early 'cabinets of curiosity', which were conceived as microcosms of the world for the Western viewer, and the expansive galleries of anthropology, science, art collections – byproducts of trade and colonisation – that developed in the twentieth century, to the more recent orientation of museums towards the bureaucratic and technocentric, which is underpinned by a universalising rhetoric. Even though the latter is thoroughly analysed throughout the thesis, with the British Museum archive as a focus, here I outline my position as researcher through the *postabyssal* epistemological framework of this study. This results from the way that I believe that my own trajectory as a researcher, as well as certain directions and detours which had to be taken during the process of my research, are of epistemological value and set the grounds for how the research sits critically toward a situated *postabyssal* thinking.

The question of epistemology is of central concern to this investigation. First, it concerns the ways of knowing that are favoured in museums whilst others are excluded. For instance, in chapter three I review how the British Museum's archive and practices are highly mediated by the operation of international organisations such as ICOM, the UN, and UNESCO. The bureaucratic agenda of these institutions, in accordance with the Museum's universalism, reproduces colonial ways of knowing people, places, cultures and ways of being whilst often excluding the voices of the communities to which museum objects belong. Therefore often the validity of the knowledge

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[90] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Eilean Greenhill-Hooper, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992); *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, ed. by Sharon Macdonald (London: Routledge, 1998); Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago University Press, 2006).

produced does not depend on any specific social, cultural, or political context, but is rather universal.

As a counter to this universal rhetoric, epistemology in my research concerns 'my' own ways of knowing and learning as a researcher. As suggested by Lury, the 'problem space' is a container space, and the process of composing the problem has an epistemological value.[91] Through my own process of formulating the 'problem space' of this PhD, I came to understand that my own position toward the research, as well as my process of learning, was constantly changing and evolving. Acknowledging the importance of situated knowledges as inherited in the work of feminist scholars such as Donna Haraway, Karen Barad and Sara Ahmed, I believe that is important to outline how my research as a whole is situated in my perspective and subjectivity, whilst undertaking this study as a formal PhD at the Royal College of Art.[92] [93] [94] Therefore, a personal account of my PhD trajectory, inspired by those feminist standpoints and in conjunction with *postabyssal* thinking, is central in the following section.

Repair/ Fracture/ Disorientation

To get somewhere you need to find your way, and, as suggested by queer theorist Sara Ahmed, this way might have various turnings, which 'also enable us to find our way through the world by situating ourselves in relation to such things'.[95] Ahmed, in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* describes a spatial and political dimension of orientation. She argues that the ways in which we shift our attention in various directions is political, and dependent on the

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[91] Lury, 2021, pp. 5–9.

[92] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

[93] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[94] Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1988), 575–99.

[95] Ahmed, 2006, p. 6.

various – often invisible – forces which operate in the background.[96] In turn, what appears on our horizon is also dependent on our bodily positions, and on the 'queer turnings' and locations we inhabit because of the ways in which various background forces shift our gaze.

Using the metaphor of Husserl's table, as the space where the philosopher sits to write, Ahmed is concerned to demonstrate how we perceive worlds in relation to the proximity between body and objects through action.[97] For example, the table of the philosopher functions as an orientation device towards the world, which sustains specific points of view. However, what sustains this relationship between the two – the subject and the object – are also all the other objects and subjects that are often relegated to the background of a space. This includes the room, the house, the family, the social and political forces which shape a subject: a background that explains the conditions of emergence or the arrival of the thing that it appears to be in the present.[98] This space generated between the subject and the object is thus what makes 'certain things, not others, available' to us and in turn allows to argue that the way we perceive worlds is always in relation to the proximity and alignments we can sustain and that are enabled each time:[99] directions according to which we live and act, and which are inseparable from us.

The tactility of orientation, as discussed by Ahmed, is of importance to my research, and in particular in relation to the central argument: how the object which renders 'oblique' or goes 'offline', whether as a glitch or an injured or repaired object, may have the potential to disturb the order of things, and consequently the claim of universality which the British Museum object has been subjected to.

One of the objects that the research sets out to examine in the section 'Fragment III: A Crack' is the Gayer-Anderson Cat, one of the most precious

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[96] Ahmed, 2006.

[97] Ibid., Introduction.

[98] Ibid., p. 38.

[99] Ibid., p. 14.

items in the British Museum's Egyptian collections.[100] Throughout its life the object has been subject to multiple restorations, first by its collector and later on by British Museum conservation scientists. Each of these *repair*s serves as an intervention into its life and is embedded with different ideological investments of the subject. In my example of the Gayer-Anderson Cat as a repaired object, I pay attention to the various invasive technologies, such as radiography, which have been applied to the examination of its cracks, the personal diary of its collector, and a technical analysis of the object published in a British Museum periodical. My aim with this case study is to unpack other versions of the history of this cultural item beyond its visual completeness, offering instead an alternative encounter which pays attention to the damage.

In turn, the question of *repair* is also a question about visibility, but also an ethical position which touches upon how the various entanglements between subjects and objects are not an absolute separation but are part of a potential embodied and material relationship. What feminist physicist and writer Karen Barad describes as an 'intra-action'*,* and feminist theorist Donna Haraway as 'situated knowledges', both point to the ethics of situatedness as epistemic honesty. From this standpoint, the approach to *repair* in my research concerns not only a critique of how museums dissociate objects from subjects, but also the relationship between myself – as a researcher – and the object of my study.

Haraway argues that only a view from the body, a located and partial perspective, sustains an objective vision in scientific research, contradicting a Kantian tradition that has separated the body from the mind – what she calls the 'God-trick'.[101] Haraway uses the metaphor of knowledge as vision, to argue that a nuanced understanding of vision and perception demonstrates that an object of sight – as an object of knowledge – cannot be conceptually removed from an embodied context, the situated viewpoint of the researcher. In this context, Haraway proposes that the researcher and the object of study are not independent but intertwined entities, and therefore highlights the need to

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[100] 'The Gayer-Anderson Cat'. *British Museum* <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/animals/gayer-anderson-cat> [accessed 3 April 2021].

[101] Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1988), 575–99.

acknowledge one's embodied and partial perspectives towards the pursuit of scientific objectivity.[102]

Along the same lines, Barad, in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, draws on Nils Bohr's philosophy of physics and his ideas of 'the agencies of observation' to introduce the physical phenomenon of diffraction as a counterpoint to reflection.[103] Bohr, using the notion of the agencies of observation, has described representations as highly dependent on interactions between the entities involved.[104] More specifically, according to Bohr's quantum physics:

> (o)ur ability to understand the physical world hinges on our recognizing that our knowledge-making practices, including the use and testing of scientific concepts, are material enactments that contribute to, and are a part of, the phenomena we describe.[105]

Extending from this, Barad has sought to reconfigure the relationship between epistemology, ontology and ethics, launching a debate about the possibility of another epistemology in her theory of 'agential realism'. Barad suggests that phenomena and objects do not precede their interaction; rather, objects emerge through particular intra-actions. The neologism 'intra-action' as proposed by Barad – instead of interaction – signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. In this way, Barad highlights that agency is not an inherent property of an individual or human which can be exercised, but is a dynamic set of forces in which things are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably.[106] In these terms, Barad's diffractive methodologies have introduced a critical practice of engagement between the researcher and the object of study, the subject and the object, aiming to understand the world from within.

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Barad, p. 31.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Bohr, cited in Barad, p. 32.

[106] Barad, pp. 140–41.

The return to the body as a part of Barad's diffractive methodologies highlights the importance of acknowledging the limitations of academic objectivity and bringing into focus the body of the researcher herself. In a similar way, Santos points out the 'personal physical, phenotypical, and psychological features, as well as lifestyle'[107] of the researcher as a visible face of their research, and as a process of 'observed participant observation',[108] implying the need for practices of self- observation.

From this standpoint, this PhD research as an object and 'I' as a researcher cannot be seen as two disentangled entities. In fact, I believe that it is important to acknowledge that during the process of my research I had to take various detours, turns and moves in non-linear ways which in turn meant that the trajectory of my research was not linear, but in fact fragmented and embodied.

My PhD journey started straight after my graduation from a Master's degree in Information Experience Design, School of Communication (SoC). During the first three years of my PhD research, I was working across the School of Architecture (SoA) and the School of Communication (SoC). This was partially because of my original cross-disciplinary supervisory team (Dr. Harriet Harriss and Dr. Kevin Walker), but also because of my own previous background in architecture, as well as my teaching activity as a visiting lecturer in Media Studies at the SoA. The nature of the practical work produced by this research follows what Sara Ahmed has discussed as 'queer turnings', describing orientations 'among disciplinary lines, lines which cross over, intersect or never met'[109] in order to avoid making any closure within my own cross-disciplinary background, but also to enable this work to be read/ seen/ experienced outside disciplinary activities and categories which classify research and ways of producing knowledge in academia.

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[107] Santos, 2018, p. 156.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ahmed, 2006.

Just before starting the fourth year of my studies there was a complete change in my supervisory team (due to one's supervisor planned departure and one's supervisor unexpected leave), which resulted in a one-term gap before I continued with the PhD research. This transitional period had a twofold impact on the progress of my research. The various institutional dynamics of the time led to a feeling of 'disorientation', what Ahmed describes as a moment of failure, and alienation, which also exposes the ways that bodies inhabit social space.[110] In my case, this disorientation was due to the practical and emotional demands in this abrupt change to the logistics of my PhD, as I had to carry on with my research whilst seeking new supervisors, arguing for an extension of the final thesis submission, and negotiating my AHRC scholarship. This period of time was stressful and difficult, but it has also encouraged me to also redirect my attention to situated knowledges, and more specifically to acknowledge that my research is at once situated as an institutional critique to the British Museum, but at the same time it is also PhD research that is confined by the very boundaries of my own academic institution, the Royal College of Art. During this time, I had the opportunity to zoom out from my research subject for a while, to reflect upon my aims and motivations with it, whilst participating in industrial action at the RCA as a both a PhD candidate and a visiting lecturer, and through conversations I had with other PhD colleagues, friends, academic staff outside the 'formal' research rooms. This 'room', outside the rigid academic walls, enabled me to reconfigure my relationships with my research, and when I eventually returned to my PhD a few months later with my new supervisory team, Dr. Eleanor Dare and Dr. Claude Dutson, I realised how this very void I had experienced for almost half a year, because of the lack of a stable ground to carry on with my research, was in fact a very dynamic and critical space, a space which has also shaped a new understanding of the research subject, and redirected my attention to the object from a situated political and embodied perspective. This is a perspective from which the cracks are embraced, and *repair* is a schism for new narratives, not only for museum objects, but for my relationship with my own research as another repaired object, which has been

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[110] Ahmed, 2006, Introduction.

subjected to various reparatory acts through the years. These *repairs* are embraced throughout the thesis, in order to synthesise my central argument regarding ways of resisting the subject-object divide, and instead think of this PhD research as closer to what Barad might call an 'intra-object'.[111]

During the national lockdowns the only possible means of accessing the interior space of the British Museum was through a virtual tour provided in collaboration with Google. Like many other galleries and museums that were closed during Covid-19 that offered virtual tours of their collections, the British Museum offered a web-based experience of its collections, a result of its partnership with the Google Arts & Culture platform since 2015.[112] According to the Museum's 2019-20 annual report, more than double the usual number of visitors accessed its web portals, including this virtual tour, since the Museum temporarily closed its doors on 18 March 2020. The Google Arts & Culture platform (2011-present) has partnered with museums internationally, allowing them to show their collections online by digitally scanning and reproducing their objects and interior environments in a virtual gallery tour, using the same controls as Google Street View.[113] According to the British Museum's director, Neil MacGregor, the collaboration between the two institutions was 'to make possible the 18th-century dream of the museum being a collection of the world, for the world.'[114] The director of the Google Cultural Institute asserted that:

> Experiencing art should no longer be reserved just for 'regular'
> museumgoers or those fortunate enough to have important galleries on

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[111] Barad, pp. 137-185.

[112] Simon Stephens, 'British Museum Unveils Google Partnership', News, 13 November 2015, *Museums Association* <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2015/11/13112015-british-museum-unveils-google-partnership/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[113] 'Street View: Tour Famous Sites and Landmarks', Step Inside Must-See Museums around the World, [blog post] *Google Arts & Culture* <https://artsandculture.google.com/project/street-view> [accessed 9 May 2020].

[114] Mark Brown, 'British Museum Exhibits Viewable Online Thanks to Google Partnership', *Guardian*, 12 November 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/nov/12/british-museum-google-cultural-institute-virtual-tour> [accessed 9 May 2021].

their doorsteps but should be made available to a whole new set of
people who might otherwise never get to see the real thing up close.[115]

Drawing upon Google Arts & Culture's claim to bring art and culture to any part
of the world and what Google describes as its mission to 'organise the world's
information',[116] in the section entitled 'A Self-Guided Tour', I follow the 'virtual
tour' to critically examine Google's claim to omnidirectionality in parallel with the
British Museum's claim to universality. What is at stake when we need to rely on
digital navigational tools such as Google Street View, in which a new visual
regime of obliqueness, glitches, high- and low-resolution imagery re-mediates the
museum experience, and the sensorial experience is reduced to a haptic one?

A return to the body, as proposed in *postabyssal* thinking, valorises the sensorial
over the rational. Santos' valorisation of the senses highlights a sensorial depth –
what he describes as 'intersensoriality' – and as such 'is not compatible with the
instrumental rationality of Western modernity, since it puts at stake the linearity,
unidirectionality, and unidimensionality of extractivist perception'.[117] Moreover,
with the notion of intersensoriality, Santos is concerned with how the
combination of the senses, has remained as an aesthetic experience within the
world of art.[118] For example, he refers to Braque's and Picasso's painting of
guitars and mandolins which can be described as silent music, or a van Gogh's
and Gauguin's still live paintings are there to be seen, touched, and tasted.[119]
From this standpoint, the sensorial depth suggested by the epistemologies of the
South, entails the emergence of senses as a new ecology of knowledge where; 'the
same object or practice may be socially constructed to be seen and yet, at a
deeper level, it may offer itself to be heard, touched, smelled, or tasted as well'.[120]

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[115] Amit Sood, Director of the Google Cultural Institute cited in Danilo Pesce, and others, 'When Culture
Meets Digital Platforms: Value Creation and Stakeholders' Alignment in Big Data Use', *Current Issues in
Tourism*, 22.15 (2019), 1883–1903 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2019.1591354>[accessed 9 May
2021]

[116] 'Google Mission Statement and Vision Statement In A Nutshell', *Four Week MBA* [blog post]
<https://fourweekmba.com/google-vision-statement-mission-statement/> [accessed 9 August 2021].

[117] Santos, 2018, p. 167.

[118] Santos, 2018, pp. 165-183.

[119] Santos, 2018, p.167.

[120] Ibid.

That is against modern extractivist methodologies which have left intersensoriality as an abstract concept. Therefore, a *postabyssal* research position entails the acknowledgment of a combination and reciprocity of the senses; 'to see and be seen, to hear and be heard and so on' for new ways of knowledge production and claims the sensorial not as only limited to human bodies but also concerning relations that human have with nonhumans and with nature.[121]

In a similar vein, Lisa Blackman, in her book *The Body*, describes the senses and the sentient body in 'movement' rather than viewing senses as fixed, interior processes marked by their location or place within the body.[122] She notes that Cartesian dualism generates the idea that 'the mind is subject to voluntary control, usually characterised as will, and the body is subject to laws which govern and regulate processes which do not require conscious effort or attention'.[123] The boundary between what is considered to be voluntary and what is seen as involuntary appears to exclude the body from cultural analysis, as it seems that its irrational dimension has nothing to offer to disciplinary knowledge.[124] In addition to this, as noted by Blackman, Cartesian dualism as expressed within the concept of *will* leads to another form of separation: those who are defined by the control of their minds and those who are defined by their bodies, as the seat of irrationality and emotion.[125]

High resolution imagery, as part of Google's Arts and Culture collaboration with museums, is often based on the assumption that high-resolution imagery resembles the museum experience, bringing the museum directly to audiences at home due to the high resolution and scale of detail – in contrast to the physical object, which cannot be encountered in such great detail.[126] The contingency of the issues of resolution, inaccessibility and temporality became part of the ethics of my research, and my means of negotiating time and distance during the

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Lisa Blackman, *The Body: The Key Concepts* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), p. 84.

[123] Ibid., p.4.

[124] Ibid., p.5.

[125] Ibid., p.22.

[126] Kim Beil, 'Seeing Syntax: Google Art Project and the Twenty-First-Century Period Eye', *Afterimage*, 40.4 (2013), 22–27 <https://doi.org/10.1525/aft.2013.40.4.22>.

pandemic: a digital realm, the experience of which, as Geert Lovink describes, does not just blend with the everyday, but increasingly contracts our abilities and constrains our realities.[127] As a counter to this, I was developing both an alternative means of accessing and retrieving information about the space to get around the unplanned practical limitations, also paying attention to how my corporeal experience was overlaying my digital experience during the lockdown.

In order to navigate into the space, I had to rely on my memories of the British Museum, and an obsolete museum map. The space of the British Museum was filmed by Google in 2015. My research took place during 2020-21. Therefore, what I encountered as the virtual Museum is a simulation of its environment as it was nearly six years ago. It is a digital simulation of the Museum spaces and objects whose experience is determined less by its physical structure and the face-to-face encounter, and more by internet infrastructure and cable networks, downloadable content, and the perspective of Google's 2.1-metre high and 0.6-metre wide camera trolley which travelled through the British Museum to capture its spaces. Undertaking this virtual self-guided tour, I am questioning how this digitally preserved object – the virtual Museum – is embodied by the subjectivity of its maker: the collaboration between Google and the British Museum. In turn, by recording the low-resolution imagery, the obliqueness and the glitch, moments where Euclidian mapping fails, and excluded areas such as the staircases, the Museum shop, narrow doorways, I do not passively use technology; on the contrary I reveal its contingencies, and how technology mediates the museum experience, and the corporeal.

On the other hand, it is important to note a reductionist drift to the body in the cultural sector, noting the emergence of a wide range of systems based on embodied interaction are also designed for museums, at scales ranging from tangible interactions to immersive experiences. For example, the Google Arts & Culture app Art Selfie, using deep learning, searches a database of paintings scanned by the app, enabling the audience to match their facial characteristics

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[127] Geert Lovink, *Sad by Design: On Platform Nihilism* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), p. 4.

with those appearing in historical artworks.[128] This turn to the body is also noticed within academia in the emergence of research faculties such as Biometric Artificial Intelligence, Computational Biomechanics and Soft Robotics, which focus on algorithmic design and embodied physical interactions with environments, whether real or simulated. Drawing upon the relationship between human body and data in 'smart cities' and surveillance technologies using machine learning algorithms, Ramon Amaro discusses this quantification process to which the body is subjected as that which orients 'blackness' toward race-specific categories. In turn, he highlights a contested relationship between data and the body may racialise the body, reproducing racism and social bias.[129] Furthermore, contesting the constructs of universal facial expressions and the universal affects as used in contemporary neuroscience, Ruth Leys, in her book *The Ascent of Affect*,[130] draws upon the negative implications of a cultural shift which emphasises embodiment over reason, evident also in the increasing use of sensors and facial recognition systems in cities, and surveillance systems.

An intensified attention to the body was observed during the Covid-19 outbreak, when outdoor activities were restricted and physical exercise was one of the few acceptable reasons to leave home, and there was an increase in the activities taking place inside our homes. The increasing need to reinforce and maintain our bodies' health and fitness accompanies the idea that in this way our bodies are more prepared to fight a virus or a disease, and therefore an increasing sense of individualism and personal responsibility to take care of ourselves and our bodies, in the context of a lack of public healthcare or availability of public health infrastructures. At the same time, the increasing attention to our bodies here is paradoxically in tandem with an increasing practice of physical and social distancing between our bodies and the bodies of others, and therefore an introversion and sense of individualism whereby the encounter with someone else's body is a threat, and spreads fear.

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[128] 'Art Selfie', *Google Arts & Culture* <https://artsandculture.google.com/camera/selfie> [accessed 9 May 2021]

[129] Ramon Amaro, 'Thursday Night Live! Decolonising Design II with Ramon Amaro', *Thursday Night Live! At Het Nieuwe Instituut*, 2017 <https://thursdaynight.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/en/reports/thursday-night-live-decolonising-design-ii-ramon-amaro> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[130] Ruth Leys, *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Situating my research towards feminist situated practices, I argue for the importance of corporeal modes of knowledge production. This methodological process, enacted as a result of the pandemic, aligns well with a *postabyssal* thinking,[131] as an alternative thinking of alternatives, that prioritises the sensorial over the rational, and puts an emphasis on the body. However, it is important to also note the tensions when the body is subjected to cultural analysis. Following on from this, the notion of the *postabyssal* and feminist situated practices concerns the epistemological orientation and theoretical underpinning of my study, challenging models of research and practice that see the role of design as a problem-solving one. This thesis is carefully situated beyond a cause-effect binary or design solutionism, and instead towards a reframing of rationality, the sensorial, and a critical return to the body.

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[131] Santos, 2018.

FRAGMENT I

Wear and Tear

In the UK, conservation on a scientific basis began just after World War I, and as a direct consequence of the war, due to the fact that a large number of objects from the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum had to be stored in the London Underground system in order to protect them from bombing activity. As a result, many of them had been severely damaged due to high levels of humidity, metal corrosion, mould and salt efflorescence.[132] In one of the first publications which argued for the importance of conservation research, titled *Preservation of Museum Objects in War-Time,* conservator Harold Plenderleith outlined the sources of the damage to the objects and emphasised the need for the British Museum to be remodelled in order for its spaces to accommodate their 'national treasures' effectively and to avoid their further deterioration.[133]

Figure 1 WWI storage in the Holborn Post Office railway tunnels. Courtesy of © The Trustees of the British Museum.

At the British Museum, the most valuable objects were moved to the basement, but as the bombing intensified, the Prime Minister and the War Cabinet ordered their evacuation to the abandoned underground railway tunnels of Holborn Post Office.

The aftermath of World War I, as artist and activist Kader Attia asserts, witnessed the development of the discipline of plastic surgery in medicine, with

132 Harold J. Plenderleith, 'A History of Conservation', *Studies in Conservation*, 43.3 (1998), 129–43.

133 Harold J. Plenderleith, 'Preservation of Museum Objects in War-Time', *Nature*, 152 (1943), 94–97.

the aim of restoring the injured bodies of soldiers returning from the war.[134] As noted above, this was a time when many museum objects had also suffered from damage, due to the unstable conditions they had been stored in underground. In turn, it is interesting to observe how surgical operations for the human body – *repairs to the human body* – began to be developed at the same time as conservation practices – *repairs to objects*.

In the following years, with the growth of interest in the technical examination of artifacts, earlier artisanal acts of conservation evolved into a more scientifically based endeavour, evidenced in the formulation of organisations such as the ICOM-CC,[135] and ICCROM,[136] which set the standards, guidelines and aims for conservation practices internationally. Today, conservation research in museums involves preventative conservation, remedial conservation and restoration. The ICOM-CC definition of the term is as follows:

> Conservation – all measures and actions aimed at safeguarding tangible cultural heritage while ensuring its accessibility to present and future generations. Conservation embraces preventive conservation, remedial conservation and restoration. All measures and actions should respect the significance and the physical properties of the cultural heritage item.[137]

In summary, preventative conservation entails all measures and actions aimed at avoiding and minimising future deterioration or loss. Remedial conservation concerns all actions applied directly to an item or a group of items with the aim of arresting current damaging processes or reinforcing the object's structure. And finally, restoration concerns all actions applied directly to a single and stable item aimed at facilitating its appreciation, understanding and use.

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[134] Manthia Diawara, Jacinto Lageira, and Kitty Scott. *Kader Attia: The Repair: From Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures*, ed. by Axel Lapp (Berlin: The Green Box, 2014).

[135] ICOM-CC is a subsidiary organisation of ICOM, see footnote 41.

[136] The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) is an intergovernmental organization dedicated to the preservation of cultural heritage worldwide through training, information, research, cooperation and advocacy programmes. It aims to enhance the field of conservation-restoration and raise awareness of the importance and fragility of cultural heritage. The creation of the ICCROM took place as a result of a proposal at the UNESCO General Conference held in New Delhi, in 1956. Three years later, the Centre was established in Rome, Italy, where its headquarters remain to this day.

[137] 'Terminology to Characterize the Conservation of Tangible Cultural Heritage'.

All of these scientific processes in the context of Western museums serve as means of care, and technologies to treat an object which have been associated primarily with interventions aimed at prolonging an object's life, as well as the study of the interaction between the object and the museum environment and the collection in order to secure a stable ecosystem for the object, and to avoid damage.

This is evidenced in the vast documentation on conservation research and studies relating to stain removal, discussing ways of avoiding the surface discolouration of objects caused by microflora such as mosses, algae and lichens, which often penetrate through cracks, veins and large pores into the interior of materials. In a similar manner, many research papers are concerned with the treatment of objects which might have suffered water damage, or high humidity levels. Respectively, ultrasonic analysis of objects is often carried out in order to ensure that sensitive objects are less affected by environmental conditions such as wind and light direction. Studies of light are undertaken to investigate how the exposure of materials to physical or artificial light might affect or accelerate the chemical degradation of objects.

At the same time, this involves the documentation of a range of scientific equipment that is utilised by museums for the analysis, study and observation of objects. These photographic technologies extend the boundaries of photography far beyond the limits of human vision, enabling the object to be seen beyond its material surface, on scales and at resolutions that the human eye cannot capture: for example, photographic techniques such as photo macrographs allow the magnification, recognition and detection of features such as hairline cracks and the onset of corrosion at an early stage. Laser scanning, computed tomography scanning, and radiography are used for recording objects for diagnostic purposes and their digital replication. There is also a range of photographic techniques to document the rate of deterioration of materials and the age of objects, test storage materials and detect water marks, scratches or cracks.

More specifically, the application of radiography,[138] along with other scientific techniques such as optical microscopy,[139] Raman spectroscopy[140] and scanning electron microscopy [141] are widely applied in conservation practices in order to study the materials, technology and manufacturing history of museum objects, as well as to locate them in time, to discover how, where and when they were made and by whom.[142] The application of these scientific techniques by focusing on the measurable qualities of objects enables scientists to speak or speculate on behalf of objects, especially in the absence of archaeological or historical facts or records. In doing so, these scientific methods are utilised as means of observing the object, assessing it and evaluating the damage it has sustained.

Turning from the Western approach to *repair*, I now highlight a notion of *repair* outside these definitions. For example, *Kintsugi*, 'golden joinery', is a traditional Japanese method of pottery restoration based on the Japanese philosophy of *wabi-sabi*.[143] The tradition of *Kintsugi* is to reveal the beauty in what is broken, according to Eastern Buddhist principles of aesthetics, such as *wabi-sabi*, a non-

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[138] Radiographic techniques, similar to those used in hospitals and by dentists, are used in the study of archaeological artefacts. As in medical investigations, radiography reveals internal details that would otherwise be invisible. This renders it especially useful in museums because it is a non-destructive method of discovery that does not require the removal of samples. When radiation (X-rays, gamma-rays, neutrons or electrons, for example) passes into an object, some of it is absorbed, some is scattered, and some may pass through the object. This produces an image on a photographic film or fluorescent screen placed behind the object. In 'Scientific Techniques', *British Museum*, 2021 <https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/scientific-research/scientific-techniques>.

[139] The use of optical lenses to enlarge the image of an object allows a wealth of information to be obtained. From the single lens magnifying glass to more complex optical microscopes, visual examination enables materials and surface treatments to be identified and characterised. The unprepared surfaces of objects can show details of colour, surface pattern and texture, tool marks, joins, repairs, wear, surface coatings, manufacture, corrosion attack and inscriptions. Finer details, especially of metals, are observed by the examination of polished sections, using a reflected light microscope. In 'Scientific Techniques'.

[140] "Raman spectroscopy is a technique that enables us to identify not only the materials used in the construction of an object, but also those used in decorating the surface. They can also be used to identify corrosion products, e.g. rust, on the surface of the object." In 'Scientific Techniques'.

[141] The scanning electron microscope (SEM) is used to study the materials, technology and manufacturing history of museum objects in great detail at magnifications over several thousand times higher than is possible with light microscopes. The SEM has a greater depth of focus and high resolution so that sharp images and the finest of details are revealed. The object is viewed by scanning a beam of electrons onto the surface and collecting the various signals that are produced, which are used to form the image and to analyse the surface. The resulting images are often grey in colour to emphasise the more interesting features. In 'Scientific Techniques'.

[142] 'Scientific Techniques'.

[143] Two of the most important principles are, first, *wabi-sabi*, which combines *wabi*, rustic beauty, and *sabi*, aged beauty, and then its artistic, bodily expression in *kintsugi*. *Wabi-sabi* claims there is beauty in common irregularity, while Kintsugi celebrates beauty in visible signs of repair, like scars. In Stephen Buetow and Katharine Wallis, 'The Beauty in Perfect Imperfection', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 40.3 (2019), 389–94 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-017-9500-2>.

Western philosophy based on the embracing of imperfection as that which make every person unique.[144] In *Kintsugi* craftsmanship, the restoration of a pot is not a return to its original self, but rather a celebration of its injury.[145] More specifically, in the restoration of ceramics the cracks in the objects are filled by using lacquer and gold or silver in a way that embellishes the appearance of the original ceramic object, celebrating the beauty in what is broken and strengthening it anew. – Figure 2.

Figure 2 Tea bowl, Raku-type clay with Black Raku glaze; gold lacquer repairs. Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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[144] Buetow and Wallis.

[145] Guy Keulemans, 'The Geo-Cultural Conditions of Kintsugi', *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 9.1 (2016), 15–34 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496772.2016.1183946>; Buetow and Wallis.

In this way, the non-Western philosophy of *repair* in *Kintsugi* craftsmanship embraces imperfections, and appreciates authenticity and humility out of respect for incompleteness, fragility and impermanence.[146] This approach contrasts with the technoscientific orientation of conservation research, in which the fact that the damage is intricately linked to the life of the object is often ignored. An example is a collection of twentieth-century Omani silver jewellery in the British Museum collections,[147] whose melting and symbolic dying is part of their life due to the way the objects are connected with spiritual beliefs in Oman.[148] More specifically, the article 'Beauty and Belief: the Endangered Tradition of Omani Silver Jewellery', in the *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin*, outlines the technical analysis of the jewellery, which was subjected to radiography in order to understand and document the craftmanship, composition and origins of those objects.[149] The prolongation of their life, and the remedying of the damage as part of the British Museum conservation study, may contradict the value, religious and cultural significance of these objects for Omani women.

The function and significance of some of this jewellery for Omani women is described as associated with various identities and religious traditions in the Middle East, such as 'the evil eye'.[150] The evil eye, in North African cultures, the Middle East and southern Europe, is a superstitious curse believed to be cast by a malevolent gaze, usually given to a person when one is unaware. When received, the evil eye might be the source of misfortune or injury and is believed to be associated with a kind of supernatural force that reflects a malevolent gaze back upon those who wish harm upon others. In Omani tradition, this superstition survives also with these pieces of Omani silver jewellery, as it is believed that they distract malevolent spirits, particularly for the protection of children. Moreover, an important aspect of the tradition of Omani silver jewellery is that these pieces

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[146] Buetow and Wallis.

[147] Omani silver jewellery was acquired in 2009 by the British Museum's Department of the Middle East from a private collector, who bought these pieces in various markets in Oman in the 1980s. In Aude Mongiatti, and others, 'Beauty and Belief: The Endangered Tradition of Omani Silver Jewellery', *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin*, 5 (2011), 1–14.

[148] Miranda Morris, and others, *Oman Adorned: A Portrait in Silver* (Muscat and London: Apex Publishing, 1997); Neil Richardson and Marcia Dorr, *The Craft Heritage of Oman* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2003).

[149] Mongiatti, Aude, and others.

[150] Ibid.

are purchased and worn by an individual and rarely passed down from one generation to the next.[151] For the transition from the one generation to the next, they have to be melted down, and 'reborn'.[152] This is why bridal jewellery, in particular, should be always be new and produced by melting down old pieces, after their symbolic damage.[153] That is the reason, as Mongiatti, and others asserts, that 'it is very difficult, therefore, to find Omani jewellery that is more than a generation old, even though styles and designs are sustained over generations.'[154]

Figure 3 An example of Omani jewelry from the British Museum collection: A Qur'an case necklace (hirz) with coral and glass bottle stopper amulets (necklace length 46 cm). Courtesy of © The Trustees of the British Museum

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[151] Morris, and others; Richardson and Dorr; Mongiatti, and others.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Mongiatti, and others, p. 4.

In consequence the preserving and prolonging of an object's life as part of the Museum's collection is not always what should be at stake. As in the case of this collection of jewellery from Oman, the prolonging of the life of the objects contradicts the cultural and religious beliefs and traditions in Oman, where in fact the prolonging of the life expectancy of this jewellery might be a source of misfortune, due to the objects' spiritual function in protecting from the evil eye, and the fact that they should be melted down and re-born; a symbolic death before they are passed down from the one generation to the next.[155] This is something that their preserving as part of the British Museum collection contradicts.

These two examples, the Japanese *Kintsugi* craftsmanship, where beauty is celebrated in what is broken, and the spiritualism associated with the Omani silver jewellery collections held at the British Museum, where damage is integral to the life of the object, evidence alternative means of *repair* beyond that of prolonging and preserving an object's life. Moreover, they indicate that damage as an undesirable change (see for example British Standards Institution[156]), and the Western understanding *repair* in conservation research, as a notion of returning something back to its original state, both stem from the *abyssal* thinking which underlines the orientation of Western museological practices, and which violates the principles of decay, and the life and death, of objects.

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[155] Ibid.

[156] British Standards Institution, Conservation of Cultural Property – Main General Terms and Definitions, CEN BS EN 15898:2019, 2019.

Figure 4 Documentation of the Research Process. Kyriaki Spanou.

Chapter Three: Views from Nowhere

The British Museum

Western museums were established in great numbers at the turn of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, when objects from colonial expeditions started flooding into the ports of Europe and the United States. From the early collections of objects from ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt to the anthropological expeditions to Oceania and South America, and later on from military operations during World War I and World War II in Africa, the Middle East and Southern Europe, objects from different countries of origin were sold in flea markets and ended up in the hands of art dealers, collectors, and museums.[157] Collections such as those of the British Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum in the UK, the Quai Branly Museum in France and the Vatican Museum in Italy are some of largest anthropological collections in Europe.

The British Museum was established by an act of Parliament in 1753 and opened to the public in 1759. It was the first national museum in the world, as well as the first public institution to be called 'British'.[158] According to *Towards 2020* – the British Museum's strategy document, its title included British 'because it was not (like other continental museums) the collection of the King but a collection for the citizen'.[159] The Museum was introduced as an institution for the benefit of the public, more specifically for the 'instruction and gratification of the public',[160] and as a major public institution 'which would serve to reinforce and indeed create a nation's sense of identity'.[161] The Museum began by accepting the bequest of the

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[157] Hicks, 2020; Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2006); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Tony Bennett and others, *Collecting, Ordering, Governing: Anthropology, Museums, and Liberal Government* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

[158] *Towards 2020: The British Museum's Strategy* (London: The British Museum) <https://docplayer.net/13127413-Towards-2020-the-british-museum-s-strategy.html> [accessed 9 August 2021].

[159] Towards 2020: The British Museum's Strategy.

[160] *Norman Foster and The British Museum*, ed. by Norman Foster, Deyan Sudjic, and Spencer de Gray (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2001).

[161] Moser, p. 6.

private collection of Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753) who, by the time of his death, had amassed a collection of 80,000 items, donated to the appointed Trustees in return for payment of £20,000 to his heirs, to manage the collection for the public display without fee.[162]

The Museum's collection consists of millions of objects which have been widely extracted from countries around the world during the era of the British Empire. Initially the Museum displayed Sloane's collection of 'exotic plants, fruits, corals, mineral stones, ferns, shells, fossils, coins, medals, classical and medieval antiquities and books'.[163] The collection was later combined with that of collector Sir Robert Cotton (1570/1 – 1631), who specialised in books and manuscripts, creating the core archive of the museum.[164] In 1828, the British Museum donated its paintings to establish the National Gallery, and later its geological specimen collection, birds, and dinosaurs went to create the Natural History Museum in 1880.[165] Finally, in 1998 the library itself departed to form the British Library, and the void left at the centre of the museum was transformed into today's Great Court.[166]

Historiographies of Western museums, according to museologist Eileen Hooper Greenhill, take two forms: encyclopaedic attempts and effective histories.[167] The first aimed to produce chronological accounts and narratives, either of individuals such as curators and collectors, or of the history of the institution itself.[168] These encyclopaedic accounts are not concerned with issues which are not generally considered historical, such as for instance 'love, conscience, instincts, egoisms, bodies', which are for Greenhill those elements which should be included in what she calls an 'effective history' of an institution. In this context, Greenhill draws

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[162] Anne Goldgar, 'The British Museum and the Virtual Representation of Culture in the Eighteenth Century', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 32.2 (2000), 195–231 <https://doi.org/10.2307/4053772>; 'Sir Hans Sloane', The British Museum Story, *The British Museum* <https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/sir-hans-sloane>.

[163] Norman Foster and The British Museum, 2001, p. 21-22.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Eilean Greenhill-Hooper, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 18–22.

[168] Ibid., pp. 18–22.

upon the personal life of the British Museum founder Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753) and his colonial expeditions in Jamaica, which was a rising colony in Britain's commercial empire thanks to the acceleration of the Atlantic slave and sugar trades. Sloane's marriage to a Jamaican heiress, and his participation in the slave trade and travels to the West Indies, also led to the acquisition of significant financial resources.[169] For Greenhill, these facts should be accounted for in narrating how the British Museum was established, as they enable the emergence of specific subject positions, which are intertwined with the colonial history of Western museums.[170]

Drawing on Greenhill's argument, a linear chronological account of the history of the Museum is beyond my focus. In contrast, this research looks at how colonisation enables the emergence of a particular range of subject positions that are accounted for by the transformation of existing practices and technologies within a specific geo-historical site to create the British Museum archive.

Within the wider debate on museums and colonialism, many museum scholars have analysed the operation of museums as a process of governing, due to ways in which the practices, exhibitions and technologies of museums work through the forms of freedom they exercise by selecting and collecting objects and knowledge.[171] From an epistemological point of view, Santos has described this violent accession as an epistemic intervention, which favours certain ways of knowledge production while excluding others. In doing so, in alignment with what he describes as the *abyssal* nature of the archive, to decolonise the archive – as an *abyssal* way of producing knowledge – requires an understanding of how the selections were actually made, and of what, and how histories are told in museums, as institutions who are responsible for how we recount history and as products of Western epistemology.[172] In turn, the very idea of selecting knowledge by means of storing is linked with the idea that selecting and storing are neutral processes. This in itself is a Western epistemological tradition, as it

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[169] Ibid., pp. 19–22.

[170] Greenhill-Hooper.

[171] Bennett and others, 2017; Bennett, 1995.

[172] Santos, 2018, pp. 197–205.

links with rationality, a sense of superiority and the neutrality of a privileged subject who is doing the storing and selection on behalf of the object.

In a similar vein, the museum archive, as discussed by Jacques Derrida in his seminal lecture *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,* operates as a means of remembering, and therefore a means of forgetting, as well.[173] In the broad sense of the archive, as employed by Derrida, the archival impulse is necessarily a self-destructive one, because the process of selecting and preserving is also a process of reducing and erasing, while pretending that there is no selection at all. This constructed neutrality in the museum archive is often expressed through the rhetoric of the 'universal museum'. Following on from this, I will unpack the issue of universalism as key to the epistemological framework of Western museums, and will later discuss how these issues are directly projected onto museum environments and museum objects.

Universalism and Humanitarianism: A View from Nowhere

The term 'universal' museum refers to museums with collections of art and cultural items from all around the world, not just from the nations where they are located. The origins of these terms date back to the years of the Enlightenment, when museums were associated with didacticism, grounded in the idea that the objects were invested with an exemplary status,[174] and which in turn served as an elitist governmental instrument in arranging two classes of audience: those who could appreciate the collection and the subordinate classes who might learn by imitating their social superiors.[175] Hicks outlines the political nuances of the terms universalism and encyclopedism within the context of the British Museum.[176] He argues that the ideology of the British Museum as a 'universal museum' was created in 2002, making a claim to a tradition of Enlightenment thinking as a thin justification for retention in the face of demands for returns. More specifically, he

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[173] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[174] Antony Vidler, cited in Bennett Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 28.

[175] Bennett, 1995.

[176] Hicks, 2020.

asserts that these terms had only occasionally been used prior to Neil MacGregor's directorship (2002-2015), and mainly in order to highlight the multidisciplinary context of the Museum as that which could include, for example, the fields of Natural History, Archaeology, Geology, and multiple forms of art.[177] However, the re-introduction of the term by MacGregor in the early 2000s was a combination of institutional re-arrangements and consolidations as part of the reinvention of the Museum[178] and the political aspects of the relationship between the UK and the United States,[179] as well as the pressure the Museum was receiving to repatriate the Benin Bronzes.[180] Accordingly, Hicks argues that the idea of the 'universal museum' was utilised as a 'weapon of its time', part of a wider process of instrumentalising heritage for cultural diplomacy.[181] This draws explicit parallels with universalism and the imperialism and militarist colonialism in parts of the world that are featured prominently within the Museum's galleries, especially Nigeria (where in 1897, Britain sent a punitive expedition in retaliation for the killing of British officials and traders, which resulted in the looting of the Kingdom of Benin – present-day Nigeria).[182]

Following on from this, the 'Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums',[183] issued in 2002 by a group of eighteen major museums in Europe and the United States, including the Louvre Museum (Paris), the Museum of Modern Art (New York) and the State Museums of Berlin, solidified the notion of universalism as part of the British Museum's institutional rhetoric.[184]

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[177] Ibid., p. 202.

[178] For example, the closure of the Museum of Mankind, the closure of the British Library Reading Room, the opening of the new Enlightenment Gallery.

[179] British Petrol (BP)'s corporate partnership with the British Museum, the Iraq war and the US invasion of Iraq's archaeological and cultural sites and the diplomatic relationship between the United States and the UK. In Hicks, 2020.

[180] Hicks, 2020, pp. 200–208.

[181] Ibid., p. 208.

[182] Ibid, pp. 200–208.

[183] 'Declaration on the Importance and Values of Universal Museums', *Hermitage Museum*, 2002 <https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/news/news-item/news/1999_2013/hm11_1_93/?lng=>.

[184] Even though the British Museum was not one of the signatories, the handwriting of the Museum's officials was all over the document, indicating the Museum's involvement in the Declaration. In Kwame Opoku, 'Declaration On The Importance And Value Of Universal Museums: Singular Failure Of An

Declaration of the Importance and Values of Universal Museums

The 'Declaration of the Importance and Values of Universal Museums'[185] was signed in 2002, and was an initiative of eighteen of the world's great museums and galleries. It came as a response to the increasing political attention that the British Museum was receiving as a result of the legal ownership battle over the Parthenon sculptures, the Benin Bronzes and the Rosetta Stone, among others.[186] In the Declaration, the museums' directors described their museums as serving 'not just the citizens of one nation but the people of every nation,' and while looting and the illegal trade in antiquities is condemned in the Declaration, it also states that objects acquired by the participating museums 'have become part of the museums that have cared for them and by extension part of the heritage of the nations which house them.'[187]

Many museum scholars have drawn attention to a logic which subordinates minority cultures and the countries of origin of museum objects, addressing the reductionism underpinning the Declaration. For example, commentators such as the former Director General of the National Museums of Kenya, George Abungu, have pointed to the failure of this Declaration to engage with the provenance and repatriation of objects, arguing also that there is a monopoly on the interpretation of other peoples' cultures and colonisation by a self-appointed group of privileged Western museums.[188] In a similar manner, Mark O'Neill, then Head of Glasgow Museums, concluded that:

> truly universal institutions would grapple with the possibility that, in the
> words of Michael Ignatieff 'the central importance of human rights in the

Arrogant Imperialist Project', *Modern Ghana* <https://www.modernghana.com/news/441891/declaration-on-the-importance-and-value-of-univers.html> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[185] 'Declaration on the Importance and Values of Universal Museums'.

[186] This came as a response to legislation by the UN and UNESCO, which have stated that stolen cultural items must be repatriated to source countries where possible. In Kwame Opoku, 'Declaration On The Importance And Value Of Universal Museums: Singular Failure Of An Arrogant Imperialist Project', *Modern Ghana*, 27 January 2013 <https://www.modernghana.com/news/441891/declaration-on-the-importance-and-value-of-univers.html> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[187] 'Declaration on the Importance and Values of Universal Museums'.

[188] George Okello Abungu, 'Universal Museums: New Contestations, New Controversies', in *UTIMUT. Past Heritage–Future Partnerships. Discussions on Repatriation in the 21st Century*, ed. by Gabriel Mille and Jens Dahl (Copenhagen: The Greenland National Museum & Archives), pp. 32–42.

history of human progress' is that it 'has abolished the hierarchy of civilizations and cultures'.[189]

For O'Neill, only when museums embrace this as their core ethic and epistemology will they realise their potential to help create a more humane world and achieve some sort of universality.[190]

On the other hand, the British Museum's director at the time, Neil MacGregor, argued in a British national newspaper that the idea of universalism served as a foundation that embraces human diversity.[191] His argument concerns the humanitarian ideals that are articulated by the museums' in the Declaration directors:

> as part of the Enlightenment conviction that knowledge and understanding were indispensable ingredients of civil society, and the best remedies against the forces of intolerance and bigotry that led to conflict, oppression and civil war.[192]

In the light of his proposition, MacGregor's *A History of the World in 100 Objects* is both a book and curatorial project, and attempts to cover the world, charting a history of progress through technological change through a hundred objects from the British Museum's collection.[193] The project has been highly criticised as a prime example of colonialism and exclusion, and was counteracted by the project *100 Histories of 100 Worlds in One Object* [194] at the University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica. The latter aimed to show an alternative history of the British Museum focusing on collectivism, and the oppressed /excluded voices in the Museum, with the statement: 'Together we can show that one museum object

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[189] Mark O'Neill, 'Enlightenment Museums: Universal or Merely Global', *Museum & Society*, 2 (2015)', p. 200.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Neil MacGregor, 'The Whole World in Our Hands', *Guardian*, 24 July 2004 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2004/jul/24/heritage.art> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[192] Ibid.

[193] Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (London: Penguin Books, 2011).

[194] '100 Histories of 100 Worlds in One Object'.

can have 100 histories and exist in 100 worlds.'[195] The project aims to present the stories of museum objects from the perspective of the people who once used them, and more specifically through returning to Kingston 'as an original site of collecting to make the point that one object, one fact, contains 100 histories of 100 words'.[196]

Initiatives such as the *100 Histories of 100 Worlds in One Object* align with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement by revealing museums' connections with the slave trade and colonialism. In the light of the Black Lives Matter protests during Summer 2020, in which statues were toppled in both in the UK and the United States, the British Museum removed a bust of its slave-owning founding father Hans Sloane, as an act that confronted its own links to colonialism.[197] Following this, the sculptor Antony Gormley – one of the British Museum's Trustees – suggested that the statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College, Oxford, should be turned to face the wall in shame. However, can these actions be an effective step towards decolonisation and the destabilisation of universality, when on an institutional level the discussions between museums and communities are still highly mediated by technocratic institutions such as ICOM, the UN and UNESCO?

The International Council of Museums (ICOM)

Universalism, as a view from nowhere, underpins the intentions of ICOM, the International Council of Museums, established in Paris in 1946 (a year after the founding of the United Nations) as a forum with the purpose of establishing professional and ethical standards for museums' activities.[198] Since the middle of the twentieth century, ICOM has operated closely with the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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[195] Mirjam Brusius, '100 Histories of 100 Worlds in One Object, Conference Report', *German Historical Institute London Bulletin, 42. 1* (May 2020), pp. 103-111.

[196] Ibid., p. 107.

[197] PA Media, 'British Museum Removes Statue of Slave-Owning Founder', *Guardian*, 25 August 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/aug/25/british-museum-removes-founder-hans-sloane-statue-over-slavery-links> [accessed 27 July 2021].

[198] 'Missions and Objectives', *ICOM* [blog post] <https://icom.museum/en/about-us/missions-and-objectives/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

(UNESCO, also established in 1945) on issues related to restitution and with the aim of preserving and securing access to culture by providing legal foundations for human rights. For instance, the more recent UN *Agenda 2030*, with the vision outlined in the publication *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, [199] is closely linked to ICOM and UNESCO operations for cultural heritage sites and museums, as stated by both the president of ICOM, Suay Aksoy, and the UNESCO General Director, Audrey Azoulay.[200] The bureaucratic context within which these negotiations occur generates questions around ethics and injustice which are of concern to my research, with the aim of unpacking the problematics of universalism as the ground upon which the British Museum archive and practices have been built.

According to the ICOM Statutes, adopted by the 22nd General Assembly in Vienna, Austria, on 24 August 2007, the current Museum Definition is as follows:

> A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.[201]

The language used in the Definition is underlined by ideas of universalism, describing it as an institution that 'serves all humanity', whilst absent from the definition is any reference to colonial legacies of power which have been the constitutive principles of the establishment of Western museums. The

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[199] 'Transforming the World with Culture: Next Steps on Increasing the Use of Digital Cultural Heritage in Research, Education, Tourism and the Creative Industries', *Europeana*, September 2015. <https://pro.europeana.eu/files/Europeana_Professional/Publications/Europeana%20Presidencies%20White%20Paper.pdf> [accessed 7 July 2021].

[200] Audrey Azoulay cited in UNESCO, 'Culture For the 2030 Agenda' <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000264687?posInSet=1&queryId=5fd6914f-013d-4c87-85c6-578bf0057459> [accessed 9 May 2021]; Henry McGhie, 'The Sustainable Development Goals: Helping Transform Our World Through Museums', *ICOM Voices*, 2020 <https://icom.museum/en/news/the-sustainable-development-goals-helping-transform-our-world-through-museums/> [accessed 9 August 2021]; *Resolutions Adopted by ICOM's 34th General Assembly, Kyoto, 2019'* (ICOM, 2019) <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Resolutions_2019_EN.pdf>; Suay Aksoy, 'President's Statement on the Alignment of ICOM with the UN Agenda 2030', *ICOM*, 10 September 2019 [blog post] <https://icom.museum/en/news/presidents-statement-on-the-alignment-of-icom-with-the-un-agenda-2030/> [accessed 7 August 2021].

[201] 'Museum Definition', *ICOM*, 2007 <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

negotiation of this concept of humanism has sparked a debate within the ICOM community, prompted by a recent proposal by the Standing Committee for Museum Definition in 2018 relating to the need for a revision of this Definition.[202]

The curator and chair of the ICOM Standing Committee for Museum Definition, Jette Sandahl, acknowledged the problematic character of the twentieth-century language of 'humanity and its environment' as well as phrases such as 'in the service of society and its development', and articulated the aim of updating the Museum Definition.[203] The following was proposed:

> Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.
>
> Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.[204]

Sandahl 's proposal is situated towards a critical framing which addresses themes of inequality, human rights, human dignity, globalisation, migration and climate change, highlighting how the emergence of these issues should relate to the operation of museums. Her initiative has been rejected by most of the ICOM

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[202] Jette Sandahl, *Standing Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials (MDPP)* (ICOM, December 2018) <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MDPP-report-and-recommendations-adopted-by-the-ICOM-EB-December-2018_EN-2.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[203] Jette Sandahl, 'The Museum Definition as the Backbone of ICOM', *Museum International*, 71.1–2 (2019), vi–9 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13500775.2019.1638019>[accessed 9 May 2021]

[204] 'ICOM Announces the Alternative Museum Definition That Will Be Subject to a Vote', *ICOM*, 2019 <https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-announces-the-alternative-museum-definition-that-will-be-subject-to-a-vote/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

community, the majority of whom found the new definition too political, ideological, and vague to apply to museums.[205] For instance, Juliette Raoul-Duval, who chairs ICOM France, denounced Sandal's initiative as an '"ideological" manifesto', "published without consulting" the national branches'.[206] In a similar manner, Hugues de Varine, a former director of ICOM, according to *The Art Newspaper*, was surprised by the 'over inflated verbiage' of an 'ideological preamble' which does not distinguish a museum from a cultural centre, library, or laboratory'.[207] A new definition of the museum is still under discussion.

The difficulty for the ICOM community in updating the definition – which has not changed since 2007 – is not symptomatic of, but could be read in parallel with, the bureaucratic context within which institutions such as ICOM, the UN and UNESCO operate. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay argues that while these institutions on the one hand act as guardians of the world's cultural assets, on the other they deny embracing their own implications in the holding and study of others' culture.[208] In doing so, since their establishment in the mid-twentieth century, the language used in their conventions and declarations, as Azoulay argues:

> (…) solidifies the rights of museums to objects expropriated from other peoples by conditioning that any change in the status of the objects will guarantee that they will be kept under the auspices of a museum recognized by these experts.[209]

From this standpoint, the following section will examine how humanitarianism is inscribed into efforts by the United Nations and UNESCO to preserve and secure human rights, while at the same time normalising ideas of universality and

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[205] Zachary Small, 'A New Definition of "Museum" Sparks International Debate', *Hyperallergic*, 19 August 2019 <https://hyperallergic.com/513858/icom-museum-definition/> [accessed 9 May 2021]; Vincent Noce, 'What Exactly Is a Museum? Icom Comes to Blows over New Definition', *The Art Newspaper*, 19 August 2019 <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/what-exactly-is-a-museum-icom-comes-to-blows-over-new-definition> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[206] Small.

[207] Noce.

[208] Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019).

[209] Azoulay, 2019, p. 64.

of a commonly shared heritage, and in turn how this intertwines with the so-called 'universal museum'.

The UN and UNESCO

In the 1948 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', Article 27 declares the right that everyone has to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.[210] Likewise, in UNESCO's 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, cultural heritage preserved in museums is placed within a clear set of values and system of ethical accountability.[211] More specifically, Article 5 states that 'Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, which are universal, indivisible and interdependent.'[212]

A language which links human rights to cultural rights has been fundamental to the operation of these institutions over the years: it is a language which is nonetheless based on the assumption that we – as humans – all share a universal history. Therefore, it fails to accept that in the context of Western modernity there are subjects which are excluded and have never been fully recognised as human. As described by professor of indigenous education Linda Tuhiwai Smith, the idea that there is a universal history, as declared in definitions of human and cultural rights, is a Western product that has been developed along the imperial beliefs about the Other, which is the exact Other that has been excluded by the writing of this history.[213] From this standpoint, the blending of human rights with cultural rights is highly contested.

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[210] United Nations, 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (United Nations, 1948) <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/udhr.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2021]

[211] 'UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity' (UNESCO, 2 November 2001) <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/5_Cultural_Diversity_EN.pdf> [accessed 3 April 2021].

[212] 'UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity'.

[213] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd, 2008), pp. 29–32.

The majority of international charters and conventions by UNESCO and ICOMOS[214] provide a terminology and definitions of 'tangible heritage' which takes the form of historical monuments, buildings and sites, hence dismissing how living communities assert meaning and value to these places.[215] In this way, less value is given to the 'intangible heritage' that includes 'oral traditions and expressions, language, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events and traditional craftsmanship.'[216]

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has described this distinction between the two expressions of heritage as a critical one. He writes:

> (i)intangible heritage must be seen as the larger framework within which tangible heritage takes on its shape and significance. It is the critical tool through which communities and societies define their archive of relationships between cultural values and cultural valuables. If cultural heritage can be seen as a major vehicle of human aspirations, tangible heritage is its physical shape, but intangible heritage is its motor and steering mechanism.[217]

Seen from this perspective, the way that this distinction is mobilised in the institutional documents becomes political in sites of conflict, such as in the case of the ISIL (Islamic State) destruction of the Yazidi community's cultural heritage in 2014.[218] As a counter to this, the project *Maps of Defiance* by Forensic Architecture addressed this very issue of the systematic destruction of cultural heritage, from the perspective of the communities who once used these sites, in

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[214] ICOMOS is a non-governmental international organisation dedicated to the conservation of the world's monuments and sites, established in Paris in 1965.

[215] Yahaya Ahmad, 'The Scope and Definitions of Heritage: From Tangible to Intangible', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12.3 (2006), 292–300 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527250600604639> [accessed 10 August 2021].

[216] Ibid.

[217] Arjun Appadurai, 'Cultural Diversity: A Conceptual Platform', *Cultural Diversity Series No. 1*, 1 (2002) <http://www.arjunappadurai.org/articles/Appadurai_Cultural_Diversity_A_Conceptual_Platform.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[218] Benjamin Isakhan and Sofya Shahab, 'The Islamic State's Destruction of Yezidi Heritage: Responses, Resilience and Reconstruction after Genocide', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 20.1 (2020), 3–25 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469605319884137> [accessed 10 August 2021].

support of Yazda's advocacy efforts, as well as in legal proceedings against known members of ISIL.[219]

The evidence of a massacre that had not previously been acknowledged speaks directly to how the blending of a language of human rights with that of cultural rights, as mediated through the protocols of the UN and UNESCO, becomes detached, by the local narratives and meanings of heritage, from the perspective of the oppressed communities. A humanitarian discourse, which as Smith points out, is framed as a humanitarian discourse often ignores the fact that some social groups 'cannot be ruled by the tension between regulation and emancipation, simply because they are not fully human' in the context of Western modernity.[220] This is inseparable from a methodological extractivism, what Santos describes as a series of extractivist methodologies which are geared to extract knowledge in the form of a raw material that is provided by objects, whether human or nonhuman, such as the excluded body of communities, or the cultural artefacts extracted to place in museum archives.[221] In doing so, extractivism, under the veil of a humanitarian discourse, views not only objects but also knowledge in general, including indigenous and non-Western knowledge – much like the way natural resources are extracted and exploited by mining industries under capitalism and colonialism.[222]

This is also evidenced in the way the conventions and declarations published by these organisations fail to efficiently address the issue of looting, or enact returns. For instance, the 'UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects', adopted in 1995, addresses the problem of theft and the illicit trade of cultural property.[223] The Convention includes a special provision, Article

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[219] 'Maps of Defiance At XXII Triennale Di Milano', *Forensic Architecture* <https://forensic-architecture.org/programme/exhibitions/maps-of-defiance-at-xxii-triennale-di-milano> [accessed 1 September 2021].

[220] Ibid.

[221] Santos, 2018, p. 130.

[222] Ibid., p. 14.

[223] 'UNIDROIT Convention On Stolen Or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects' (Rome: UNIDROIT, 24 June 1995) <https://www.unidroit.org/english/conventions/1995culturalproperty/1995culturalproperty-e.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2021].

3, with regard to the return of cultural property of tribal and indigenous groups, claiming:

> the restitution of a sacred or communally important cultural object belonging to and used by a tribal or indigenous community in a Contracting State as part of that community's traditional or ritual use, shall be subject to the time limitation applicable to public collections.[224]

Weaknesses of the UNIDROIT Convention are that the time limits for recovering stolen indigenous cultural property are flexible, and that the rules only apply to items which were stolen after the treaty came into force.[225] Moreover, the UK did not sign the convention,[226] and only Contracting States can claim for the restitution of objects belonging to tribal or indigenous communities, making it harder for tribal and indigenous communities to bring actions.[227]

Later UNESCO conventions, such as the 2003 'Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage'[228] and the 2005 'Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions'[229] emerged as a response to concerns within the international community that globalisation, as Christina Kreps writes, 'was leading to the widespread loss of traditional cultures, languages, performing arts and, in general, the world's diversity of living cultural expressions'.[230] Although these were initially aimed at improving the latter issue by recognising and encouraging the participation of indigenous communities and various ethnic minorities in securing their cultural heritage, none of them addressed past appropriations. However, again the UK is not a party to the 2003

[224] 'UNIDROIT Convention On Stolen Or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects'.

[225] Saskia Vermeylen, 'Easter Island Statues: International Law Is Shifting against British Museum', *The Conversation*, 29 November 2018 <https://theconversation.com/easter-island-statues-international-law-is-shifting-against-british-museum-107726> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[226] Ibid.

[227] Ibid.

[228] UNESCO, 'Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003' (17 October 2003) <http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17716&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[229] UNESCO, 'Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions 2005' (20 October 2005)<https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/passeport-convention2005-web2.pdf>[accessed 9 May 2021].

[230] Christina Kreps, in *Museums, Heritage and International Development*, ed. by Paul Basu and Wayne Modest (New York: Routledge, 2015).

treaty and was party to the 2005 treaty only through European membership, which ended in January 2020.

Finally, the United Nations General Assembly's 'Declaration On the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' (UNDRIP), adopted in 2007, stated in Article 33 that 'Indigenous people have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions. This does not impair the right of indigenous individuals to obtain citizenship of the States in which they live'. [231] Even though, UNDRIP is the most applied comprehensive international instrument on the rights of indigenous peoples' to date, the document has failed to secure the assets of indigenous communities in various calls for returns. For instance, although the Declaration appeared to instigate the Torres Strait Islanders' claim (2011-2012) for the repatriation of human remains held at the British Museum , it was not enough for their successful return, due to the British Museum's argument for the 'public benefit' of its worldwide collections. Moreover, a year after the Declaration, the Benin Dialogue Group[232] was established in an effort to initiate a conversation between museum curators with representatives in Nigeria regarding the repatriation of the Benin Bronzes. To date, no object in the British Museum's collection has been returned to Nigeria, and the Museum is being secretive about the exact number of Benin Bronzes in its collections.[233]

Scholars such as Ariella Azoulay, Helaine Silverman and Fairchild Ruggles, Chiara De Cesari, Christina Kreps and Stuart Hall have pointed out the ineffectiveness of such policies and laws and the deployment of culture for political purposes,

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[231] 'United Nations Declaration On The Rights Of Indigenous Peoples' (United Nations, 13 September 2007) <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf>[accessed 9 May 2021].

[232] The Benin Dialogue Group is an international group formed in 2007 with the aim of enacting a dialogue between representatives of Western museums and representatives of the Nigerian Government in order to instigate actions for the return of the Benin Bronzes.

[233] Hicks, 2020.

illuminating the uses and abuses of cultural heritage. [234] [235] [236] [237] Azoulay, in her discussion of the imperial context within which the 1948 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' was produced, argues that:

> rather than reading these documents with an eye to what is written in them that is, for the textual rights they declare, I read them as the material objects in which their authors' imperial rights are materialized through a series of distinctions between past and present, document and object, content and matter, rights as provisions, and rights taken for granted.[238]

Stuart Hall, in his keynote speech 'Un-settling "the Heritage", Re-imagining the Post-nation: Whose Heritage?', given in 1999 at a national conference titled *Whose Heritage?*, argues that we should think of 'heritage' as that which 'is bound into the meaning of the nation through a double inscription'.[239] It is at first the constructed nation for which the heritage provides the archive, but also the nation whose meaning is constructed within (not above or outside) representation. From this standpoint, Hall touches upon the contingencies of representation and cultural diversity, and more specifically the oppressed voices of the UK's black and ethnic minority communities, which are excluded from museums, educational settings and public funding, tracing this back to the emergence of multicultural Britain after World War II. For Hall, the idea of a universal heritage has notions of the preservation and conservation of a past that are used in practices of governmentality embedded within it. In turn, questions such as what makes the heritage, or for whom is that heritage, cannot be examined outside issues of representation and the governing assumptions of the current times and contexts.[240]

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[234] *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*, eds., by Helaine Silverman and Fairchild Ruggles (New York: Springer, 2007).

[235] Chiara De Cesari, 'Creative Heritage: Palestinian Heritage NGOs and Defiant Arts of Government', *American Anthropologist*, 112.4 (2010), 625–37 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2010.01280.x>.

[236] Christina Kreps, in Museums, Heritage and International Development, 2015.

[237] Stuart Hall, 'Un-settling "the Heritage", Re-imagining the Post-nation: Whose Heritage?', *Third Text*, 13.49 (1999), 3–13 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528829908576818>.

[238] Azoulay, p. 456.

[239] Hall, p. 5.

[240] Hall.

From the standpoint of human rights, Silverman and Ruggles note that what is at stake in institutional efforts to inscribe cultural heritage within a humanitarian discussion 'is the question of who defines cultural heritage and who should control stewardship and the benefits of cultural heritage'.[241] These contestations, they continue, emerge from the fact that:

> Heritage is by no means a neutral category of self-definition nor an inherently positive thing: It is a concept that can promote self-knowledge, facilitate communication and learning, and guide the stewardship of the present culture and its historic past. But it can also be a tool for oppression.[242]

Silverman and Ruggles' assertion that that there no such thing as neutrality in the way cultural heritage is defined is evidenced in the ways that the British Museum deploys stewardship against communities due to its perceived technological superiority. An example is the case of the Torres Strait Islanders' unsuccessful claim for the return of their ancestral remains (two divining skulls), in which the Museum's claims of 'public benefit' conflicted with the spiritual, religious and cultural beliefs of particular communities, as it will be examined in the section entitled 'Fragment II: Letters'. In a similar manner, De Cesari writes that 'heritage produces a contested and "dissonant" space because its dominant representations are open to different interpretations and appropriations'.[243]

As has been demonstrated in this section, under the veil of universalism and humanitarian discourse, culture is often mobilised as a claim for human rights; however, there have been important omissions and points of failure, such as the issue of temporality and the issue of representation of countries opting in to sign up to UN and UNESCO procedural documents. This evidences how both stewardship and heritage, as mobilised through these institutional procedures, can also be used as a tool for oppression.

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[241] Silverman and Ruggles, p. 3.

[242] Ibid.

[243] De Cesari, p. 626.

Violence and Extraction and Cultural Aesthetics

The looting of objects from areas and communities to which they belong in order to be placed in the British Museum archive (along with its related institutions), is inseparable from a methodological extractivism which, as noted by Santos, views not only objects, but also knowledge in general, as information to be extracted and used.[244] Hicks sees this act of extraction as that which also conditions the life of the object to its double historicity: its existence before and after the violent act of accession, therefore the moment before and after the British Museum's claim of universality.[245] Along the same lines, Azoulay writes that the extraction of objects from their communities shaped the conditions under which Western museums emerged as imperial institutions that defined and assessed what art is.[246] From this standpoint, Azoulay highlights how this extractivist ideology upon which museums are built and operate up to the present day is embedded with an imperial violence which is also constitutive of the Western definitions of art and artists.

As part of the inaugural events for the formation of the United Nations, the exhibition 'Art of the United Nations' (1944-1945), organised at the Art Institute of Chicago, featured objects lent from museum collections in the United States and Europe. Each of these objects represented a member state of the UN, many of which were both subject to colonial wars as well as the battlegrounds of World War II. In the catalogue, the exhibition was described by the curator and director of the Institute, Daniel Catton Rich, as 'not (a) political exhibition' but instead as serving the purpose of widening 'the aesthetic horizons' of the audience.[247] He continues that visitors are invited to 'read this art in terms of history, philosophy, religion, or geographical boundaries', to 'widen our aesthetic horizons and increase our pleasure in art.'[248]

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[244] Santos, 2018, p.14.

[245] Hicks, 2020.

[246] Azoulay, pp. 63-66.

[247] Daniel Catton Rich, *Art of the United Nations* (Chicago, IL: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1944).

[248] Rich.

The rhetoric of art and war being two opposing directions exemplified in the catalogue's statement is contradictory to the imperial violence inscribed within the objects of the exhibition. The display included objects from private acquisitions and national museums' collections across the United Nations, and completely ignored the objects' provenance. For instance, Brazil is represented by a painting made by the Brazilian artist Candido Portinari, and in the text is described as a place where 'Indians of untutored race' were led by their conquerors (the Portuguese) to develop a style of architecture 'which had its full flowering in the next century in rich, luxuriant, and elaborate edifices that still beautify Brazil's cities.'[249]

The way a lack of virtues was ascribed to the indigenous people of Brazil in the catalogue is close to what Linda Tuhiwai Smith has argued as differentiation between the 'fully human' and the 'partially human' in the context of imperialism.[250] Smith notes that one of the supposed characteristics of 'primitive peoples' was an inability to create institutions or history, to imagine, to produce anything of value, to know how to use land and resources from the natural world, to practise the arts of civilisation.[251] In this manner, in imperial and colonial practices of classification which have attempted to transform indigenous practices into science, indigenous societies 'by lacking such virtues', were disqualified 'not just from civilization but from humanity itself.'[252] As Smith writes, 'imperialism provided the means through which concepts of what counts as human could be applied systematically as forms of classification, for example through hierarchies of race and typologies of different societies.'[253]

The violence of the act of accession of the object to the museum could be read in many ways. At first it concerns what Azoulay describes as the unwelcome and violent separation of people and their artefacts, by forcing both to become objectified through the observation, classification, study, conversion, care, charge

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[249] Ibid., p.13.

[250] Smith, p. 25.

[251] Ibid.

[252] Ibid.

[253] Ibid.

and control by institutions and their scholars and experts.[254] For Azoulay, this parallels the role of museums as imperial institutions, to preserve a past that is, in fact, a vast enterprise of destruction conducted at the expense of – and as a substitute for – destroyed worlds.[255] Moreover, it evidences a binary logic of opposition and separation between subject and object, human and nonhuman – what has been theorised as an *abyssal* distinction.

Ideas of stakeholder inclusion, diversification and bottom-up participation in museum programmes has been increasing in the critical discourse in recent years, due to the pressure from movements, initiatives such as BLM and the work of scholars such as Dan Hicks at the Pitt Rivers Museum in the UK and Wayne Modest in the National Museum of World Cultures in Rotterdam.[256] An example is the Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue project (2007–2009),[257] initiated by the Institute for Cultural Heritage with the aim of generating a dialogue between European museums (including the British Museum) and migrant communities. Moreover, efforts to embrace participation by communities and democratic access to cultural heritage were seen in the 2015-2016 exhibition 'Encounters: Revealing Stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Objects from the British Museum' which was produced as a collaboration between the British Museum, the National Museum of Australia and a team of researchers from the Australian National University. The exhibition toured to the National Museum of Australia (NMA), Canberra, from November 2015 to March 2016. It aimed to actively seek participation from, and engage with, Indigenous and Aboriginal communities to contribute information and co-curate the display of Australian Aboriginal material from the British Museum's collections.[258] However, the project drew criticism from various indigenous activists such as Gary Murray, an Elder of the Dja Dja Wurrung

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[254] Azoulay. p.1.

[255] Ibid.

[256] *Museums and Communities*, 2013; Bernadette T. Lynch and Samuel J.M.M. Alberti, 'Legacies of Prejudice: Racism, Co-Production and Radical Trust in the Museum', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 25.1 (2010), 13–35 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770903529061>.

[257] 'Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue: Selected Practices from Europe', ed. by Simona Bodo, and others, *MAP for ID*, 2009 <https://www.ne-mo.org/fileadmin/Dateien/public/service/Handbook_MAPforID_EN.pdf>.

[258] *Encounters: Revealing Stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Objects from the British Museum* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2015).

people,[259] for failing to adequately engage with the repatriation of looted objects, such as Dja Dja Wurrung barks, and the argument of loan versus return remained unresolved, as the British Museum denied the communities' claim for the return of some of their 150 items which the Museum holds.[260]

Although my research acknowledges the importance of this shift in the current discourse, and the potential of participatory models of exhibition-making to contribute and reinvent the museum as a pluriversal and inclusive environment, this direction is beyond the scope of this analysis. I will instead focus on specific case studies in the following chapters to identify the ways in which museums develop their arguments for technological superiority, and how the museum as a geopolitical location reinforces these ideas, either through the organisation of the galleries, storage spaces and scientific laboratories and the constructing of 'public value', or by means of inscribing meaning onto objects by reducing their histories before the act of deaccessioning.

Towards Alternative Visions for the Museum

Historian Françoise Vergès describes a museum based on the concept of 'absence': a museum without objects that would neither seek to fill up a void, nor hide the histories of violation. [261] Instead it would embrace the absence of material objects to confront the lives of the oppressed, the migrants, the marginal.[262]

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai talks about the object as an 'accidental refugee', linking the fate of museum objects with the bodies of the refugees who seek new

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[259] Dja Dja Wurrung People is a Traditional Owner Group entity that has fought to be recognised as the Traditional Owners of djandak, in Central Victoria in southeast Australia. *Djangi Dja Dja Wurrung* <https://djadjawurrung.com.au/> [accessed 9 August 2021].

[260] Paul Daley, 'Battle for Bark Art: Indigenous Leaders Hail Breakthrough in Talks with British Museum', *Guardian*, 10 February 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/feb/10/battle-for-bark-art-indigenous-leaders-hail-breakthrough-in-talks-with-british-museum>.

[261] Françoise Vergès, 'A Museum Without Objects', in *The Postcolonial Museum: the Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History*, ed. by Iain Chambers and others (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 25–38.

[262] Ibid.

homes.[263] In this way, Appadurai argues that we need to think about the object beyond fixed and stable narratives which are reduced to stories of dislocation, suffering and rehabilitation, and instead through a more open and balanced approach which would eventually allow for more possibilities and meanings.[264]

In his conversation with curators Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and Margareta von Oswald, Wayne Modest notes how notions of crisis and migration can be seen through the perspective of museum objects:

> I am interested in a transition in which we move away from a representation that says this is who those people are, or a practice that hides from its historical violence, and continues to conscript certain humans into what I call the 'deep cultural' and incommensurably different. I am more interested in a shift towards a place that acknowledges the museum's implicatedness within certain pasts and uses this to reposition it as a space where questions of redress, where repair can be inaugurated.[265]

Modest's drawing of attention to how the past has shaped the present, and how this might fashion other types of more equitable futures, offers an alternative way to consider the function that museums might have while acknowledging imperial violence as a constitutive element of their historiography. [266] In a similar manner, Clementine Deliss's notion of the 'metabolic museum' moves beyond dualistic practices.[267] Deliss invites us to reconsider the museum as a space with 'metabolic functions', which in turn is a call to 'think about each of the organs that contributes to its overall institutional operations, subjecting collections to

[263] Arjun Appadurai, Tony Bennett, and Sharon Macdonald, 'Sharon Macdonald, Tony Bennett & Arjun Appadurai – THING' (Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, October 10, 2016) [Lecture], *HKW*, *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* <https://www.hkw.de/en/app/mediathek/video/54230> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[264] Ibid.

[265] Wayne Modest, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, and Margareta von Oswald.

[266] Wayne Modest and Geraldine de Bastion, 'Objects, (Trans-)Nationalism and the Question of the Colonial Past in the Present', Ifa (Institut Für Auslandsbeziehungen) <https://soundcloud.com/ifa-podcast/objects-trans-nationalism-and-the-question-of-the-colonial-past-in-the-present> [accessed 28 June 2021]; Modest, Ndikung, and Oswald.

[267] Clémentine Deliss, *The Metabolic Museum* (Stüttgart: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2020).

contemporary scrutiny and remediation.'[268] In doing so, Deliss is concerned with ways that the collection could be used in self-reflexive ways as a contemporary resource to produce meaning.[269] What she describes as a 'metabolic process' is one within which aesthetic practices should no longer be seen in isolation, 'but each enquiry becomes a reflection of temporary interdependencies between artworks, people, objects, media, equipment, experiences, observations, laws, economies, and affects'.[270]

'The Museum of Emotion' (2019), an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London, curated by artist and activist Kader Attia, touches upon the ambivalent nature of emotions, drawing links between damaged objects and injured bodies, embodied and disembodied ways of seeing, focusing on the metaphor of *repair* and *reparation*.[271]Attia's work unravels the political and ethical dimension of *repair* as a critique of modern Western systems of control that have been defining various aspects of life, from traditional museology to contemporary mechanisms of social exclusion.

The installation 'The Repair from Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures', displayed a series of sculptures of injured faces and broken objects, juxtaposed with pictures of repaired African artefacts and of deformed faces of World War I soldiers. [272]According to Attia, the decisive moment in our – Western – understanding of *repair* was World War I, when acts of *repair* became much more sophisticated due to the proliferation of reconstructive surgery on the traumatised bodies of soldiers.[273] This was something which, according to Attia, has generated a polarisation of the very definition of the term. In the West, *repair* stems from 'an illusion of reappropriation of the self', while in non-Western

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[268] Ibid., p. 112.

[269] Ibid.

[270] Ibid.

[271] *Kader Attia: The Museum of Emotion*, ed. by Ralph Rugoff (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2019).

[272] *Kader Attia: The Museum of Emotion.*

[273] Attia Kader, 'Accident as Repair: Kader Attia - Artist Lecture and Discussion' [YouTube video], 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ybUeLyNb3o&t=3253s> [accessed 9 May 2021].

cultures,[274] 'the repair creates a new reality'.[275] On one hand surgery is that which fixes the injury, and on the other the injury is celebrated, with ritual surgery in tribal communities that inflicts wounds as an act of socialisation and to generate a sense of belonging.

Attia asserts that the cultural, ethical and political dimensions of *repair* lie in modernity, suggesting a dialogue between the contemporary meaning of *repair* and the traditional, premodern one.[276] The understanding of *repair* that Attia suggests is one which could allow for an expanded definition of its very meaning: *repair* beyond *fixing* the injury in both bodies and objects by ways of neglecting the trauma, towards embracing the trauma and the impartiality of human nature.

Drawing on the work of Clementine Deliss, Wayne Modest and Kader Attia in both the thesis and the practice, I argue for a position that acknowledges that museums are implicated within imperial violence and extractivism but that also proposes the acknowledgement of this past as a shift towards a process of *repair*.

Following on from this, the section entitled 'Fragment II: Letters' examines a case in which what is at stake is the spiritual, religious and cultural role of an artefact for the community to which it belongs, versus the claim of universalism by the British Museum. It involves two divining skulls extracted from Torres Strait Islanders of Nagir and Mer in Australia during the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait in 1898. These artefacts were brought to the British Museum by Professor Alfred Cort Haddon, an evolutionary anthropologist who instigated the 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait in order to undertake a holistic study of the Torres Strait Islanders. By staging the retrieved reports, letters and policy documents deployed for this case – documents which are normally hidden in archives – 'Fragment II: Letters' turns the collection from the inside out in order to challenge the Museum's colonial, universalist claim to hold looted objects for

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[274] What Kader Attia calls 'extra-Occidental Cultures'.

[275] Kader Attia, 'Repair: Architecture Reappropriation and the Body Repaired', *Kader Attia* http://kaderattia.de/repair-architecture-reappropriation-and-the-body-repaired/.

[276] Manthia Diawara, Jacinto Lageira, and Kitty Scott. *Kader Attia: The Repair: From Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures*, ed. by Axel Lapp (Berlin: The Green Box, 2014), p. 165.

the benefit of the Museum's global audience at the expense of the rights of the community to which these objects belong.
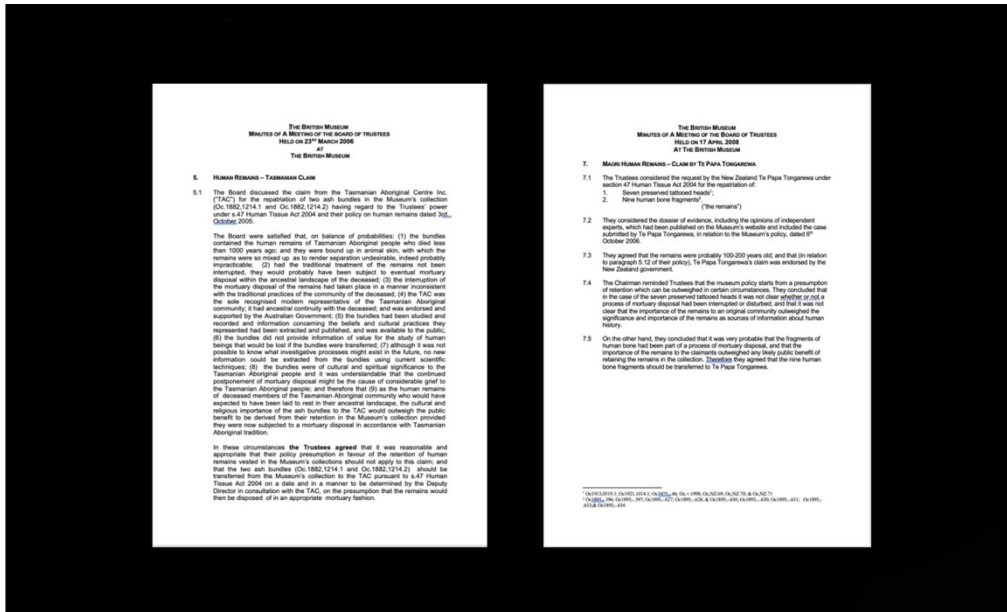
FRAGMENT II

Letters

Figure 5 Fragment II: Letters. Kyriaki Spanou

Left: Tasmanian Claim. Right: Claim by Te Papa Tongarewa.

Cultural beliefs and practices of communities sit uncomfortably with the British Museum's policy of continuing to hold looted objects, which have been extracted in military operations such as in the Kingdom of Benin, or during anthropological expeditions in the late 19th century. The Museum often marginalises the importance of cultural sensitivities and beliefs that surround objects in favour of their retention, excluding the voices of the communities to which these items belong. What is often at stake, is the assumed primacy of western scientific research versus the local cultural traditions. This is evident in cases concerning the repatriation of ancestral human remains: the ethical treatment of such collections in Western museums is an ongoing issue, and one where the dialogue is quickly shifting within recent debates in US institutions such as the Penn Museum and Harvard University.[277] In the UK,

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[277] Representatives of the Penn Museum in Philadelphia apologised for the holding of remains of those killed in the 1985 Move bombing in Philadelphia, and these collections serve as a case study in the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton. The remains were displayed without the family permission. This case was instigated on the grounds of recent controversy in the United States relating to the broader misuse of Black remains for scientific purposes, to justify white supremacist theories. Moreover, at Harvard University, a steering committee was formed for the purpose of cataloguing and developing policies around the human remains housed in the university's museums, which hold collections of the remains of individuals of African descent. In Ed Pilkington, 'Bones of Black Children Killed in Police Bombing Used in Ivy League Anthropology Course', *Guardian*, 23 April 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/22/move-bombing-black-children-bones-philadelphia-princeton-pennsylvania> [accessed 8 May 2021]; Jasper G. Goodman and Kelsey J. Griffin, 'Possible Remains of Enslaved People Found in Harvard Museum Collections', *The Crimson*, 29 January

at the Pitt Rivers Museum, when it reopened in September 2020 after the first national lockdown, all human remains have been removed from display, yet still in their holdings.[278] In the British Museum, two Tasmanian cremation ash bundles were repatriated in 2006, and only nine out of the sixteen Maori human remains claimed by Te Papa Tongarewa were returned in 2008 to New Zealand. [279] [280]

Following these repatriations, and the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly's 'Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' (2007), [281] the Indigenous peoples of Torres Strait Islanders (TSI)[282] initiated a discussion with the British Museum concerning the repatriation of their ancestral remains. The TSI advocacy team – in collaboration with the Australian Government – was committed to the unconventional return of the TSI ancestors' remains from overseas holding institutions.[283] These items were taken during the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Strait Islands in 1898-1899 which was instigated and led by Professor Alfred Cort Haddon,[284] a British evolutionary anthropologist, who undertook a holistic

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2021<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2021/1/29/committee-to-examine-human-remains-in-harvard-museums/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[278] Dan Hicks, 'Decolonising Museums Isn't Part of a "Culture War". It's about Keeping Them Relevant', *Guardian*, 7 May 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/07/decolonising-museums-isnt-part-of-a-culture-war-its-about-keeping-them-relevant> [accessed 7 May 2021].

[279] British Museum, 'Human Remains- Tasmanian Claim', 23 March 2006 [The British Museum, Minutes of A Meeting of the Board of Trustees, Held on 23rd March 2006 at The British Museum] [2.9.1 Extract from 23 March 2006 minutes] < https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/human-remains/request-repatriation-human-remains-torres-strait-islands> [accessed 5 February 2021]

[280] British Museum, 'Maori Human Remains – Claim by Te Papa Tongarewa', 17 April 2008 [The British Museum, Minutes of A Meeting of the Board of Trustees, Held on 17 April 2008 at The British Museum][2.9.2 Extract from 17 April 2008 Minutes] <https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/human-remains/request-repatriation-human-remains-torres-strait-islands>[accessed 5 February 2021]

[281] The 'United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' proposes the right of indigenous people to the repatriation of human remains and supports cooperative relations with States. In 'United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples'.

[282] The Torres Strait Islands are politically part of Australia.

[283] Stephen Seriako, and David Lui Ned, 'The Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners Submission to the Board of Trustees of the British Museum. Claim for the Repatriation of Two Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains', 31 May 2011 [2.2 The TSI claim, dated 31 May 2011] <https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/00%2002%20Claim%20from%20Torres%20Strait%20Islanders_.pdf > [accessed 5 February 2021]

[284] Other members of the expedition team were Charles Seligman, C.S. Myers, W.H.R. Rivers, W.M. Dougall, A. Wilkin and Sidney Ray.

study of the Islanders.[285] On his return, Haddon brought back two divining skulls which were later bequeathed to the British Museum collection. One skull was identified as that of a named young man, who had died in 1887; it was purchased by Haddon in 1888 while he was on the island of Nagir.[286] The second skull was purchased by Haddon on Mer in 1889.[287] Haddon's descriptions were included as evidence for the conditions of the purchase in the reports exchanged between the British Museum and the TSI advocacy team between 2011 and 2012.[288] The TSI claim written by Seriako Stephen and Lui Ned David, argue for the cultural, spiritual and religious significance of these items, and continuity with ancestral remains due to the ways they are linked with local customs and belief systems which predate any missionary influences.[289]
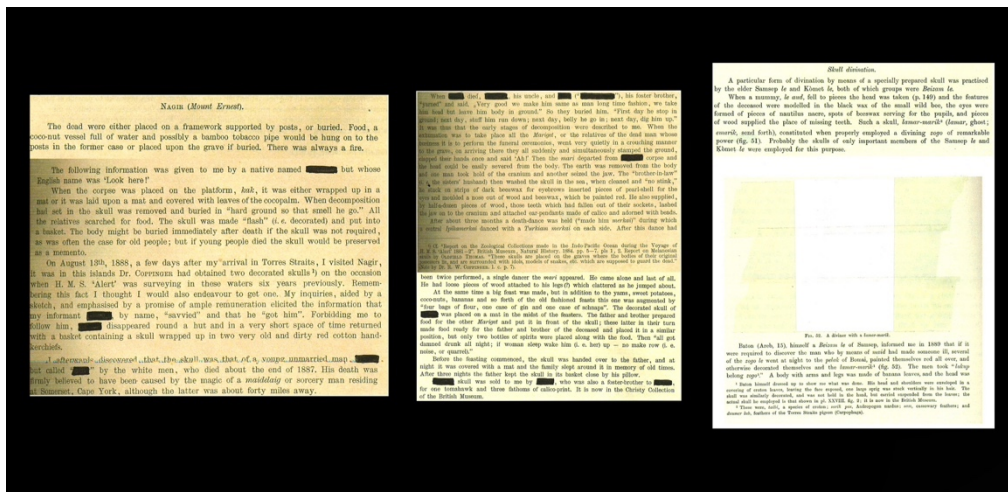
Figure 6 Fragment II: Letters. Kyriaki Spanou.

Excerpts from Alfred Cort Haddon's Reports of 1888-89 in which he describes the actual collection and purchasing process.

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[285] *Regarding the Dead: Human Remains in the British Museum*, ed. by Alexandra Fletcher, Daniel Antoine, and J D Hill (London: The British Museum, 2014), pp. 40–41.

[286] Natasha McKinney, 'Request for the De-accession of Human Remains from the Torres Strait Islands, Australia' (The British Museum, 3 June 2011) [2.4 The briefing note on the skulls provided for the meeting on 30 June 2011 by N McKinney including two Bioarchaeological Reports by D Antoine (BM)] <https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/human-remains/request-repatriation-human-remains-torres-strait-islands>[accessed 5 December 2021], p.2.

[287] Natasha McKinney, 'Request for the De-accession of Human Remains from the Torres Strait Islands, Australia'.

[288] Ibid.

[289] Seriako and Ned, p.7.

According to the TSI claim to the Board of Trustees of the British Museum in May 2011, one of the arguments of the claim was that the removal of their ancestors from their land disrupts the circle of life and death which, in their spiritual, cultural and religious traditions, is not linear. As Seriako and Ned write in the claim:

> Of vital concern in Torres Strait Islander culture is the 'spirit' and what might become of it. Death is not seen as an end point but as a transition to another level of existence.[290]

> Traditional beliefs held that the spirit of the deceased was capable of bringing harm to the community, and the funerary ritual was indented to avert such danger to free the spirit to its final resting place.[291]

On these grounds the TSI representatives claimed the return of their ancestors in order that they could receive a proper funerary ceremony, a vital element of their traditional belief system which has been interrupted. Moreover, the TSI representatives state their objection to the application of any invasive or non-invasive technologies for the study of these objects, arguing that the British Museum's argument on the basis of the public benefit to the Museum's worldwide audience comes at the expense of the cultural rights of their community. More specifically, they stated:

> Torres Strait Islander people appreciated the benefits of science should proceed on a basis of co-operation and consensus in relation to our ancestors' remains. Our ancestors' remains are a fundamental spiritual and cultural link to our past and that appropriating (including invasive and non-invasive research on) ancestral remains violates the sanctity of the dead. We consider that there will be no spiritual peace until the dead are returned 'to country' and have received their last rights in accordance with their traditions.[292]

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[290] Ibid., p.8
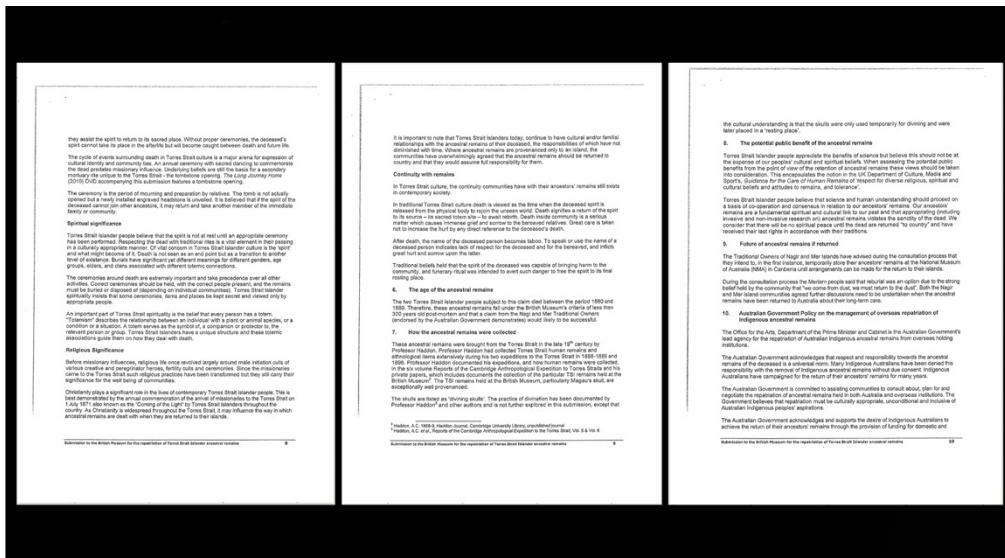
[291] Ibid.

[292] Ibid., p. 10.

Figure 7 Fragment II: Letters. Kyriaki Spanou.

The Torres Strait Islanders' Claim to the British Museum for the Repatriation of ancestral remains on 31 May 2011.

In cases of the repatriation of human remains, investigative methods such as DNA analysis and CT scanning are utilised as means to justify provenance, and to estimate the specific time frame and original location of objects during negotiations with communities who claim the objects' return. According to the British Museum's Human Remains Policy,[293] which outlines the criteria for a request, the claimants should demonstrate the continuity of religious/spiritual belief and/or cultural customs and practices between themselves and the community from which the human remains originate.[294] For example, 100, 300 and 500 years are markers for whether there is a direct genealogical link, which might outweigh the public benefit to the global community of retaining the human remains in the Collection.[295] Although it is important to note that in the case of Torres Strait Islanders, the central

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[293] The policy was approved by the Trustees in October 2006 and updated in 2013. A new policy was introduced in 2018, valid until 2023.

[294] See paragraphs 5.14–5.16 in British Museum, 'British Museum Policy Human Remains in the Collection' (2006) <https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/00%2001%20Human%20Remains%20Policy%206%20Oct%202006.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[295] According to the Human Remain Policy (2006); 'The Trustees will be more strongly in favour of retention of human remains in the Collection where a request is made to ancestral remains over 300 years old and very strongly in favour of retention where the request concerns ancestral remains over 500 years old. Finally in cases where the human remains are less than 100 years old the applicants should address a direct and close genealogical link and demonstrate the cultural continuity and importance of the remains to them'. See paragraphs 5.14–5.16 in British Museum, 'British Museum Policy Human Remains in the Collection' (2006).

argument for the return of their human remains is grounded in a different, non-linear and non-Western understanding of life and death, in which, according to the TSI claim, death is not considered as an end point, but as 'a transition to another level of existence'.[296] Therefore, the designation of quantitate durational markers of 100, 300, 500 years as criteria for the evaluation of experiential continuities between past and present, are based on Western assumptions and conceptions of time which exclude the more ontological understanding of duration common in non-Western traditions.

Figure 8 Fragment II: Letters. Kyriaki Spanou.

Right: Excerpt from Anthropologist Dr Richard Davis's report. Left: Excerpt from bioarchaeologist Professor Simon Hillson's report.

Furthermore, two independent reports by anthropologist Dr Richard Davis of the University of Western Australia and by bioarchaeologist Professor Simon Hillson of University College London were submitted.[297] [298] Davis emphasised the cultural significance of the remains, restating the spiritual identity of the deceased in relation to the Torres Strait Islanders' beliefs, reinforcing what was

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[296] Seriako and Ned, pp. 8-10

[297] Richard Davis, 'Report on the Cultural Significance of Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains Held by the British Museum', 12 December 2011 [2.8.1 Dr Richard Davis's report] <https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/00%2008.1%20Richard%20Davis%20Report.pdf> [accessed 5 February 2021].

[298] Simon Hillson, 'Decorated Human Skulls Oc,89+.96 and Oc,89+.97', 2012 [2.8.3. Professor Simon Hillson's report] <https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/human-remains/request-repatriation-human-remains-torres-strait-islands>[accessed 5 February 2021].

already stated in the TSI claim regarding the communities' traditional beliefs in the spirit of the dead.[299] He noted, however, that the Islanders might have been prepared to trade or exchange the divining skulls, which had led to negative characterisations of the Islanders by historians due to the way they had dealt with remains of the dead.[300] Davis concluded that in the present-day context the skulls for the TSI community are 'social entities that compel descendants to reconsider their relationship to them in an era where Islanders are achieving autonomy and ownership of those things that are taken from them'.[301] On the other hand, Professor Hillson argued for the importance of the skulls for future DNA studies, emphasising their value for anthropology due to their rarity and origin, which are key aspects for understanding the origins of modern humans, suggesting the use of high-resolution computer tomography radiography for future genetic research.[302]

Figure 9 Fragment II: Letters. Kyriaki Spanou.

The British Museum's Conclusion Statement on the case of the Repatriation of Human remains from the Torres Strait Islands.

The Trustees decided in December 2012 that this claim would not be accepted, due to insufficient evidence supporting repatriation, and that 'it was unclear that

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[299] Davis, pp. 13-19.

[300] Ibid., p.8.

[301] Ibid., p.19.

[302] Hillson.

the process of mortuary disposal had been interrupted'.[303] As Natasha McKinney asserts, the active participation of the Islanders in the exchange that was stated in Davis' report may have influenced the Trustees' decision against repatriation; moreover, the interpretation of Haddon's account played a pivotal role in the discussions: McKinney notes that collectors' accounts are often fragmented and limited in detail, making assessment of claims difficult.[304]
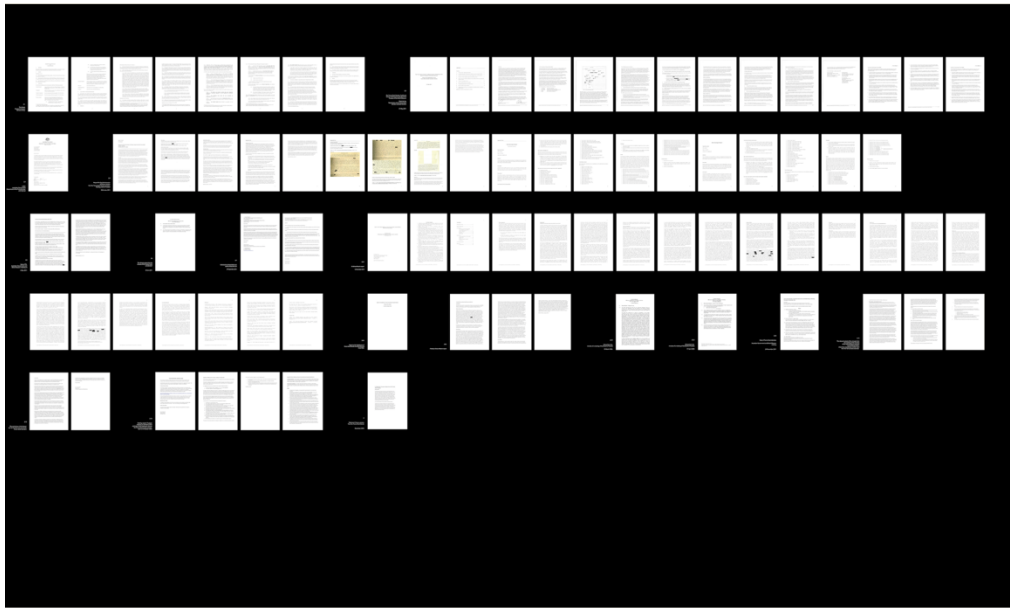
Figure 10 Fragment II: Letters. Kyriaki Spanou

A compilation of the Torres Strait Islander claim, and the consequent responses by the British Museum.

In 'Fragment II: Letters', the documentation of the Torres Strait Islander claim, and the consequent responses by the British Museum, are compiled together into a single document comprising all the reports, policy documents and letters exchanged between 2011–2012. This also includes the extracts of minutes of their conversations, including the minutes of the discussion of two Tasmanian cremation ash bundles in 2006 and some Maori human remains from New Zealand in 2008, and the 'British Museum's Human Remains policy' (2006)[305] which are all included in the dossier of material considered by Trustees for this

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[303] British Museum, 'Statement: Human remains from the Torres Strait Islands' December 2012<https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/human-remains/request-repatriation-human-remains-torres-strait-islands>[accessed 5 February 2021]

[304] Fletcher, Alexandra, Daniel Antoine, and JD Hill, eds., *Regarding the Dead: Human Remains in the British Museum* (London: The British Museum, 2014), pp. 40-41.

[305] British Museum, 'British Museum Policy Human Remains in the Collection'.

repatriation case. All these documents are published on the British Museum website, listed as individual documents in accordance with the Museum's policy on human remains – which requests the decision to be publicly accessible.[306] These documents cannot be seen as a whole, however: they are only accessible individually, scattered on the Museum's website.

Even though the inclusion of the dossiers of repatriation cases is justified as offering a degree of transparency to the decision-making process (according to the Museum's human remains policy), it does raise the question as to whether the very means of study of these objects, such as computer tomography, SR scanning and radiography, is unethical considering that on the one hand it enables scientists to justify the objects' provenance, identity and date, and in turn their ability to preserve these objects, but on the other it conflicts with the rights of the community by reappropriating their items for the universalist claim of the benefit of public science. Commenting on how the proliferation of such technologies in all European ethnographic museums invades the spiritual sanctity of ritual objects, Clementine Deliss asks: 'how far are artists, priests, and healers involved in deciding if such analyses should be performed on their heritage, whose coded knowledge has been enacted for centuries by way of these iconic sculptures?' [307]

The polarisation between spirituality and technical knowledge, cultural beliefs and the benefits of public science, evidence the ideological orientation of *repair* in the Global North. As an alternative to this epistemological paradigm – which prioritise technical knowledge at the expense of human rights to culture – I procced with the thorough documentation of this dispute, gathering all the accessible information that is archived on the British Museum website. By compiling all these documents together and framing the analytical description of the negotiation between the British Museum and the TSI into a single artefact, 'Fragment II: Letters' stands not as a representation of the museum object – in this case the two divining skulls of the Torres Strait Islanders – but as a

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[306] 'Request for Repatriation of Human Remains to the Torres Strait Islands, Australia'.

[307] Deliss, p. 99.

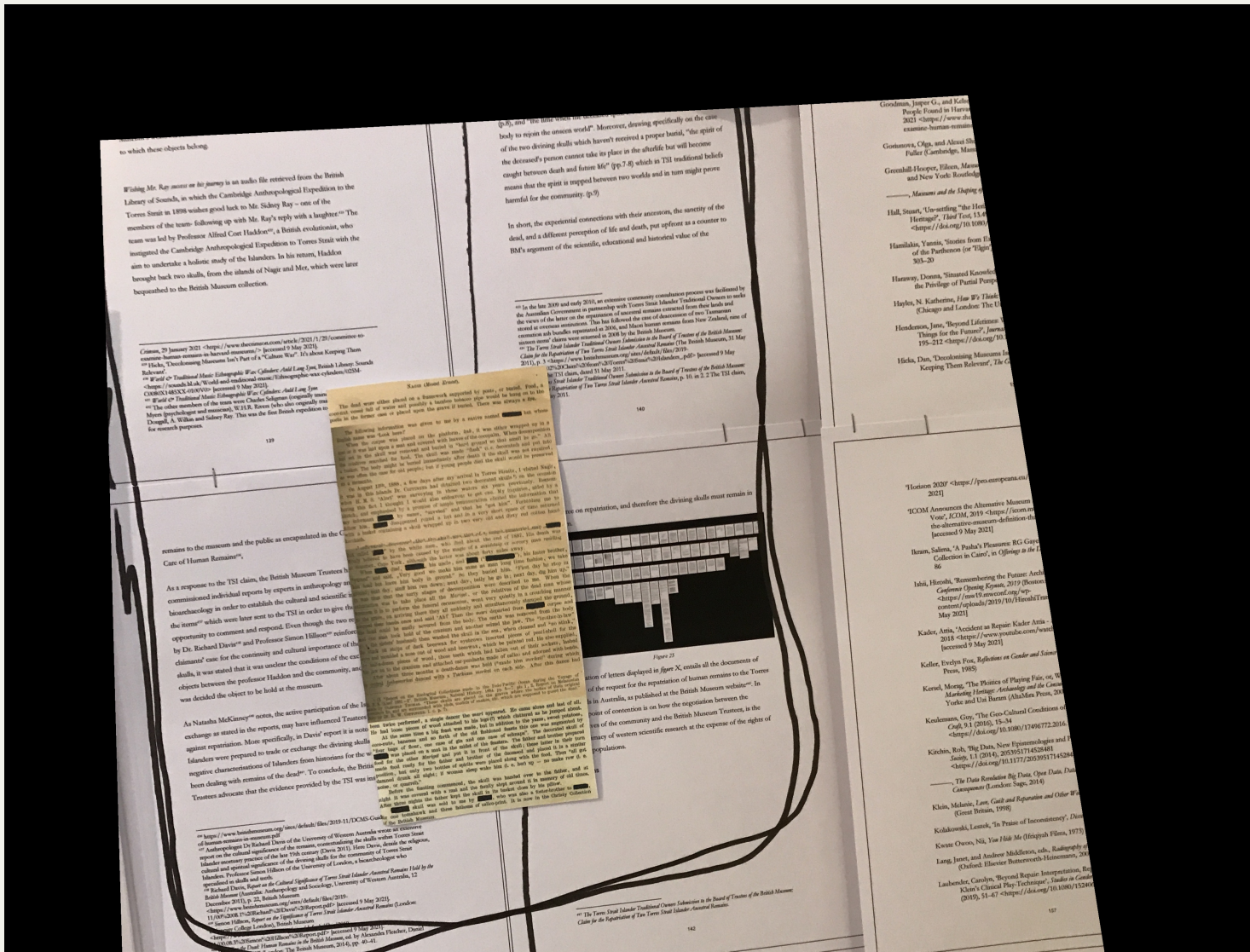representation of the institution, which also exhibits the myth that it is the ideal caretaker.

Figure 11 Documentation of the Research Process. Kyriaki Spanou.

Chapter Four: Portals between Physical and Digital Worlds

The Museum's Geographies and Eurocentrism

The organisation and spatial arrangement of the British Museum's galleries takes place according to the geographical locations, nations and world cultures from which its objects derive. This implicitly and explicitly constructs national identity narratives around which heritage is presented to the public. This, according to archaeologist Stephanie Moser – who has investigated the representation of ancient Egypt in the Museum – creates a 'mental picture' that functions as an interpretive framework for understanding a particular theme, cultural group, or historical episode.[308] As Moser asserts, the question of how meaning is produced in exhibitions requires an investigation of not only what objects are absent or present in a display, but more specifically a question about the representational system itself that has been created for the depiction of a subject.[309] Similarly, scholars in museum studies such as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe have extensively analysed how meaning is produced in exhibitions and how this links to power relationships between an institution and its audience. [310] [311] [312] Drawing from Moser's work, my concerns at this point were to understand how the representational system of the Museum is also mediated by the architecture of the space.

The British Museum has eight departments, and the displays are organised according to these:

the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas

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[308] Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2006), p. 2.

[309] Ibid.

[310] Eilean Greenhill-Hooper, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[311] *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, ed. by Sharon Macdonald (London: Routledge, 1998).

[312] Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe, eds.,*Theorizing Museums* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

the Department of Asia

the Department of Britain, Europe and Prehistory

the Department of Coins and Medals

the Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan

the Department of Greece and Rome

the Department of the Middle East

the Department of Prints and Drawings

The spatial organisation of the eight departments within the Museum, as well as the relationships between them created by their proximity in the layout, is arranged according to what the Museum classifies as representative of the cultural heritage of each nation. The study of the relationship and proximity between those departments, as well as the way that certain objects are selected as representative of those nations and world cultures, was a key concern here in order to investigate Moser's claims and enquire whether narratives are indeed constructed in the way my hypothesis suggests.

The ground floor features objects from the Departments of Ancient Egypt and Sudan, Greece and Rome, Middle East, Asia, and Oceania and Americas. The floors above exhibit objects from the same departments, but from different historical periods. The African collections are entirely exhibited in the basement of the Museum, in the underground levels. The latter are part of the Museum's anthropological collections which, due to lack of space, between 1970–2004 were exhibited at the Museum of Mankind, housed at 6 Burlington Gardens. In 2004, they moved back to the British Museum's Bloomsbury site, and since then the African collections – including the Benin Bronzes – are exhibited, separated by Egypt, in the basement of the Museum.

The spatial division between Egypt and Africa might be understood as the perpetuation of the imperialistic idea that Egypt is not part of Africa, even though they both belong to the same continent, or that Africa produced no great civilizations. Moreover, the act of classifying the African objects in the Museum could be read in parallel with what South African philosopher Mogobe Bernard Ramose has argued is a historical dispute related to power, in terms of the ways that Africa has been colonised by Europeans. Ramose argues

that even the name 'Africa' is a baptismal name, 'given by a virtue of a power', to the northern part of the continent by the Greeks and Romans, that later on spread to the southern part of the continent.[313] From this standpoint, 'those who subsequently conquered Africa were also evoking unjustified use of violence, in order to establish themselves and their epistemological paradigms in this continent'.[314] For Ramose, a conquering act of naming Africa speaks to the problem of historical injustice; an assumption that the people living in the continent were lacking linguistic, cultural and sociological resources.[315] An extractivist practice, described by Santos, has difficulty in embracing the body in all its emotional and affective density without turning it into just another object of study.

The ancient Egypt collections have been historically arranged in spatial juxtaposition with the ancient Greece and Rome collections – the classical world.[316] Moser has seen this as a comparative mode of evaluating ancient art which filtered and objectified Egypt via the gaze of the Western collector/ curator/ historian's knowledge of ancient Greek or Roman art, and therefore the Egyptian culture was not treated as a distinctive cultural event. This was partly due to insufficient historical knowledge about ancient Egypt, since the Museum was not established until the late nineteenth century, but was also due to the lack of an acquisitions policy for Egyptian antiquities – hence the majority of objects were uncontextualised. Moreover, as Moser asserts, until the late nineteenth century, Egyptology was not recognised as a discipline, hence the interpretation of the Egyptian objects was subject to Western ideas about this civilisation.[317]

In turn, the ways that the Egyptian objects were curated as part of the British Museum prioritised their aesthetic qualities, and they were not chronologically, scientifically or historically documented. This valorisation of the aesthetic relegated the Egyptian object to something that which would stimulate basic

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[313] Mogobe, Bernard Ramose in 'Conversations of The World - Mogobe B Ramose and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Part 1)' *Conversations of The World*, 2016 [YouTube video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEDNoZg3G4Y> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[314] Ibid.

[315] Ibid.

[316] Moser.

[317] Moser, pp. 217–33.

emotional responses, such as awe and wonder, from the masses, in contrast to the classical world, which was meant to appeal to an elite, educated audience. Finally, by representing Egypt as a source of 'wondrous curiosities' with collections of scarabs, mummies, figures of animal gods, and 'colossal monstrosities', the Egyptian object was at once defined as alien and different from Western art and paradoxically appropriated within the evolutionary scheme of Western art.[318] Ancient Egypt was simultaneously appropriated as Western and dismissed as exotic.[319]
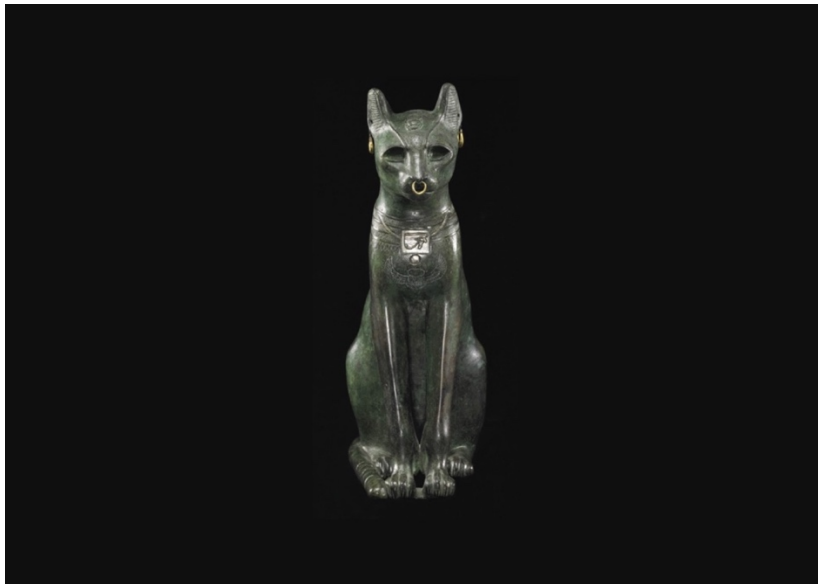
Figure 12 The Gayer-Anderson Cat. Courtesy of © The Trustees of the British Museum.

One of the objects that my research set out to examine is the Gayer-Anderson Cat in the section entitled 'Fragment III: A Crack'. The object is a pharaonic bronze from the Late Period, about 664–332 BC, known as the Gayer-Anderson Cat, and is regarded as one of greatest masterpieces of the British Museum's collection in the Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan.[320] This object has been connected with mythological female entities, fertility, and divine attributes in ancient Egyptian culture by both its collector and the British Museum.[321] It is

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[318] Ibid., pp. 217-224.

[319] Ibid., pp. 227-228.

[320] 'The Gayer-Anderson Cat'. *The British Museum* <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/animals/gayer-anderson-cat> [accessed 3 April 2021]

[321] Janet Ambers and others, 'A New Look at an Old Cat: A Technical Investigation of the Gayer-Anderson Cat', *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin*, 2 (2008), 1–12; Neal Spencer, *The Gayer-Anderson Cat.* (London: British Museum Press, 2007).

displayed in Room 4, Egyptian Sculpture, on the ground floor of the Museum. In the 2019-20 British Museum Review, on the occasion of the closure of the Museum due to the pandemic, Hartwig Fischer writes:

> As I walked through the deserted galleries just before leaving the Museum myself, sunlight shining through a large window directed me towards a bronze cat, an avatar of the Egyptian goddess Bastet, donated to a temple by a wealthy worshipper. This cat has traversed millennia; sitting motionless it holds the past, awaits the future. I felt consoled by its imperturbable presence, thinking that it was there to guide us silently to another epoch, full of promises and new directions. Then I read the label: 'The scarab beetles on the cat's head and chest symbolise rebirth, while the silver udjat-eye on the pectoral invoke protection and healing.' Protection, healing, rebirth – the object speaks to our own predicament.[322]

Fischer saw the divine characteristics of the object as a symbolism that speaks to the hope of resurrection after the pandemic. In my analysis of this object, in 'Fragment III: A Crack', I will look at how the various *repairs* to which the object has been subjected during its life reveal a dynamic space, and a potentially different narrative beyond the pitfalls of Orientalism and the exceptionalising myths with which the West has presented ancient Egypt, and its heritage, as exotic. Using as a starting point the technical analysis of this object conducted by the British Museum scientists in 2008, published in the *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin* as 'A New Look at an Old Cat',[323] I trace the other complex stories that are potentially associated with the life of this object.

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[322] British Museum, *Reaching Out: Review 2019/20* <https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/The_British_Museum_Review_2019-20_0.pdf>.

[323] Ambers and others.

FRAGMENT III
A Crack

The Gayer-Anderson Cat is a pharaonic bronze from the Late Period of ancient Egypt. It is a 42 cm-tall, life-sized model of a cat made out of cast copper alloy, a material which oxidises with the passage of time. The figurine wears jewellery and a protective wedjat amulet and is decorated with a winged scarab that appears on the chest and head. In historical records, animals in ancient Egypt have been associated with mythological female entities.[324] Cats, in particular, have been related with the goddess of Bastet, who would typically manifest in a variety of anthropomorphic, theriomorphic and hybrid forms in animal figurines.[325] Moreover, the fertility, motherly nature and hunting abilities of cats were seen as appropriate divine attributes, relating this figurine with the symbolism required of a sacred object.[326]

The Gayer-Anderson Cat was bequeathed to the British Museum in 1939, as a gift from its collector, the British army major and orientalist Robert Greville Gayer-Anderson (1881–1945) who spent most of his life in Egypt as an army doctor and administrator. A copy of the original figurine is displayed in the Gayer-Anderson Museum in Cairo. The known history of the Gayer-Anderson Cat traces back to 664–332 BC, although the manner of its acquisition, through a collector rather than from a controlled excavation, makes both period and the exact location it was found in uncertain.[327]

In a passage from his unpublished memoirs, *Fateful Attractions*, Gayer-Anderson enthusiastically describes his first impressions of the object when an art dealer showed it to him after breakfast in Cairo, on Monday 22 October 1934:

> [An old friend] carried a large bundle wrapped in cloth; but instead of the assured smile, usual on such occasions, he looked serious and wore an air of secrecy, almost apprehension, I felt. After accepting and lighting a cigarette, he confirmed me in the feeling by intimating that

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[324] Neal Spencer, *The Gayer-Anderson Cat.* (London: British Museum Press, 2007).

[325] Ibid.

[326] Ibid.

[327] Janet Ambers and others, 'A New Look at an Old Cat: A Technical Investigation of the Gayer-Anderson Cat', *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin*, 2 (2008), 1–12.

he would like no one but ourselves to be present when he showed me what he had brought […] squatting on a low stool close beside me, [he] very deliberately untied his bundle and began to extract from it a number of objects done up in newspaper and dirty clouts. These he unwrapped carefully one by one, handling each to me as he did so. [The objects] were so time destroyed and friable that I wondered why this man had brought these worthless relics and I felt a trifle annoyed at his having under-rated my standard to such an extend as to have done so.

Neither of us had spoken a word and it was dawning upon me that this man was probably building up a dramatic situation […] There was a long pause; he had stopped his unwrappings – 'is that all'? I was constrained to say, and I knew that I was giving him his cue! – he did not answer, but fumbling among the pile of wrappings on the floor, he produced another object – an object of some considerable size and weight. At last, he disclosed the life-sized bronze statue of a cat […] he held the bronze up to me with a dramatic gesture! Yes! This was the climax he had worked up to so skilfully and successfully.
I examined it carefully. It appeared to be whole and complete, and it was covered with a heavy coating of reddish and greenish deposits which he did much detail and subtlety of modelling, but I have found with fine pharaonic bronzes that their beauty and merit are always patent no matter what their condition and this was no exception. To my practiced eye it was obviously a work of the greatest refinement and beauty of form, a bronze of great rarity and value.[328]

Gayer-Anderson's vivid description of his first encounter with the object, and his imagining of its potency, seems to be a combination of several ideas around art objects collected at that time. It was a period when many objects, particularly from Africa, were sold in flea markets, and later on began to be acquired by ethnographic museums in Europe and the United States, to shape

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[328] A passage from Gayer-Anderson's unpublished memoirs *Fateful Attractions*, cited in Spencer, pp. 54–55.

the first anthropological collections. At that time, any art object which was connected to rituals, spirit possession, divination or superstition was capable of attracting the attention of the Western viewer, and more specifically the gaze of artists such as Picasso and Braque, who were drawn to African objects, such as masks, totems and carvings, in their paintings and sculptures.[329] For example, the BBC documentary series on the subject of tribal art, *The Tribal Eye* (1975),[330] presented by historian David Attenborough, drew upon links between African and European art, using as references the works of Picasso to introduce the Dogon culture in West Africa.[331] Thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire have described this approach as the circulation of a colonial ideology: an ideology of racial and cultural hierarchy that was essential to the colonisers' sense of superiority in creating the Other.[332]

The Egyptian object, in particular, has been always portrayed as a source of fantasy and mystery, due to its connection with themes related to death, spirituality and superstition, as it was also discussed in Stephanie Moser's study of how the British Museum has constructed a particular view of ancient Egypt by also juxtaposing it with the ancient Greek and Roman sculptures.[333] Moreover, ancient Egypt has figured as a site of fantasy and mystery in popular culture through stories about pharaohs, mummies, and pyramids, which also feature the British Museum as the place wherein this non-Western civilisation intersects with the Western world. For instance, in stories inspired by Egyptology, Western scientists and heroes often rescue ancient civilizations from oblivion and exhibit such findings in museums as symbols of Western progress and civilization. Examples include films such as the many *The Mummy* series (1932–1944, 1959–1971 and 1999–2008), *Raiders of the Lost*

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[329] Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilised Places*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[330] The Tribal Eye is a seven-part BBC documentary series on the subject of tribal art, written and presented by David Attenborough. 'The Tribal Eye' exhibition took place at the Museum of Mankind in 1975, in association with the BBC television series. In David Attenborough, 'The Tribal Eye' [seven-part documentary series] (BBC, 1975).

[331] The Dogon are an ethnic group indigenous to the central plateau region of Mali in West Africa.

[332] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Robin D.G. Kelley, 'A Poetics of Anticolonialism', *Monthly Review*, 1 November 1999 <https://monthlyreview.org/1999/11/01/a-poetics-of-anticolonialism/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[333] Moser.

Ark (1981), and more recent films such as *Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb* (2014). This reinforces the notion that the Arab civilisation is of the past and not the present, and therefore backwards and uncivilized: what Edward Said describes as Orientalism.[334]
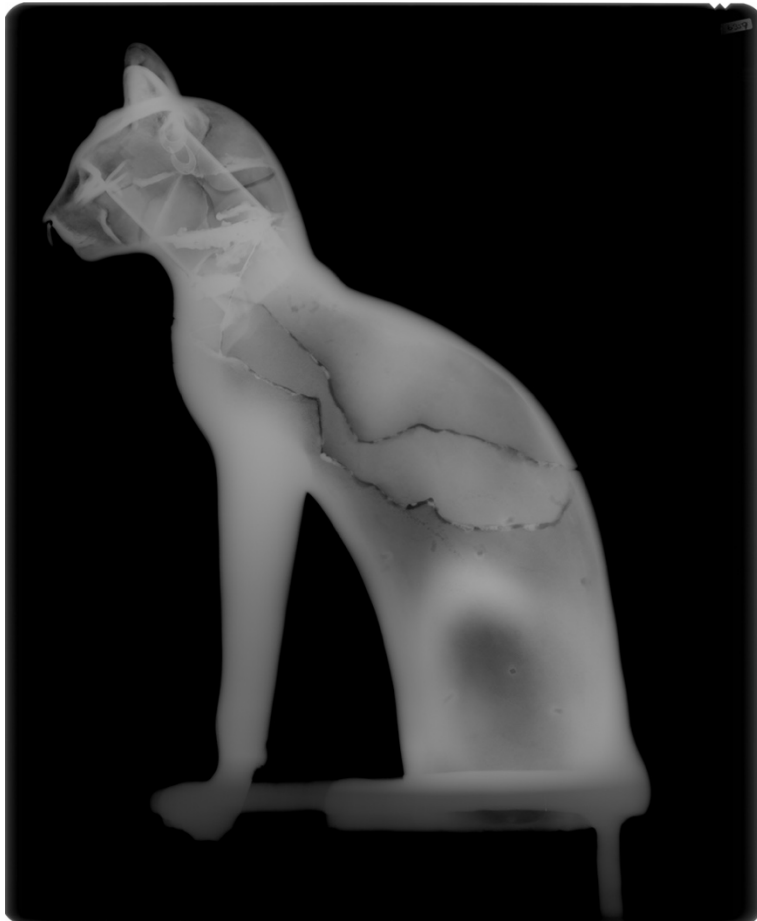

Figure 13 Gayer- Anderson Cat Radiograph. Courtesy of © The Trustees of the British Museum.

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[334] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

Even though today the Gayer-Anderson Cat from the outside looks fairly complete, a crack runs around the whole body dividing the top of the back from the lower part. The crack is jagged in nature and quite wide, from 1 to 2 mm in places, so it is visible with naked eyes. The source of its damage is unknown, although according to the technical analysis of the object undertaken in 2008 by British Museum scientists, a detailed structure, based around a cut-down cylinder, has been inserted inside the figurine, presumably as a scaffold to hold together its head and neck with the rest of its body, while some of the many smaller cracks have been restored in soft solder.[335] Conservators Jane Amber and others, in the *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin* article 'A New Look at an Old Cat' suggest that the object may have been already damaged when Gayer-Anderson bought it. The detailed optical examination, using X-ray radiography to view the internal space of the object, evidenced consequent attempts to restore it. X-rays revealed damage radiating out from a central point on the top of the head, indicating that the pharaonic bronze must have received a heavy blow to the head at some point.[336] The more recent attempt to restore it was in 1982, when British Museum conservators tried to fill and improve the appearance of the large crack along the back, in order to make less obvious the damage in the replicas for public sale.[337]

The large crack might relate with an accident during excavation, or during its transit from Egypt to England.[338] Or possibly in response to accidental damage during its treatment and cleaning by Gayer-Anderson.[339] Gayer-Anderson speaks about the process of cleaning the pharaonic bronze as a 'labour of love' describing in detail the technique that he had followed for the cleaning of 'Bastet', using a 'hammer, chisel and burner'.[340] He writes:

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[335] Ambers and others, p.1.

[336] Ambers and others, p.6.

[337] Ibid.

[338] Ibid., p.8.

[339] Ibid.

[340] Spencer, p. 57.

I followed a technique in which I was already highly proficient from long practice and which if carefully and successfully carried out brings a good sound bronze such as this proved to be back to its original surface and condition. Using a hammer, a chisel and burner I carefully flaked off little by little the layers of the outer grey-green and inner brick-red patines and gradually an exquisite figure of a cat emerged as if from under a veil that was being slowly stripped off her. The cleaning of Basht [Bastet] was indeed a labour of love – it took me over a year from the time of purchase to its completion.[341]

According to Salima Ikram's research in 'A Pasha's Pleasures: RG Gayer-Anderson and His Pharaonic Collection in Cairo', Gayer-Anderson was known as a skilled restorer, among his collections could be found various parts of statuettes such as arms, ears, scarabs, feet, horns, uraei, ostraca, and beards.[342] These were fragments which he had been collecting from tombs, temples, and dwellings in Persia and Egypt to use later for restoring objects which he had been storing in his house. [343] [344] Perhaps some of these fragments might have been also used for the restoration of the pharaonic bronze.

The radiographic analysis indicated a layer of red cuprite lying beneath the surface of the object, suggesting that Gayer-Anderson must have painted the object with a green pigment mix that currently covers it.[345] Bronze is very vulnerable to corrosion, due to the increased humidity levels in the area of the Nile Delta where the object was found. However, research indicates that the green colour is not a result of a natural process of corrosion, but instead it has been applied by Gayer-Anderson to disguise the extensive restorations made to the figure.[346] Moreover, the painting and polishing of objects were methods

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[341] Excerpt from Gayer-Anderson memoir cited in Spencer p. 57.

[342] Salima Ikram, 'A Pasha's Pleasures: RG Gayer-Anderson and His Pharaonic Collection in Cairo', in *Offerings to the Discerning Eye* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 177–86.

[343] Ibid.

[344] Gayer-Anderson's collections were later bequeathed to the Pitt Rivers Museum, the Wellcome Collection, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum in the UK, while others are spread throughout the world or remained in his museum in Cairo.

[345] Ambers and others, p.8.

[346] Spencer, p.58.

frequently used by collectors of ancient Egypt antiquities to make ancient Egyptian bronze figures lookk like Renaissance sculptures.[347]

If the cracks in the body of the Gayer-Anderson Cat indicate visible traces of previous attempts to *repair* it, they thus stand as traces of an architecture of gazes and technologies which have been utilised in order to prevent its inevitable decay, to fix its injury and consequently to isolate it from the flow of time. Therefore, the X-radiographic imagery that reveals the *repairs* serves as a reference to the Western gaze of the object's collector as well as the British museum scientists who have attempted to fix its damages in order to minimise the results of naturally occurring defects.

Museum objects become inscribed into an architecture of gazes, and backstage machinery which attempts to cover up their damage or unavoidable degradation. The Gayer-Anderson Cat is an object which has been subjected to various *repairs* throughout its life. Each of these *repairs* served a different purpose that is entangled with the ideological investments of a subject, the restorer. For example, the British Museum scientists have restored the Cat in order for public sale replicas to look visually complete. The restorations made by Gayer-Anderson might relate with the symbolism associated with the Cat, reflecting his hopes this object – that is also baptised with this name – to achieve rebirth into eternity.[348] Thus, the latter *repair* also reflects the appropriation of Egyptian antiquities by orientalists.

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[347] Ibid.

[348] Ambers and others, p.3.

Figure 14 Physical Reconstruction of the Crack. Kyriaki Spanou.
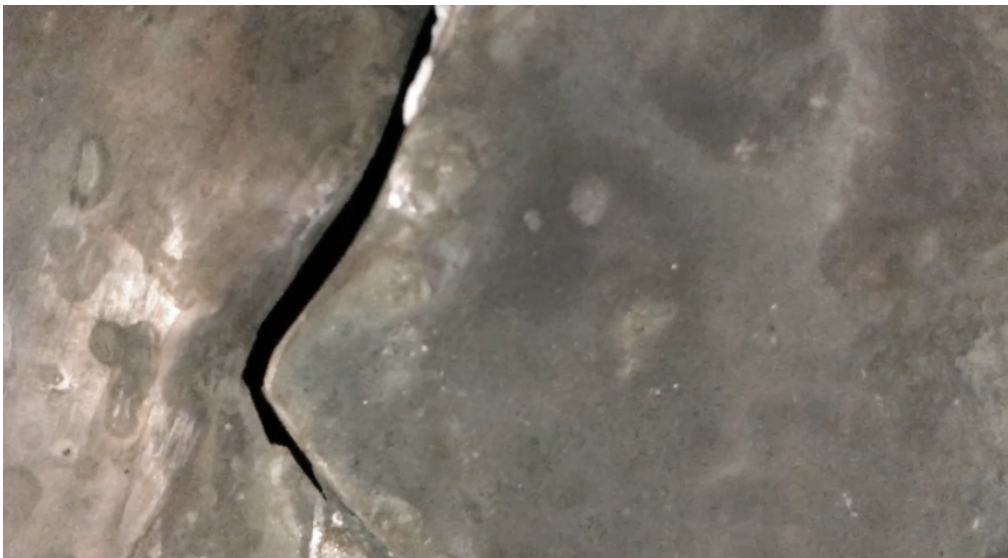

Figure 15 Still from film. Kyriaki Spanou.

Figure 16 Photograph of the Crack. Kyriaki Spanou.

Figure 17 Digital Reconstruction of the Crack. Kyriaki Spanou.

As a counter to this, I proceed with a re-enactment of the object's imperfection, staging the crack as an artefact in itself: an artefact that speaks to the journey of this object, and the various subjectivities which have mediated its life prior to its placement in the Museum's vitrine. I deploy a reversed process of untangling the original *repairs*. I used a hammer to bend and shape the alloy leaves; a chisel to shape the cutting edges, glue and staples to connect the disparate pieces; my photographic camera to take photos and to film its crack whilst zooming in and out to the reveal the details of its materials; I drew the details of its injury on tracing paper. This is a gesture to highlight that the very means used to bind objects together in the museum, is also what often splits their meanings apart. Therefore, this is to suggest an alternative narrative of a *repair* which accounts how the various rather complex personal and ideological factors, technological infrastructures and subjective evaluations are inextricably linked with the display of a museum object. I create a compilation of material including: a video which features its collector's own process of treatment, and the various sources to I referred in order to access information about the object, a physical and digital reconstruction of the crack, this section aims to re-enact a moment of *repair* as a proxy to the original museum object.
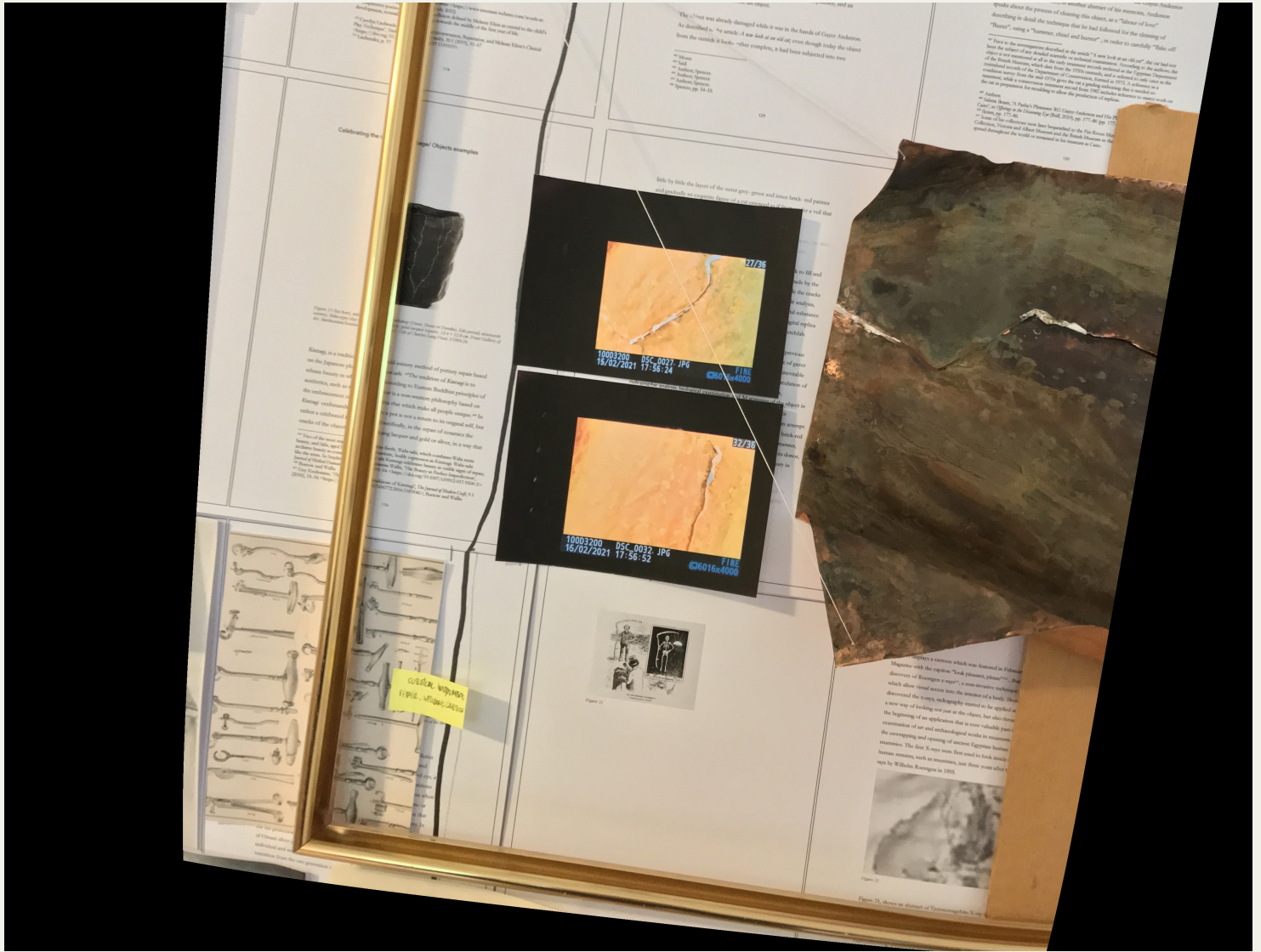
Figure 18 Documentation of the Research Process. Kyriaki Spanou.

Monitoring Damage Through Space

This section focuses on how the technoscientific orientation of spatial design strategies and exhibition design mechanisms as means of monitoring damage are contested. I argue that these infrastructures and design strategies adopted by the British Museum are not neutral but embedded with systemic ideologies, which also are projected onto the design of the layout of the Museum. The basement, the conservation laboratory and visitor navigation are key areas for investigation in this section.

The British Museum exhibits only a fraction of objects from its collections in the galleries: the remaining items are in the storage areas, with some in the Conservation laboratories. A key overarching requirement for care in a museum environment is the need to maintain stable environmental conditions and having appropriate storage, materials and systems. In conservation terms, this is called 'preventative conservation' and entails all measures and actions aimed at avoiding and minimising future deterioration or loss.[349]

Museums serve the task of exhibiting objects which are not made to be preserved in museums. For example, insects can be introduced from many sources, including new acquisitions, objects on loan from other collections and items returned from loan. Objects carry their own ecosystems – particularly ethnographic objects with feathers and other organic materials – which might be disrupted by the ecological conditions of the museum. In turn, museums deploy a series of design practices which concern the monitoring of environmental conditions such as heating, air-conditioning, artificial lighting, the location of architectural elements such as doorways and windows, and the height of ceilings in order to prevent alterations to objects by humidity, temperature, air flow and anthropogenic factors such as the presence and circulation of visitors. This involves a range of strategies for preventative conservation for the design of the actual space of the museum and its layout regarding the location and successful preservation of objects within the gallery spaces and storage. These decisions concern not only conservators but also architects, curators, and exhibition

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[349] 'Terminology to Characterize the Conservation of Tangible Cultural Heritage'.

designers whose design strategies focus on the efficiency of the museum environment. In this manner, the idea of 'object-friendly galleries',[350] as conservators put it, generates a monitoring environment for the object, which my research examines in parallel with the construct of 'public value' and how this empowers the Museum's argument that it is the ideal caretaker.

In the early 1970s, the number of publications reporting on damage to museum collections have been increasing internationally, outlining means of preventing materials damage from pollutants.[351]According to conservator Susan Bradley's overview of preventative conservation and practice at the British Museum between 1970 and 2005, the expansion of the Museum during this period of time led to a series of conservation studies regarding the causes of the deterioration to objects, as many of them were found to be in a poor state.[352] More specifically, some major changes during this time were the closure of the Museum of Mankind and the British Library Reading Room, the relocation of the Department of Ethnography back to the Bloomsbury site and the opening of the new Enlightenment Gallery. The led to the development of new galleries and storage to house objects, such as the rooms to accommodate the anthropological collections. In turn, the purpose of studies of preventative conservation were to gain a better understanding of means of preventative treatment as well as the environmental requirements which would secure a stable environment for museum objects. Objects from the ethnographic collections which were made of organic material and were more vulnerable to damage, such as the Maori objects, and sugar objects from Mexico, were under investigation. This is due to the fact that the temperature and relative humidity levels of the Museum's storage and exhibition spaces were not optimised until then. Therefore, alternative treatments started to be investigated and suggested for stabilising the Museum's

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[350] Susan Bradley, 'Defining Suitability of Museum Galleries by Risk Mapping', in ICOM Committee for Conservation, Preprints, vol. II, 14th Triennial Meeting, The Hague, 12-16 September 2005. <https://www.icom-cc-publications-online.org/2179/Defining-suitability-of-museum-galleries-by-risk-mapping>.

[351] Cecily M. Grzywacz, *Monitoring for Gaseous Pollutants in Museum Environments* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2006).

[352] Susan Bradley, 'Preventive Conservation Research and Practice at the British Museum', *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 44.3 (2005), 159–73.

environment, such as dehumidified display cases and temperature control.[353] Both the galleries and the storage areas of the Museum were studied and analysed, to ensure that objects are displayed and stored in safe conditions, which, as Bradley suggests, have been vastly improved since the 1970s, when this research began.
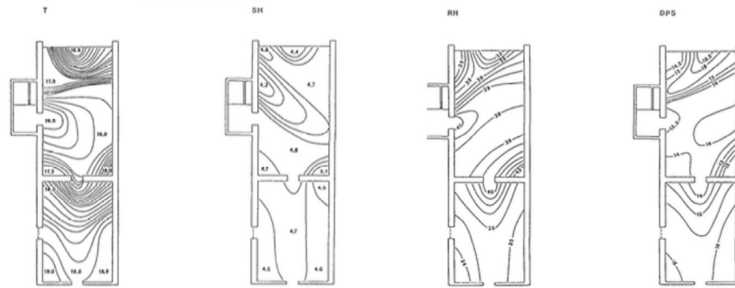

Figure 19 Conservator's Adriana Bernardi Study of Isolines of Temperature, Specific Humidity, Relative Humidity and Dew Point Spread inside the First and Second Egyptian Rooms of the British Museum, 24 February 1988.

In a similar manner, studies such as the one above by the conservator Adrianna Bernardi in 1990 have been undertaken with the aim of optimising the Museum's environment, suggesting architectural interventions.[354] Bernardi analysed the microclimate conditions of two of the Museum's Egyptian Gallery rooms, suggesting interventions such as rendering the ceiling of these galleries opaque, closing the grilles in order to control the ingress of air, managing the opening of the windows with greater caution, introducing double door systems in order to monitor the movement of air, and finally keeping the heating system on day and night.[355] This was prompted by the fact that the sarcophagi and mummies exhibited in these two rooms were displayed outside sealed protected cases, and were therefore more sensitive to lighting and humidity. Therefore the Museum's environmental conditions, due to its architectural synthesis in combination with anthropogenic factors such as the circulation of visitors, caused a destabilised

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[353] Susan Bradley, 'Preventive Conservation Research and Practice at the British Museum', *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 44.3 (2005), p. 162.

[354] Adriana Bernardi, 'Microclimate in the British Museum, London', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 9.2 (1990), 169–82 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647779009515206>.

[355] Ibid., p. 180.

microclimate for the said artefacts, and in turn they might have been subject to damage.

Preventive conservation targets the prevention of damage, and therefore puts in place a series of practices which aim to ensure that the object is carefully preserved at the museum. This ties in with idea of the British Museum as the ideal caretaker of the object, due to its technoscientific advantage. In turn, this might lead to the idea that institutions in non-Western countries, with less technoscientific equipment and resources, might fail to deliver efficient damage prevention practices for objects, something that is contested in case of returns. For example, the pollution in Athens was cited by Neil Mc Gregor as an argument against the repatriation of the Parthenon Marbles, implying that the marbles are more safely preserved in the British Museum.[356]

Figure 20 Stills from Kwate Nii Owoo's film *You Hide Me* (1973).

A personal testimony of the storage areas of the Museum in the early 1970s was offered by Ghanaian filmmaker Kwate Nii Owoo. Nii Owoo managed to evade the Museum's management and security system to gain access to the underground vaults where African artefacts from the Museum's anthropological collections were stored. [357] His film *You Hide Me* (1973) revealed that African art objects were 'hidden in plastic bags and wooden boxes in the basement of the Museum'. Owoo is quoted as saying:

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[356] Morag Kersel, 'The Politics of Playing Fair, or, Who's Losing Their Marbles?', in *Marketing Heritage: Archaeology and the Consumption of the Past*, ed. by Rowan Yorke and Uzi Baram (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004), pp. 41–56.

[357] *You Hide Me*, dir. Nii Kwate Owoo (Ifriqiyah Films, 1973).

Each country had a room, a vast vault with masses of things, so we took two countries on the west coast, Ghana and Nigeria, a country on the east coast, Sudan, and South Africa. We did it under a lot of pressure, moving from one corridor to the next, under the scrutiny of 15 security officers, placed at different strategic positions to make sure that we did not steal any of the artworks.[358]

In his reflections of the basements of the Museum, Owoo describes the space as a hidden city – only 2 per cent of the total amount of objects of the British Museum collections were displayed in the upper galleries.[359] At the time the film was considered controversial, as it exposed the number of objects from African counties which were secretly held in the basements of the Museum and not available for public view, as well as touching upon the demand that these items should be returned to their countries of origin. [360] The film was eventually banned in Ghana, due to the fear of harming Ghana's relationship with the UK, and at the time was criticised for being 'anti-British'.[361]

Apart from the storage facilities, until 2014 the basements of the Museum included the Museum's conservation laboratories. These underground floors were originally designed to accommodate servants in the Georgian era, prior the use of the building as a museum in 1759. In a short documentary published by the British Museum in 2009 to introduce to the public the Museum's plan for the World Conservation and Exhibition Centre (WCEC), a number of conservators and scientists appear to describe the design and logistics of these basement rooms as inappropriate for the conservation laboratories.[362] For instance, some of

[358] Owoo, cited in James Leahy, 'You Hide Me', *Vertigo*, 1.2 (1993)
<https://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-1-issue-2-summer-autumn-1993/you-hide-me/> [accessed 9 July 2021].

[359] 'Nii Kwate Owoo on His Film *You Hide Me* (1970)' (Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum) [YouTube video]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2EHjYjtdeg> [accessed 11 May 2021].

[360] Leahy.

[361] 'Nii Kwate Owoo: Biography', *African Film Festival New York* <https://africanfilmny.org/directors/nii-kwate-owoo/> [accessed 29 July 2021].

[362] 'World Conservation & Exhibitions Centre at the British Museum', The British Museum, 2010, [YouTube video]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvBhTQOTPxg&t=305s&ab_channel=TheBritishMuseum > [accessed 9 May 2021].

them highlight the fact that their facilities were scattered around and away from the main building, noting that the amount of space to host the Museum's technological equipment was restricted and many objects such as large mummies were excluded from analysis due to their large size, which meant they could not pass through the narrow corridors, staircases or via the backyard in order to reach the research laboratories.[363] The former Museum Trustee Bonnie Greer (2005–2015) argued that due to these facts, the Museum 'cannot [sufficiently] deliver the quality of care, education, learning and engagement programmes that we would like to', and in turn she highlighted the urgency and usefulness of the British Museum Masterplan to build the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre (WCEC).[364] The WCEC is in a separate building just opposite the Museum, which accommodates the research laboratories, conservation studios and scientific labs and environmentally controlled storage space for the museum's vulnerable collection. The development of the WCEC was one of largest construction projects in the Museum's history, undertaken during Neil MacGregor's directorship, and it opened to the public in 2014.

The Museum's *Building Development Framework: Towards the Future* (2014), as proposed by Neil MacGregor, reviewed its operations in Bloomsbury during previous decades.[365] The conservation facilities and improvement to visitor circulation were key. Three strategic objectives were outlined in the document:

> 1. 'Develop and improve the buildings for the benefit of our visitors' in order to
> 2. 'Extend and enhance their engagement with the collection'
> Underpinning everything, we will
> 3. 'Promote financial and environmental sustainability'. [366]

According to the diagram published in the Museum's Framework (see Figure 21), visitor figures were expected to rise by 2020. Key moments for the raising of

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[363] Ibid.

[364] Ibid.

[365] British Museum, *Building Development Framework: Towards the Future,* (May 2014) <https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/british-museum-building-development-framework-May-2014.pdf>[accessed 5 September 2021].

[366] Ibid.

visitor numbers between the early 2000s and 2020 are defined as the following: the Great Court (opened in 2000), the closure of Museum of Mankind in 2004, the London Olympics in 2012, and finally the opening of the WCEC in 2014. The 2014 Framework also outlined concerns regarding visitor flow through the ground floor of the Museum, indicating the access pinch points and areas of congestion. – Figure 22.
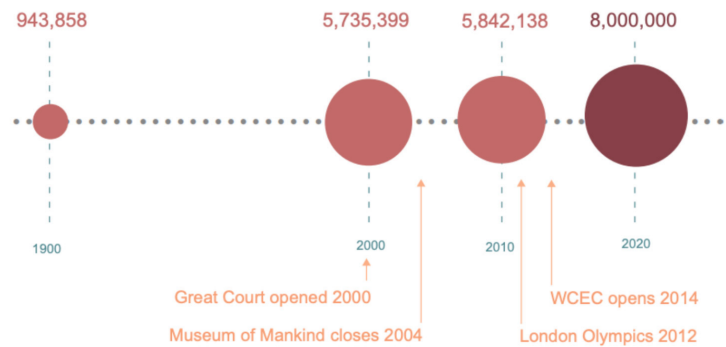
Figure 21 Past and predicted visitor numbers, 1900–2020.The diagram shows actual visitor figures in 1900, 2000 and 2013, and projected visitor numbers by 2020, as derived from Visit Britain's forecast for UK tourism. Courtesy © The British Museum Trustees, 2014.

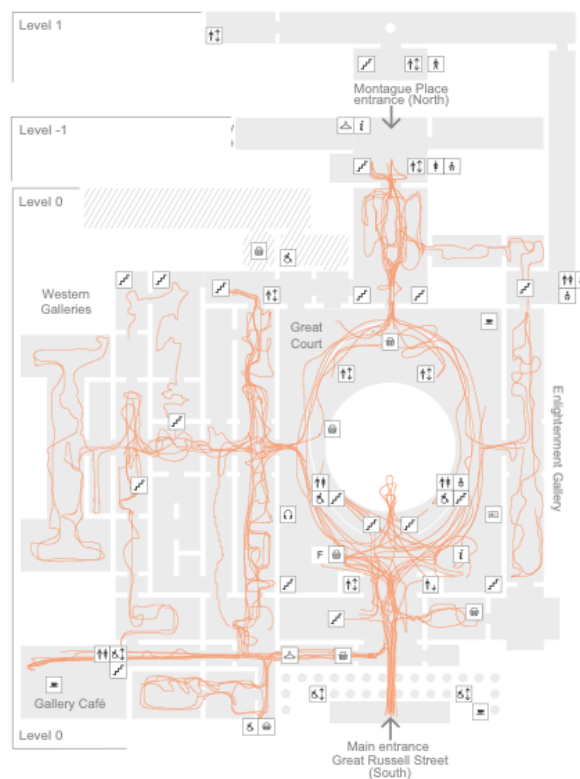Figure 22 The diagram shows visitor flows through the ground floor of the Museum (pre WCEC), showing access pinch points and areas of congestion. Courtesy © The British Museum Trustees, 2014.

The optimisation of the layout of the galleries and the circulation of visitors, as well as the extension and development of new storage and conservation facilities are key concepts for the emergence of the Museum as a technological apparatus, but also for the linking of the operation of the Museum with public value.

'Free admission' to the permanent galleries of all the national museums in the UK, such as the British Museum, which are sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), began on 1st December 2001.[367] The policy of free admission was originally introduced by the Labour Government and was later followed by a campaign led by the museums themselves. The permanent galleries of the British Museum were always free to the public, and the admission fee was only for special/sponsored exhibitions. When free admission was introduced, museums such as the V&A became free to enter, and the British Museum, the Tate and National Gallery retained their free admission, but received extra funding to guarantee that the entry could remain free.[368] [369] A key parameter to evaluate the success of this scheme was statistics of visitor numbers and demographics. This is part of the British Museum's agreement with the DMCS that requires it to report on a number of performance indicators, such as the number of visits to the Museum, the number of online visits, and statistics on visitors from outside the UK.

In the early 2000s, the Museum underwent a major transformation project: the opening of new galleries, and the departure of the library collection to the new British Library at St Pancras to create a new public space – the Great Court. According to architect Spencer de Gray's publication *A Project Diary*, which outlines the justification for the development of the central courtyard, one of the reasons which prompted its development was the increasing number of visitors, who were forced to use the galleries as the main circulation routes, resulting in a

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[367] UK Government, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 'Ten Years of Free Museums', (2011) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ten-years-of-free-museums>[accessed 9 August 2021].

[368] 'Universal Free Admission to the UK's National Museums', 27 May 2016, *Centre for Public Impact*, <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/free-entry-to-museums-in-the-uk> [accessed 8 July 2021].

[369] Stephen Deuchar, 'Time to Count the Cost of This Museum Revolution', *Independent*, 29 November 2011 <https://www.independent.co.uk/hei-fi/entertainment/time-count-cost-museum-revolution-6269432.html>.

'confusing and frustrating' experience for the visitor.[370] According to de Gray, the main objective of the building of the Great Court was to 'open up a new public route through the building' which would also include an education centre, reception, orientation area and shops.[371] This also aligned well with the Museum's plan to reunite the ethnographic collections form the Burlington Gardens site with the collection at Bloomsbury, and therefore meant the development of new rooms for the display of these collections.

As part of this ongoing period of change, after the completion of the Great Court the Museum commissioned Space Syntax Limited, in collaboration with the architectural firm Ian Ritchie Architects, to conduct a series of studies of spatial analysis to inform the Museum's master planning.[372] Space Syntax researchers conducted a baseline study of visitor movement patterns and the spatial layout between the years 2004 and 2005. The aim of this analysis, as described on the Space Syntax website, was to 'explain how visitors were using the museum and to investigate the characteristics of its spatial layout in order to establish the effect of the spatial layout on visitors' experience'.[373]

Space Syntax draws on principles for understanding the relationship between space and its social occupation as described by its founders, architects Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson in their book *The Social Logic of Space*.[374] [375] Hillier and Hanson's architectural theories and methods are employed in the analysis and description of the built environment, with the purpose of examining relationships between morphological features of space and social processes. As outlined by the authors, 'syntactic analysis' was originally deployed in order to allow architectural

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[370] Spencer de Gray, in Norman Foster and The British Museum, p. 38.

[371] Ibid., p. 39.

[372] 'Space Syntax: British Museum', *Space Syntax* <https://spacesyntax.com/project/british-museum/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[373] Ibid.

[374] Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[375] Prof. Julienne Hanson and Prof. Bill Hillier were the originators of the computer-based representations, analytic techniques and research methodologies that have become the basis of the 'Space Syntax' configurational analysis of building layouts and urban places. However, their viewpoints diverge with Hillier to become the Director of the Space Syntax Laboratory and Hanson to become a Professor of House Form and Culture (UCL) focusing on the design of homes and neighbourhoods, in relation to supporting older people's lifestyles and aspirations and ensuring accessibility and inclusion for people of all ages.

space and its properties to be represented and quantified so that comparison could be made between the layout of buildings and urban areas.[376] In the development of the Space Syntax analysis through the years, Space Syntax researchers have used modelling and simulation to represent and quantify aspects of spatial configuration and morphology within which pedestrian movement takes place, from the scale of museums to that of public squares and cities.

In the case of museums and galleries, Hillier and Tzortzi write that the Space Syntax analysis investigates the layout of objects within spaces, and the layout of the relations between different spaces in museums.[377] Although the aim of this is to show how the spatial layout of exhibitions and the experience of visitors are highly interdependent and shape the experience of the visitor,[378] in their analysis they rely heavily on interpreting quantitative data, such as patterns of movement, encounter and avoidance, rather than focusing on the qualitative information regarding the exhibited item and visitor's experience of the item, treating both visitor and the object as a volume in order to proceed with their respective quantification in computer-based representations and simulations. In the case of the British Museum, Space Syntax researchers were primarily concerned with the analysis of elements such as: visitor navigation, including flows, routes, stationary activities, wayfinding studies, visibility of areas and spatial accessibility analysis, pedestrian movement simulation using computer agents, and visitor increase forecasting.[379] – Figures 23, 24, 25.

A visual analysis of visitor circulation which seems to draw from the Space Syntax analysis is cited in the Museum's *Building Development Framework: Towards the Future*.[380] (See Figure 22) For instance, both figures indicate a density of visitors in the South part of the Great Court near the entrance, as well as in the entry point of Room 4, where the Rosetta Stone is displayed. Moreover, the circulation and activity of visitors is recorded in exactly the same areas as the Space Syntax

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[376] Hillier and Hanson.

[377] Kali Tzortzi and Bill Hillier, 'Space Syntax: The Language of Museum Space', in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. by Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 282–301.

[378] Ibid., p. 296.

[379] 'Space Syntax: British Museum'.

[380] British Museum, *Building Development Framework: Towards the Future*.

analysis. The quantification of visitors' navigation trails, as indicated in the Museum's *Building Development Framework* in alignment with the analysis undertaken by the Space Syntax, demonstrates how the concept of public value is embedded within funding structures, and with the idea of the 'free museum'.[381]

The study of navigation patterns shows at a macro scale where 'agents' are travelling within the museum but say nothing about the amount of understanding/information the visitor is getting. (see Figures 23, 24, 25) Moreover, areas of circulation are rendered as 'attractor points' or attention points –in much the same way a supermarket might be planned. As such, these analyses of the Museum layout are highly preoccupied with the morphology of the space, and not with qualitive information about the exhibited item. Similarly, Space Syntax researchers deploy methods developed for quantifying the urban environment for their observations within the museum – treating visitor footfall as they do traffic or cyclists on London's streets.[382] Exceptions are Kali Tzortzi's book *Museum Space; Where Architecture Meets Museology* and Sophia Psarra's book *Architecture and Narrative: The formation of space and cultural meaning*, where the authors are also concerned with how visitor's experiential connection with the space and the exhibited items, and the overall narrative of a museum display in connection with space.[383][384]Against these more theoretical and conceptual approaches of Space Syntax practioners, it is worth revisiting the point that Space Syntax's other applications are analyses of urban environments such as public squares, airports and hospitals, in order to predict correlations between spatial layouts and social effects such as crime and traffic flow.[385] However – does this macro-view obscure certain political dimensions?

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[381] 'Universal Free Admission to the UK's National Museums'.

[382] See Alan Penn and Alasdair Turner, 'Space Syntax Based Agent Simulation', in *Pedestrian and Evacuation Dynamics*, ed. by Michael Schreckenberg and Som Deo Sharma (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2001), pp. 99-114; Space Syntax, *Space Syntax General Practice Brochure*, 2011 <http://spacesyntax.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Space_Syntax_General-Practice-Brochure_1209.pdf>

[383] Tzortzi's analysis focuses on Tate and Centre Pompidou, and Psarra studies the Soane's Museum in London in parallel with Louis Borges' fiction literature.

[384] Sophia Psarra, Architecture and Narrative: The Formation of Space and Cultural Meaning (London: Routledge, 2009); Kali Tzortzi, Museum Space: Where Architecture Meets Museology (London: Routledge, 2017).

[385] Tom Bolton and others, 'Crime Policy and Place Layout' (London: University College London) <http://spacesyntax.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/3.-Crime-policy-and-place-layout_2018.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2021]; Bill Hillier and Ozlem Sahbaz, 'Safety in Numbers: High-Resolution Analysis of Crime in Street Networks', in *The Urban Fabric of Crime and Fear*, ed. by Vania Ceccato (Dordrecht: Springer
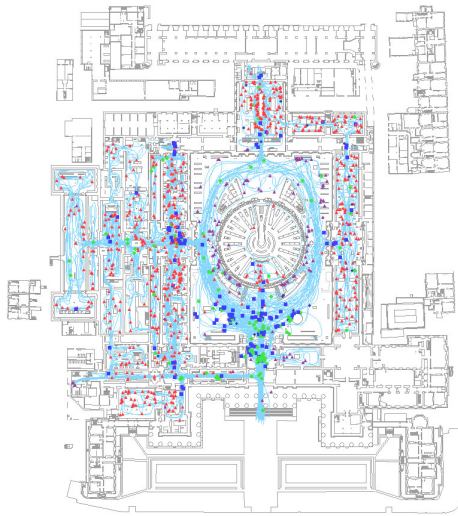
Figure 23 Space Syntax visitor movement tracing study. Visitors' navigational paths through the building have been recorded in ordered to provide valuable information regarding the range of individual journeys and common wayfinding characteristics (2003–2004) Courtesy of Space Syntax Limited 2021.
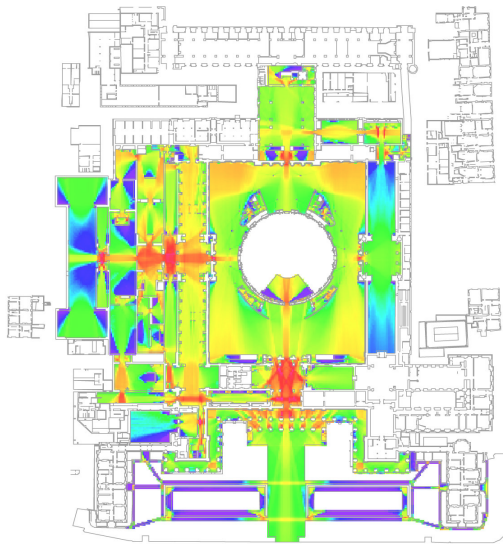
Figure 24 Spatial accessibility analysis, indicating in red visitors' key decision-making points on the Museum's ground floor (2003–2004). Courtesy of Space Syntax Limited 2021.
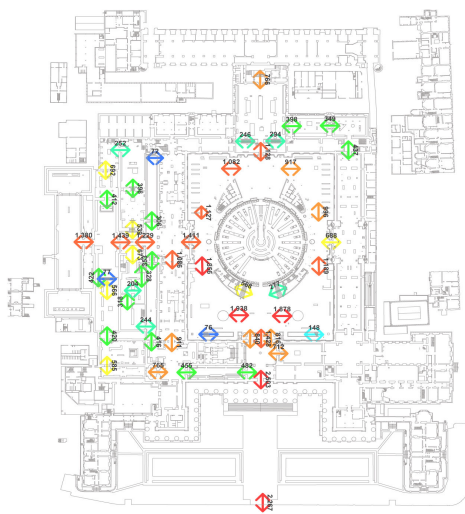
Figure 25 A visitors' movement survey that indicates how visitors use the spatial layout of the ground floor of the British Museum as a key wayfinding resource. The survey aims to establish a relationship between spatial layout design and visitor activity, and to identify pinch points and under-used areas (2003–2004). Image courtesy of Space Syntax Limited 2021.

Netherlands, 2012), pp. 111–37 <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4210-9_5>; Bill Hillier and Shinichi Iida, 'Network and Psychological Effects in Urban Movement', in *Spatial Information Theory*, ed. by Anthony G. Cohn and David M. Mark (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2005), pp. 475–90.

Considering that the apparatus of these practices when employed by the Museum is to facilitate visitors' pathways, and the efficacy of the layout, in alignment with a *postabyssal* thinking my research it does raise the question of what happens when we take non-linear, fractured movement rather than smooth visitor flow as a starting point to think through how the British Museum layout could be reorganised? Or breakdown instead of optimisation, as a guideline to redefine the rhetoric of public value as mobilised with the Museum's funding structures? Would this mean that low visitor engagement due to the lack of quantified analysis by Space Syntax would lead to low public funding, and therefore the privatisation of the museums, and in turn limited accessibility? In the UK, according to the facts and figures exhibited by the UK government, 51.1% of white people had visited a museum or gallery, compared with 33.5% of Black people and 43.7% of Asian people, indicating that museums already show a lack of inclusiveness, and were limited to serving privileged groups.[386]

Moreover, returning to the previous analysis of preventative conservation as that which optimises the gallery environment in order to guard museum objects from damage, including also surveying anthropogenic factors such as visitor circulation, it does raise the question of whether slowing decay is an assumption that ties in with Western notions of ownership and care. Therefore, if we see these practices as driven by ideological and financial imperatives of the Museum, would this dissolve the myth of the Museum as the ideal custodian?

These questions have an ethical dimension concerning the role of the Museum's technoscientific strategies as those which favour rationality, planning, and optimisation over more unsettled encounters. Morozov has seen 'imperfection, ambiguity, opacity, disorder' as constitutive elements of human freedom, in contrast with how the latter has been confined by the Silicon Valley dream of innovation, wherein 'smart' solutions seek technological perfection.[387] Even though Morozov is primarily concerned with trends in data analysis, what he calls 'solutionism' and 'internet-centrism', he is essentially engaged with how the

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[386] Cabinet Office, UK Government, 'Visits to Museums and Galleries', *Ethnicity Facts and Figures*, 2021 <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/culture-and-community/culture-and-heritage/adults-visiting-museums-and-galleries/4.1#main-facts-and-figures> [accessed 9 August 2021].

[387] Morozov, Introduction.

quantification of human experience in data sets is part of the legacy of the Enlightenment humanism that now reaches us courtesy of Silicon Valley.[388] In a similar vein, Ramon Amaro, discussing the broader implications between data and the human body within the 'smart city' rhetoric, warns that the way that datafication is mobilised in various social, economic and politic worlds, lead to new forms of government which ignore the contextual circumstances in the creation of dynamic cultural relationships'.[389] In other words, both Amaro and Morozov highlight the power dynamics embedded within the technoscientific orientation of data- driven practices, and how these dynamics might have larger implications in capitalist societies.

A Self-Guided Tour

Following from this analysis, my plan at this stage of my research was to conduct in-situ investigation, in order to better understand the way that interior spaces are organised in the Museum, and to document the operation of this backstage machinery, the storage spaces, the basement and the conservation laboratories.

Most importantly, my aim was to document how this spatial organisation impacted on and inscribed meaning to the exhibited items, and how this corresponds with the Museum's ideology which promotes it as the ideal caretaker of the collections. However, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic allowed no access to the Museum as of 18 March 2020 when its temporary closure was announced. Following from this, in order to access the Museum, I had to shift from an in-situ to an online investigation of the Museum, through the Museum's online portals.

The blog 'How to Explore the British Museum from Home' on the Museum's website introduces alternative means of accessing the Museum during the

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[388] Morozov.

[389] Ramon Amaro, 'Thursday Night Live! Decolonising Design II with Ramon Amaro', *Thursday Night Live! At Het Nieuwe Instituut*, 2017 <https://thursdaynight.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/en/reports/thursday-night-live-decolonising-design-ii-ramon-amaro> [accessed 9 May 2021]

lockdowns.[390] These were: self-guided virtual tours of the galleries using the Google Street View application, podcasts, audio tours, YouTube interviews with curators and web-based events, as well as an online library of eight million objects from the Museum's collection.[391] In order to proceed with my enquiry, I chose to utilise the Google Street View (GSV): an application which enables a 360-degree view navigation through the Museum and was established as part of the Museum's collaboration with Google's Arts & Culture platform in 2015.

Google's Arts & Culture is a non-profit initiative, collaborating with cultural organisations and institutions internationally, with the aim to 'bring art and culture to any part of the world so that it is achievable for all people'.[392] It features the virtual gallery tour, Zoom Views and the Art Selfie applications The Art Selfie application allows people to find their likeness in a work from art history by snapping a selfie, using deep learning algorithms to search a database of paintings scanned by Google to match an artwork to each user. Zoom Views presents digital images of famous paintings in high resolution, allowing a zooming into the images that is described as 'the closest thing to walking up to the real thing with a magnifying glass'.[393] Due to the fact that many of these paintings are fragile and sensitive to light and humidity, this application has been described as enabling access to a global audience while ensuring that they are safely preserved for future generations.[394] As emphasised on Google Arts & Culture's website, high-resolution digital imagery that is globally available in Google's range of applications is a movement towards the democratisation of information, knowledge, education and universalised access to art collections.[395]

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[390] British Museum, 'How to Explore the British Museum from Home' [blog post], 2020 <https://blog.britishmuseum.org/how-to-explore-the-british-museum-from-home/> [accessed 9 May 2021]

[391] Ibid.

[392] Ana Verde and Jose Manuel Valero, 'Virtual Museums and Google Arts & Culture: Alternatives to the Face-Toface Visit to Experience Art', *International Journal of Education and Research,* 9.2 (2021) <https://ijern.com/journal/2021/February-2021/05.pdf>.

[393] 'An Eye for Detail: Zoom through 1,000 Artworks Thanks to the New Art Camera from the Google Cultural Institute' [blog post], *Google*, 2016 <https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/arts-culture/art-camera-cultural-institute/>.

[394] Ibid.

[395] 'Bringing the World's Art and Culture Online for Everyone' ('About'), *Google Arts & Culture* <https://about.artsandculture.google.com/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

Moreover, some of the British Museum objects have been also digitised in the online platform Sketchfab, founded in Paris in 2012 as a space to upload, share and view digital 3D content. The Sketchfab project was started out of frustration at the lack of online space at the time for people making 3D models to share their work. Since then, it has operated as a platform where users buy and sell 3D models, for use in gaming industry and architectural models. The British Museum, along with many other museums such as the Smithsonian Institution, and the Horniman Museum, use the site to host their collection of digital 3D objects.[396]

On moving my observations to the virtual gallery tour of the British Museum, I investigated the space via the Google Street View camera application: a technology which, when used in the context of the British Museum, is applied as a mode of inhabiting, and representing, the interior space of the Museum and its contents. As a counter to this, in my research I focus on the operation of the Google camera as a tool to understand the geometry and physicality of this mediation, and how this generates a new visual regime.

Google Street View is a technology featured in Google Maps and Google Earth, which was launched in 2007; it provides spherical views / 360-degree imagery. It operates with software in which geometry and photography are simultaneously brought into the computer to create models of high geometrical and photographic accuracy by stitching together a number of photographs into 360-degree images. These photographs are collected by driving cars in outdoor environments, or with walking trolleys for indoor areas. In the case of the British Museum, a panoramic camera was mounted on the top of a trolley, to collect images from multiple directions.

In order to access the British Museum via Google Street View, there are three entrance points. One can directly enter from the British Museum's website, but the Museum is also accessible through Google Arts & Culture or directly through Street View in Google Maps. When one enters from the Museum's website, most of the times the frame centres on the Rosetta Stone, and less often on the

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[396] 'Users/ Museum', *Sketchfab* <https://sketchfab.com/members?segment=organization%2Fmuseum> [accessed 9 September 2021].

southern part of the Great Court. After mapping the geographical coordinates of my virtual entry points onto the Museum's plan, I figured out that the virtual Museum entries correspond to areas which have been identified as key points in the visitor circulation, according to the earlier Space Syntax analysis, as well as in the British Museum's 2014 Masterplan analysis of visitor circulation .(see Figure 22) Therefore, the entrance points to the virtual tour are strategically chosen according to locations where crowd density is identified in the physical environments of the Museum.
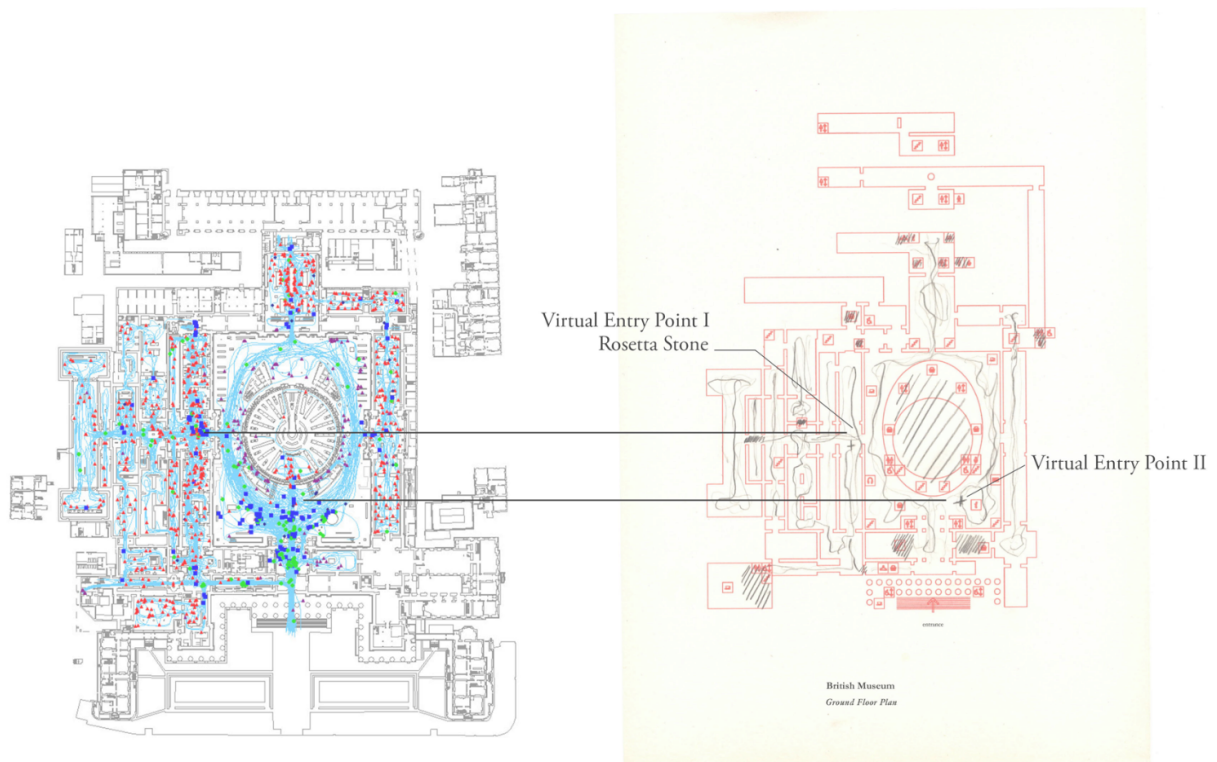

Figure 26 Annotated Diagram. Kyriaki Spanou.

Left Image: Space Syntax 'Visitor Movement Traces' study. Right Image: Annotated diagram made by author to indicate which areas are accessible in the virtual gallery tour (ground floor). Virtual Entry Point I and II coincide with areas that Space Syntax 'Visitor Movement Traces' study indicates as high crowd density areas.

With a Click of my Mouse

Figure 27 Virtual Entry Point I in the British Museum's Virtual Gallery Tour.

With a click of my mouse, the British Museum is a URL, and this URL is a representation of the world, a world which lacks a stable ground and horizon. I am constantly reminded that I am looking backwards in time; the space was filmed by Google nearly six years ago, over the course of about five days in 2015.[397] By inhabiting the perspective of a 2.1-metre high and 0.6-metre wide viewing window of Google's camera trolley, which travelled through the British Museum, one can float through the galleries, zooming in and out, revealing pixelated details of objects, walls, furniture with an uncanny distortion and flatness.

I am dropped into the Egyptian Gallery. The frame centres upon the Rosetta Stone – one the most precious and contested items of the collection, due to numerous requests Egypt made to the British Museum claiming legal ownership of the item.[398] The Rosetta Stone was extracted from Egypt during Napoleon's expeditions from 1798 to 1801, an imperial enterprise to extract objects from

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[397] Kristin Romey, 'A New Site Lets You Walk the British Museum From Your Couch', *National Geographic*, 24 December 2015 <https://www.nationall.com/travel/article/151223-british-museum-google-cultural-institute-worlds-largest-indoor-street-view-digital-virtual> [accessed 10 May 2021].

[398] Abungu, pp. 32–42; Opoku, 'Declaration On The Importance And Value Of Universal Museums: Singular Failure Of An Arrogant Imperialist Project'.

local cultures in the name of their universal salvation.[399] In the virtual tour, it stands upright and is exhibited behind glass, to secure the wellbeing of the object; interior spotlights render the hieroglyphic text area of the stone clearly visible.[400]

Once inside the Museum, Google's Street View navigation arrows are everywhere. One can follow these arrows, or just click on a distant spot to jump to a closer view. How could one find one's way around the room? I rely on my memories and an obsolete Museum map which helps to navigate forward and backward in this virtual environment. Following the movements of my mouse, I am drawing lines and non-linear contours while navigating in order to orientate myself in the space of the Museum.

British Museum
Ground Floor Plan
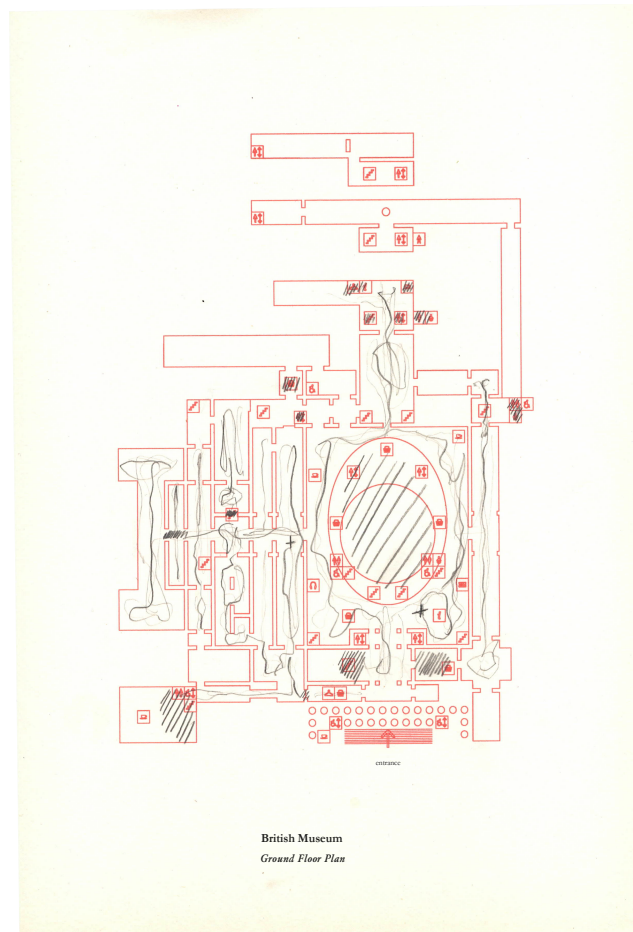
Figure 28 Annotated Diagram Virtual navigation. Kyriaki Spanou.

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[399] Azoulay.

[400] Eric Miller, and others, 'The Examination and Conservation of the Rosetta Stone at the British Museum', *Studies in Conservation*, 45, sup. 1 (2000), 128–32 <https://doi.org/10.1179/sic.2000.45.Supplement-1.128>.

The virtual Museum is occupied by objects but is empty of people, although according to the British Museum's 2019-20 annual report over 1.5m people accessed the British Museum's website, including this simulation.[401] The number of virtual visitors has more than doubled since the British Museum temporarily closed its doors in March 2020 due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.[402]

A few clicks later, benches are available to sit on, placed in front of a vitrine to enable lengthier contemplation. How do you stand? Do you stand upright as if facing the screen ready to swipe on, scroll down, or move closer, zooming in or bending down to peer at the underside of an exhibit? The camera penetrates the walls, the floors and objects which are hollow in the digital simulation. The non-linear sequence from the entrance to the exit, and vice versa, breaks away from the familiar pathways of movement and exploration in the physical environment of the Museum.

Figure 29 Glitch. Virtual Gallery Tour. Kyriaki Spanou.

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[401] British Museum, *The British Museum Report and Accounts For the Year Ended 31 March 2020*, 2020 <https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/British%20Museum_Report_Accounts_2019-20_0.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[402] Ibid.

Figure 30 Glitch. Virtual Gallery Tour. Kyriaki Spanou.

The Invisible Apparatus

In the virtual tour, access is limited to the staircases, the toilets, spaces of egress, the Museum café, the shop, which appeared as dead ends in the tour. Occasionally objects would become present, such as the red fire extinguishers, or the blue dehumidifiers. There is no access to the storage rooms and basements of the Museum, except for the galleries such as the Gallery Room with the Benin Bronzes. Similarly, there is no access to the World Conservation and Exhibition Centre in the virtual gallery tour, as well as to the areas of special exhibitions which charge an entrance fee in the physical space of the Museum.

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Figure 31 Glitch. Virtual Gallery Tour. Kyriaki Spanou.

The apparatus of the Museum that is invisible is both that which allows the Museum to operate as a public building, and therefore to comply to certain building regulations and health and safety; but it is also the apparatus of the backstage machinery utilised for the preservation of the object. Therefore, even
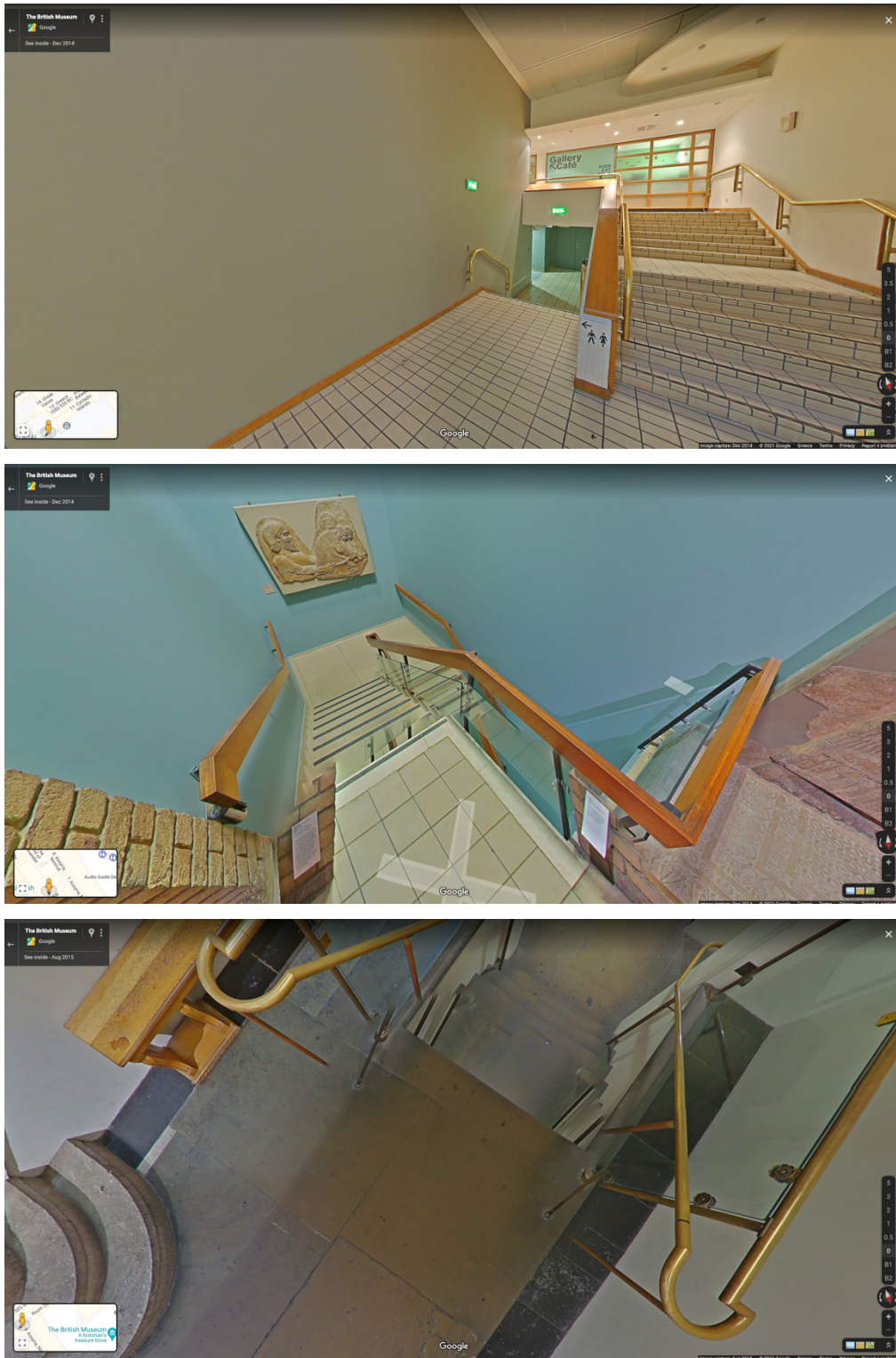
though Google is promoted as part of an expanded access to the Museum, by this selection process, and the relegation of areas into the background, the experience of the Museum is reduced to the logistics of a platform, and the visitor becomes a user.

Glitches, pixelated images, triangles and vertices, distorted perspectives, absence of smell and touch replace the physical experience of the Museum by reducing it to a number of clicks. These cannot be seen outside the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, where digital environments are increasingly being used as an alternative resource for institutions who do not take up the physical space required for exhibitions or archives. They are platforms, rather than spaces, that promise to reach a far larger audience across the globe. However, to maintain this desired digital and online presence, the planetary effects are not considered in detail; one that brings together the infrastructure of networks, the mesh of fibre-optic cables, data centres, electromagnetic waves and the extraction of resources. Moreover, considering the rhetoric of innovation underlying Google's aim to 'organise the world's information' and the omnipresence of platforms such as Zoom, Deliveroo, Facebook and Instagram, the implications of the platform museum signals toward an internet-based culture which, as Lovink has put it, 'there is no "social" anymore outside of social media'. [403]

A Geospatial Imagery

By navigating the visual screen through multi-touch gestures, I move towards the south-western part of the Museum. Some of the exhibited objects are featured in high resolution, directing the viewer to the Google Arts & Culture main website, where they can zoom in and out to reveal the details of the photographed objects in greater detail.[404] Is this made on the assumption that large image files replicate fully our experience?

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[403] Lovink, p. 3.

[404] Those have been captured by the Art Camera, a technology developed by Google in 2016 that allows the reproduction of high-resolution gigapixel images featured in the Google Arts &Culture website. Since Google deployed this technology, there has been a rapid expansion of newly scanned artworks. Until then museums had to involve a third party with image scanning equipment, but now Google has its own camera the process has become cheaper. In Jacob Kastrenakes, 'Google Made an Insanely High-Res Camera to Preserve Great Works of Art', *The Verge*, 17 May 2016 <https://www.theverge.com/2016/5/17/11686296/art-camera-google-cultural-institute> [accessed 9 September 2021].

Google Street View's navigational imagery engenders the capacity to create a version of the Museum, whilst constraining our understanding of the Museum, limiting our sensorial activity to that of touch and vision. Curator Doreen Mende suggests these modes of virtual navigation have 'composed a sensory-motor vocabulary of the body, more specifically, of the finger's tactile capacity that mobilizes the touchscreen interface as a display for becoming present within a world, yet without one's own body'.[405] The way that the touchscreen interface mobilises the screen, is different to the experience one might have in the physical space of the Museum. In the virtual tour, one cannot pass through the narrow doorways in the Cycladic Arts room, perhaps due to the close proximity of the walls, which would not allow the Google camera to capture and film the space in great precision. As a result, the ancient Greek vases and sculptures refuse to be captured by the Google camera; they appear distorted. With a pinch-to-zoom gesture, I zoom in and out, in an effort to see the vases. The 'code of touch' operates and recalibrates the frame continuously 'within a navigable field – towards a geospatial imaginary beyond the limits of a static frame.'[406]

This geospatial imaginary, as discussed by Mende, concerns a world-making that 'fits onto the tips of two fingers', therefore relying on the technology of zoom to recalibrate our proximities. It is therefore a world where our gaze is controlled by means of touch, to operate the image within a navigable field. On the other hand, these images are products of the perspective of the Google's camera, which inhabits positions different from those of the visitor. By zooming in and out, glitched images of the Ancient Greek vases, the hollow walls and surfaces, reveal what Goriunova and Shilgin describe as the true functionality of the computer and 'the ghostly conventionality of the forms by which digital spaces are organized'.[407] Spatial formations which also depend on the infrastructures and the ubiquity of digital technologies.

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[405] Doreen Mende, 'The Code of Touch: Navigating Beyond Control, or, Towards Scalability and Sociability', *E-flux* 109, 2020 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/109/331193/the-code-of-touch-navigating-beyond-control-or-towards-scalability-and-sociability/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[406] Ibid.

[407] In Matthew Fuller, ed., *Software Studies*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p.114.

The images produced by cameras mounted on missiles, late artist and documentary film-maker Harun Farocki designates them as 'operative' images.[408] These images are to serve an automated vision machine, that is programmed for the detection of targets and re-orientation of the route of the missiles in military operations. The proliferation of this imagery dates back to the mid-twentieth century, when, according to Farocki, machines and their images were starting to operate, *to do* things in the world.[409] As such, he coined 'operative' images to describe types of images which are made 'neither to entertain nor to inform,' but rather are part of a – usually technological – operation.[410] Farocki in the lecture 'Computer Animation Rules' in 2014 remarked that 'computer-animated, navigable images constitute the twenty-first century's ruling-class of images',[411] and therefore demand a different kind of analysis, which pays attention to the frame, the action and the ability given to the viewer to navigate the scenery

'Reality will soon cease to be the standard by which to judge the imperfect image. Instead, the virtual image will become the standard by which to measure the imperfections of reality' says the narrator of Harun Farocki's video installation *Parallel- I-IV* presented at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, highlighting how our perception of reality is affected by the proliferation of virtual imagery.[412] The computer navigable images of the British Museum are outputs of the panoramic camera mounted on the top of Google's camera trolley, where lasers have been utilised to capture distances to walls, and motion sensors to track the trolley's position, a hard drive to store data, and a laptop to operate the system.[413] Google's algorithm was confusing visages of sculptures, paintings and masks, the fact-blurring recognition technology that is used by Google when they are mapping urban environments had to be deactivated in the Museum in order to

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[408] Harun Farocki, 'Phantom Images', *Public*, 0.29 (2004) <https://public.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/public/article/view/30354> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[409] Harun Farocki, 2004.

[410] Farocki, 2004, p.17.

[411] Harun Farocki, *Harun Farocki: Computer Animation Rules* (IKKM, 2014) [lecture] <https://vimeo.com/100092938> [accessed 20 May 2021]

[412] Harun Farocki, *Parallel- I-IV*, 29 January – 5 June 2016, Video Installation, Whitechapel Gallery, London.

[413] 'Street View Takes You inside Museums around the World', [blog post] *Google* 2011 <https://maps.googleblog.com/2011/02/street-view-takes-you-inside-museums.html> [accessed 9 May 2021].

effectively capture the exhibits.[414] For the algorithm, both the face of a sculpture and the face of a human are the same.

Even though Farocki is primarily concerned with video games and aerial photography, both 'operative' and 'computer-animated, navigable images' resemble the operation of the Google Street View camera in the Museum considering that premise of the collaboration between the institution and Google – according to the Museum's director, Neil MacGregor – was 'to make possible the 18th-century dream of the museum being a collection of the world, for the world'[415] aligning with Google's universalist claim to 'organise the world's information'.[416] In the new visual-spatial regimes produced by these navigational processes, resolution in relation to authenticity, democratisation and accessibility are at the epicentre of Google's rhetoric in its involvement with cultural heritage sites and museums across the world. Accordingly, part of Google's involvement in museums was the digitisation of the artefacts, with the aim of providing higher-quality resolution imagery accessible from everywhere without the need to physically access the museum.

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[414] Romey.

[415] Mark Brown, 'British Museum Exhibits Viewable Online Thanks to Google Partnership', *Guardian*, 12 November 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/nov/12/british-museum-google-cultural-institute-virtual-tour> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[416] 'Google Mission Statement and Vision Statement In A Nutshell'.

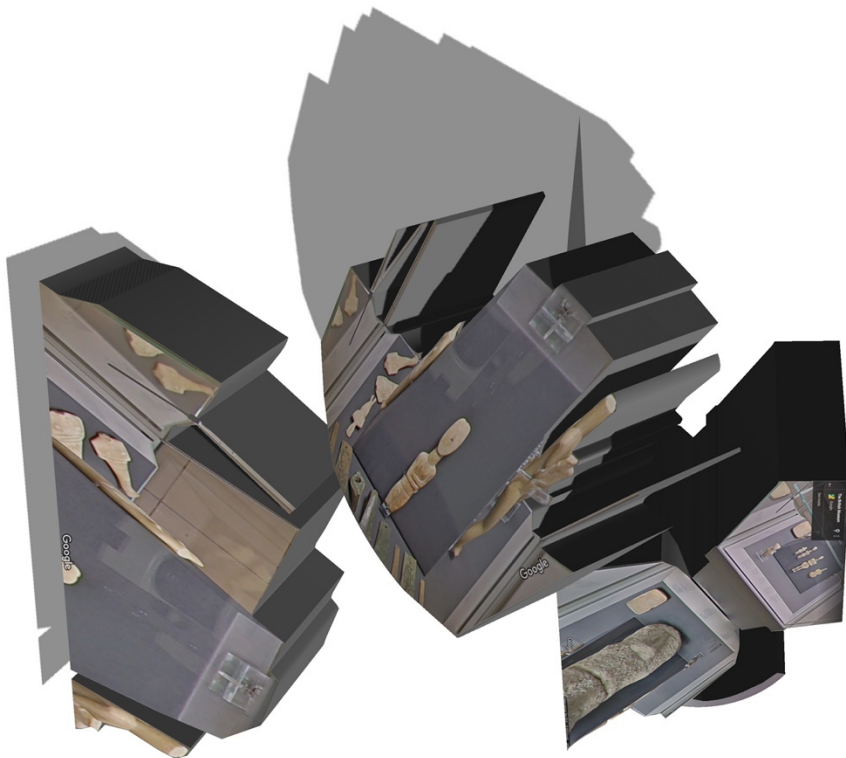Figure 32 Glitch. Virtual Gallery Tour, Cycladic Arts Gallery. Kyriaki Spanou.

Figure 33 Glitch. Virtual Gallery Tour, Cycladic Arts Gallery. Kyriaki Spanou.

When the virtual museum tour application was announced at a press conference hosted by Tate Britain in 2011, the discussion between art critics and the Google Cultural Institute (now Google Arts & Culture) mainly centred around how a website experience of artworks could replace the authenticity of a work of art.[417] As scholar of visual culture Kim Beil writes, 'Critics eagerly tested Google's assertion that these so-called "gigapixel" images are even better than the real thing because they provide a microscopic view of details in brushwork and surface condition that are difficult or impossible to see with the naked eye'.[418] A gigapixel image is digital image bitmap composed of one billion 10^9 pixels, 1000 times the information captured by a 1-megapixel digital camera. The inclusion of this type of imagery was at the time discussed as the project's 'reality effect', in terms of the ways this operation allows for microscopic range, simulating the dimensionality of the object's surface, and high-resolution[419] representations of cultural objects.[420]

Drawing on Farocki's discussion on how both 'operative' and 'computer-animated, navigable images' materialise concepts about the world, according to the concepts that guided the construction of devices that shape them, the following section entitled 'Fragment V: Blurriness' looks at another instance of Google's technology applied to the scanning of the British Museum, taking the central question regarding *repair* in another direction.

The main argument of Google Arts & Culture regarding its involvement with museums is the accessibility and democratisation of collections. One of the means of justifying this is Google's so-called 'reality effect', whereby high-resolution imagery offers something which resembles the physical experience of the museum object whilst giving global access to the museum. From this standpoint, it is important to draw attention to how high-resolution imagery acquires a different meaning when technical images, such as those provided by Google Street View and Google Earth, are 'doing things' outside museums.

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[417] Beil.

[418] Beil, p. 23.

[419] In photography resolution is the detail an image holds, offering the capability of visualising spatial detail.

[420] Beil.

'Fragment IV: Blurriness' aims to bridge the operation of Google in the museums, with its technological operations outside cultural forms of expression, for mapping cities. In doing so, I return to the central question of the thesis regarding *repair* in order to highlight a notion of *repair* that is not only confined to museum objects, but is also relatable to the context of how information and communication technologies may be transformed into wider circulatory practices of ordering knowledge.

FRAGMENT IV
Blurriness

Google provides a wide range of imagery from the microscale museum of scanning museum objects to the macroscale of satellite imagery. Hopping from the virtual gallery tour of the British Museum to an urban environment, such as the Palestinian territories, the issue of resolution acquires a very different meaning. Satellite imagery such as that provided by Google are useful for investigators of conflicts in areas where they have to rely on and utilise image-based practices to document and analyse the territory.

On 17th May 2021, only a few days after the Israeli air strikes on Gaza Strip, both Israel and the Palestinian territories appear on Google Maps as low-resolution satellite imagery.[421] The BBC article 'Israel-Gaza: Why is the region blurry on Google Maps?' was reporting this as an issue that has been highlighted by researchers who are using open-source software or publicly available information such as satellite imagery to locate attacks and document the destruction. Eyal Weizman talks about the difference in resolution as that which 'demonstrates the imbalance of power', analysing how the resolution varies from Google Earth and Google Street Views to those provided by aeroplanes and drones in areas of conflict, and how exceptions – as if reductions in resolution – are made in war zones such Palestine/Israel. Weizman writes:

> While the human body is the scale to which drone optics are calibrated, it is the very thing that publicly available satellite images are designed to mask.[422]

Following this, it is important to acknowledge how the issue of resolution expands from museums to macroscale imagery, and how the quality of resolution is controlled by political forces in regard to the world outside museums. Drawing upon this contested aspect of resolution, 'Fragment IV: Blurriness' displays two screenshots. The first screenshot is a high-resolution photography of Yaxchilan Lintel 24, an item from the British Museum's Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas which is accessible both in

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[421] Christopher Giles and Jack Goodman, 'Israel-Gaza: Why Is the Region Blurry on Google Maps?', *BBC News*, 17 May 2021 <https://www.bbc.com/news/57102499> [accessed 17 May 2021].

[422] Eyal Weizman, Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability (New York: Zone Books, 2017), p. 30.

the virtual tour[423] and in Google Arts & Culture website, featured in a high-resolution image.[424] Next to the high resolution image of Yaxchilan Lintel 24, I juxtapose a low-resolution still from Google Maps in the area of the attacks on Gaza in May 2021.[425] Therefore, returning to the question of *repair*, the resolution has a dual function when is subjected to Google's extractivist operations outside museums. The rhetoric of high resolution within museums overlaps with the rhetoric of accessibility, and consequently with publicly accessible collections worldwide. As for the low-resolution imagery provided by Google controls the relationship between what we are able to see or not see in areas of conflict, and suggests the blurring of an image as the denial of access to the damage in conflict zones.
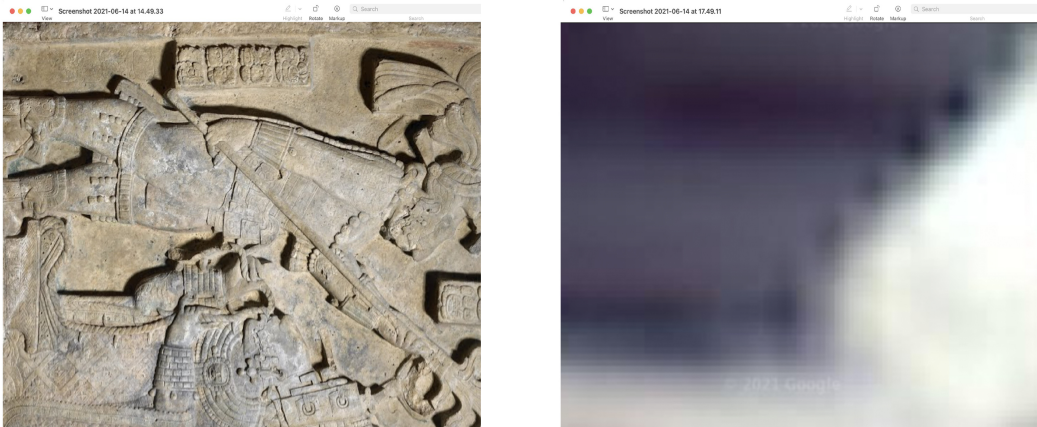
Figure 34 Fragment IV: Blurriness. Kyriaki Spanou

Left Image: 'Screenshot 2021-06-14 at 14.49.33' High-resolution imagery for the Yaxchilan Lintel 24 in Google Arts and Culture. Right Image: 'Screenshot 2021-06-14 at 17.49.11': Low-resolution satellite imagery provided by Google Maps in Gaza.

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[423] 'Yaxchilan Lintel 24', [Google Street View] *Google Arts & Culture*
<https://artsandculture.google.com/streetview/nwGUv6jWUJzDhQ?sv_lng=-0.1270315053275795&sv_lat=51.52004281811421&sv_h=-55.62525431553432&sv_p=-6.730814551480535&sv_pid=zJSoxV0OlYMP4J0IBA1hdA&sv_z=1> [accessed 07 July 2021]

[424] 'Yaxchilan Lintel 24', [blog post] Google Arts & Culture
<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/yaxchilan-lintel-24/nwGUv6jWUJzDhQ>[accessed 9 May 2020].

[425] 'Hanadi Tower in Gaza', [Google Maps]
<https://www.google.com/maps/@31.5225695,34.4342687,244m/data=!3m1!1e3> [accessed 14 June 2021]

The two images are presented as two 'screenshots'. To take a screenshot, one must press and hold three keyboards together. Shift, Command and 4. Use this keyboard shortcut will allow you to turn your cursor into a crosshair, and drag it to select a portion of the screen to capture. Once the frame's been set, all that's left to do is to release the mouse button or trackpad and a thumbnail will appear in the bottom-right corner of the screen. The PNG entitled 'Screenshot 2021-06-14 at 17.49.11' stands for a low-resolution satellite imagery provided by Google Maps in Gaza. And the PNG image entitled 'Screenshot 2021-06-14 at 14.49.33' stands for the high-resolution imagery for the Yaxchilan Lintel 24 that is accessible via Google Street View, featured in the main website of Google Arts and Culture as a high-quality image.

Throughout this research, the originally planned in situ investigation of the British Museum has been replaced by a screen mediated interaction, wherein the logistics and technical aspects of the computer have interfered with the process of interacting with the environment of the Museum. The sensorial interaction with the Museum's environment has been replaced by a digitally mediated process of screenshotting; navigation has been dictated by Google's arrows. And the 'digital openness' promised by Google involves 'closedness'.

Figure 35 Documentation of the Research Process. Kyriaki Spanou

480.3k Triangles and 238.8k Vertices versus 113x 77x 28cm

Figure 36 Rosetta Stone, Digital Texture Mapping. Kyriaki Spanou.

Digital representations of culture generate new spatialities, encounters and proximities with objects. For example, many of the objects presented during the virtual gallery tour, such as the Rosetta Stone, are also part of the Museum's digital library in the 3D file repository Sketchfab – another virtual portal of the Museum. The 113x 77x 28cm fragment of the Rosetta Stone translated into 480.3k triangles and 238.8k vertices. [426] [427]A high-quality 3D-printable model of the Rosetta Stone is available to download, under a Creative Commons Non-Commercial licence.[428] The British Museum is funded by a combination of grant-

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[426] Miller and others., 'The Examination and Conservation of the Rosetta Stone at the British Museum', *Studies in Conservation*, 45, sup. 1 (2000), 128–32 <https://doi.org/10.1179/sic.2000.45.Supplement-1.128> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[427] 'The Rosetta Stone', *Sketchfab* [blog post] <https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/the-rosetta-stone-1e03509704a3490e99a173e53b93e282> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[428] 'Sketchfab: British Museum Models', *Sketchfab* [blog post] <https://sketchfab.com/britishmuseum/models> [accessed 9 May 2021].

in-aid allocated by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and income is secured through commercial, fundraising, sponsored and charging activities. The digital library of Sketchfab's collaboration with the British Museum originated in an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded crowdsourcing project, MicroPasts, in collaboration with University College London, with the aim of producing 3D objects for academic research.[429] [430] [431] According to Chris Michaels – the Museum's head of digital media and publishing at the time – the digitisation was intended to have more tactile benefits, as 'people will be able to touch something they're not supposed to touch in real life,' which in turn would enable the Museum to show more of its archive 'without damaging any artefacts'.[432] In turn, the digital Rosetta Stone is an object that you can hold in your hand, turn it over, zoom in, zoom out, to investigate it.

A future-oriented thinking regarding the value of digital technologies in museums is a key theme in conferences such as MuseWeb, which features advanced research and applications of digital practice for cultural, natural and scientific heritage. Founder and director of the Tangible Media Group at MIT, Professor Hiroshi Ishii, in his keynote speech for MuseWeb 2019,[433] envisioned a future of museums oriented towards an augmented sense of human touch, enabled by interactive technologies. Ishii notes:

> In a museum, it's very difficult to interact with an art piece or artist, because usually the artist is gone, and the art piece is so fragile or precious that you are not allowed to touch. How can you capture this interactivity

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[429] University College London, 'MicroPasts Knowledge Exchanges', *UCL* <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/research/directory/micropasts-knowledge-exchanges> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[430] Bart Veldhuizen, 'MicroPasts: Crowdsourcing Cultural Heritage Research', *Sketchfab*, 2015 <https://sketchfab.com/blogs/community/micropasts-crowdsourcing-cultural-heritage-research/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[431] Emma Bryce, 'The British Museum Uses 3D Scanning to Bring Artefacts to Life', *Wired*, 5 February 2015 <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/reprinting-history> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[432] Bryce.

[433] MuseWeb is an international annual museum conference. The meetings and proceedings feature advanced research and applications of digital practice for cultural, natural and scientific heritage.

is key? So, to make it tangible is a goal to invent new tangible interactions

that inspire and engage people.[434]

Ishii sees the potential for interactivity to inspire and engage, underlining a
cultural orientation where an increasing attention to digitisation overlaps with
ideas of creativity, innovation and personalisation, similar to the Google Arts &
Culture applications –such as the Art Selfie[435] – which flourished during the first
lockdown Covid-19 pandemic lockdown when access to physical cultural heritage
sites was restricted. Looking at issues of censorship, originality and the truth of
data, in 2015 artists Nora Al-Badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles secretly scanned the
head of Nefertiti in the Neues Museum in Berlin. The Other Nefertiti – a digital
replica of the actual object – is an artistic intervention in which artists, after
scanning the object, handed the files to an anonymous group of hackers who
gave them back an .stl file, that they made available as a torrent file under a
Creative Commons licence. The artists said:

> With the data leak as a part of this counter narrative we want to activate
> the artefact, to inspire a critical re-assessment of today's conditions and to
> overcome the colonial notion of possession in Germany.[436]

Even though other museums are not allowing visitors to scan or photograph
their objects, the British Museum encourages people to scan their collection. In
the online library Sketchfab many of the objects have been made available by
individual users, and only for few of them charge for their use – the majority are
available for free. Digitisation is often used as means of perpetuating the life of
museum objects, which are susceptible to damage, degradation and deterioration
due to the passage of time, exposure to light, heat and handling. For this reason,
digital records have become of increasing interest for conservation departments

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[434] Hiroshi Ishii, 'Remembering the Future: Archiving for 2200', in *MuseWeb Conference Opening Keynote, 2019* (Boston, MA: MuseWeb) <https://mw19.mwconf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/HiroshiTranscriptMW19.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[435] 'Art Selfie', *Google Arts & Culture* <https://artsandculture.google.com/camera/selfie> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[436] Nora Al-Badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles, 'The Other Nefertiti', *Aksioma Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana* <https://aksioma.org/the.other.nefertiti>.

that are keen to keep accurate data on the state of an original. This was highlighted during the ISIS occupation of parts of Syria and Iraq, when several acts led to the destruction of World Heritage sites, such as mosques, churches and archaeological sites.[437] Digital archaeologists, using photography and museum images, were able to reconstruct several of the lost and damaged artefacts, with the result that digital scanning is used as a preventive measure to protect the object against destruction.

Museum scholar Fiona Cameron has written about the meaning of the transformation of cultural heritage to that of *digital* cultural heritage, and what that means in terms of museums' strategies of display. Through the development of her post-humanities framework for museums, Cameron argues that due to the proliferation of digitisation,

> (d)igital cultural heritage and museum systems are no longer located solely in the national or local or the human or technical; rather, they are embedded and deeply entangled in dynamic, burgeoning meshes of diverse people, cultural contexts and realities, technological developments, global infrastructures, automations, human and non-human processes, planetary crises, geopolitical contexts and events.[438]

It is therefore important to understand Google Arts & Culture's project, as well as the online platform Sketchfab, in the context of how information and communication technologies in museums may be transformed into wider practices of ordering. My concerns are how digitisation strategies, when used as part of a rhetoric of democratisation and free accessibility, overlaps with the British Museum's intention to utilise digitalisation strategies as a means of preservation. And in turn, this will enable me to investigate the politics of such a position, specifically considering the politics of *preserving* versus *repairing*. For example, the British Museum, which holds more than eight million historical artefacts in its archive, in 2014 announced plans to use 3D scanning to bring

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[437] Karel Nováček and others, 'The Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq as a Violation of Human Rights', *United Nations Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights* (Munich: RASHID International e.V, n.d.).

[438] Fiona Cameron, *The Future of Digital Data, Heritage and Curation in a More-than-Human World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), p. 9.

them into public view on the freely accessible platform of Sketchfab.[439] Similarly, in the UK, the Natural History Museum, the British Library, and the Victoria and Albert Museum have all launched similar programmes to digitally record their vast collections. [440] [441] [442]

Chris Michaels articulated the intentions of digitisation as the 'moments when technology change what the museum can be,' and that 'the core of the project is about preserving the knowledge of an object forever.'[443] But what does 'forever' mean? Can this be seen outside of Western museums' ideological investment in retaining objects indefinitely as part of the construct of universal heritage? From this standpoint, this relates to their resistance to and denial of the return of the object to the source community, by providing universal access to digital replicas instead of the actual objects, such as in the case of the Google Arts & Culture project and Sketchfab. As seen in the case of the Benin Bronzes, the Parthenon (or Elgin) Marbles, and many other cases concerning cultural items, such as human remains and sacred objects, the longstanding demands for their return are repeatedly refused with the argument that the British Museum is a deposit of a universal heritage.[444] Here, the argument of digitisation also connects with museums' conservation research responsibility to maintain their collections forever, and to do everything possible to delay the natural laws of deterioration and decay in order to preserve objects eternally. If these technologies are utilised as means of preserving objects by averting the natural forces of deterioration, what is defined as a damage – the unavoidable decay of the object – is key here, due to the way this links to subjective evaluations.

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[439] Cited in Bryce.

[440] Eleanor Peake, 'The Natural History Museum Is Going High Tech to Save Its Archive', *Wired*, 18 December 2017 <https://www.wired.co.uk/gallery/natural-history-museum-digitising-80-million-specimens-lego> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[441] Bonnie Christian, 'The British Library Is Racing to Save Archived Sounds from Decay', *Wired*, 5 September 2017 <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/british-library-sound-archive> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[442] 'ReACH (Reproduction of Art and Cultural Heritage)', V&A, [blog post]<https://www.vam.ac.uk/research/projects/reach-reproduction-of-art-and-cultural-heritage> [accessed 6 August 2021].

[443] Bryce.

[444] Hicks, 2020; Price and Hicks.

For example, in the Sarr and Savoy report, the authors write about potential means of instigating the restitution of objects to their source countries in Africa:

> It is even possible to consider the creation of apparatuses to fill the void left by these objects, in the guise of the creation of replicas to be housed in the Western museums, whose energetic aura will be assured through the machinery of narrative and the possibilities that digital tools allow for as well as ICT [Internet Communications Technology]. [445]

Therefore, if the Western museums – including the British Museum – have the technical equipment to generate digital replicas, could it then this be used as means of holding the digital replica and returning the original copy to the source community? In the case of the Parthenon Marbles, the British Museum suggested the opposite. Therefore, technologies such as virtual reality or 3D scanning could make the physical location of the objects less important to their original contexts.

More specifically, the British Museum suggested virtual replicas of the Parthenon Marbles to be returned in the Acropolis Museum in Athens, whilst the original copies effectively remain in the UK. One of the arguments of the British Museum officials to justify their retention has consistently been that of preservation. According to the British Museum Trustees, the removal of the objects to the Museum were deemed necessary on conservation grounds, and this has proved highly beneficial in preserving the sculptures from 150 years of high-level pollution in Athens. [446] Moreover, in an earlier interview, the British Museum director, Hartwig Fischer, characterised the removal 'as a creative act', [447] pointing

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[445] Sarr and Savoy, p. 39

[446] The British have consistently provided four arguments justifying their retention of the Marbles. First, the Marbles were removed legitimately on the grounds of Sultan's firman (a legal document). Second, returning the Marbles to Greece would constitute a precedent for the universal removal of major acquisitions of the world's museums, thus limiting the role of the museum in the education of the public. Moreover, the removals were necessary on conservation grounds, and they have proved highly beneficial in preserving the sculptures from 150 years of high levels of pollution in Athens. Finally, the Marbles have become an integral part of the British cultural heritage. In Kersel.

[447] Mark Brown, 'British Museum Chief: Taking the Parthenon Marbles Was "Creative"', *Guardian*, 28 January 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jan/28/british-museum-chief-taking-the-parthenon-marbles-was-creative> [accessed 9 May 2021]; Giannis Andritsopoulos, '«Η Ελλάδα Δεν Είναι ο Νόμιμος Ιδιοκτήτης Των Γλυπτών Του Παρθενώνα»', *TA NEA*, 2019 <https://www.tanea.gr/print/2019/01/26/greece/h-ellada-lfden-einai-o-nomimos-lfidioktitis-lfton-glypton-lftou-parthenona/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

to how the removal of cultural heritage from its original context to that of a museum may be understood as a creative shift toward a new life for an object.

The repatriation of the Parthenon reliefs was a similar case to the Oxus treasure from Tajikistan and Tutankhamun's treasures, held in the Manchester Museum, where digital repatriation was suggested as an alternative way to negotiate the return.[448] [449] MacGregor's reasoning was as follows:

> At the moment there is not very much middle ground between the two sides on the subject of the marbles and it is tiresome for everyone to keep saying the same things. The Parthenon can never be reconstructed, so let's try and put together what's left of it virtually.[450]

What the British Museum defines as potential damage to the object due to a lack of technical equipment and infrastructure in the source country contradicts what the communities to which the objects belong see as the destruction/ damage of their cultural heritage by the failure to reinstate the objects in their original setting.

Where does a shift toward the digitisation of culture leave us, particularly in the modern context where European research grants celebrate new methods of digitisation as inherently 'innovative', without necessarily being culturally progressive? For example, the rapid rise of IoT and the changes in the urban landscape with the advancement of 'smart cities', Europeana's 2015 white paper *Transforming the World with Culture* recognises digital culture as one of the key issues for modern cultural policy-making and promotes its creative use in building the cities of the future.

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[448] Asia-Plus, The British Museum Hands over Copies of Items from the Oxus Treasure to Tajikistan', *Asiaplustj*, 30 August 2011 <https://www.asiaplustj.info/en/news/29/20110830/british-museum-hands-over-copies-items-oxus-treasure-tajikistan> [accessed 7 August 2021].

[449] 'Tutankhamun's Replica Treasures in Manchester', *Elginism*, 2010 <http://www.elginism.com/elgin-marbles/when-replicas-are-as-convincing-as-the-real-thing-do-museums-still-need-to-keep-the-originals/20101122/3295/> [accessed 7 July 2021].

[450] 'British Museum Director Say Marbles Will Never Return to Greece', *Elginism*, 2003 <http://www.elginism.com/elgin-marbles/british-museum-director-say-marbles-will-never-return-to-greece/20030224/4547/>.

Along these lines, extractivism as that which commodifies both knowledge and experience, as put by Santos, touches upon the larger rhetoric of the use of data in the cultural sector, which often overlaps with entrepreneurial and business-oriented research, revolving around a language of innovation and creativity. [451] European research grants, are an example, such as Europeana 2021 and Horizon 2020: they aim to support the cultural heritage sector in its digital transformation through the adoption of new advanced digital interactive technologies, to strengthen infrastructure, enrich data, share collections and engage with audiences.[452] A common belief evidenced in this shift is that technology can be depended upon to solve social and personal problems; an exemplar of an ideology of technological solutionism. [453]

Preventative conservation and digitisation strategies such as those indicated in this chapter often utilise a rhetoric of damage prevention: either by means of digitising the object, in order to prevent its unavoidable decay and to preserve the object eternally or by spatial design practices which monitor the museum's environment in order to safely display the object. Both means presume that keeping the object for longer is better. Considering that museums serve the task of preserving objects which are not meant to be displayed in museums, this evidences an *abyssal* thinking regarding what we define as damage, that is not a neutral category. Moreover, returning to the question of what it means to keep an object 'forever', the durational aspect of this is important.

Objects are carriers of complex histories. And these histories are the precondition for an object to enter the museum. That is to say, that the future oriented thinking of preservation equals access to the past. However, this past is highly conditioned by the ideological investments in museum objects and

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[451] Europeana is an initiative of the European Union, financed by the European Union's Connecting Europe Facility and European Union Member States. It advocates for providing the cultural heritage sector with digital practices that support openness, transparency and reuse of digital cultural heritage through grants and funding of cultural projects and initiatives. 'About Us', *Europeana* <https://pro.europeana.eu/about-us/mission> [accessed 9 July 2021].

[452] Horizon 2020 is a seven-year funding programme of the European Commission to develop new, sustainable solutions to social and cultural challenges, driving new forms of innovation and growth. Europeana participates in projects that aim to explore and showcase high impact applications of cultural heritage. In 'Horizon 2020', *Europeana* <https://pro.europeana.eu/page/horizon-2020> [accessed 9 July 2021].

[453] Morozov.

definitions of cultural heritage, which as has been discussed in chapter three, are not neutral categories, and museum objects are subject to double a historicity; histories before and after the accession to the museum.[454] In fact, this past might often not be retrievable, or be connected with violent histories of destruction of cultural heritage, which, many Western museums ignore. Santos has discussed this as a fundamental problem of the archive. He writes: 'How is it possible to retrieve the past experiences and memories of agencies and realities that were subject to *abyssal* exclusions by Western-centric *abyssal* thinking?' [455]

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[454] Hicks, 2020.

[455] Santos, 2018, p. 15.

FRAGMENT V
Fragments of Fragments

The central question of this PhD regarding *repair* was my way of generating a bridge between the history of the institution and how certain museum items find their place within this institution. *Repair* was the vehicle to stage the realms and conditions wherein a museum object may connect with other objects, places and practices but also the means to justify a critical spatial practice, which accounts issues of subjectivity and situated knowledge. From this standpoint, my subjectivity as a researcher, my assumptions, limitations, ambitions, all the various detours during the years of this PhD journey are blended inextricably with this investigation.

The section 'Fragment V: Fragments of Fragments' concerns the very process of my investigation, drawing from what chapter two has discussed as 'situated knowledge' as a form of embodied objectivity,[456] and Barad's notion of 'diffractivity' which illuminates the ever-evolving material entanglements between subjects and objects.[457]

What this research suggests as the difference between *preserving* and *repairing?* *Preserving* in museums is often designed to generate something which appears as though it is absolutely perfect, the exact replica of a museum object, isolating it from the flow of time. On the other hand, *repairing* recognises the limitations of what we can do with a museum object. As such *repair* is to suggest the importance of the process, beyond that of just *fixing* the damage; to suggest a less technological point of view that prioritises 'ways of knowing', other than 'knowledge itself'.[458] What Santos has described as a *postabyssal* thinking that prioritises the sensorial over the rational, ways of 'learning with' rather than 'learning about'.[459]

As a piece of work this PhD has a consistency and an internal continuity. However, the original version of this research is one that underwent extensive

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[456] Haraway.

[457] Barad, pp. 72-132.

[458] Santos, Introduction.

[459] Ibid.

editing, discussions, writing, erasing, reading. Therefore, my means to illuminate the ethical position of the thesis regarding *repair*, is to present the very process of my research as an artifact itself. To illustrate this, the 'Fragment V: Fragments of Fragments' is comprised of all the fragments of the research; handwritten notes, photographs, books, screenshots, printed chapters of the thesis, feedback, pixelated objects from the virtual gallery tour, the staged 'Crack' of the Gayer-Anderson Cat, printed documents from the Torres Strait Islander claim, all the detours, non-linear ways of learning and thinking. During the process of this research, all these items were placed on the wall of my room. Therefore, the presentation of the 3d scanned wall of my room in Athens – where most of this research took place since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic – is my means to justify the ethical stance of this research, to present knowledge which does not presume my neutrality as a researcher. From this standpoint the very essence of this PhD – is conducted and is captured by the way it is presented, as a *repaired* artefact itself. By cultivating an understanding of *repair* as a process, I hope to contribute new methods for *unfixing*.
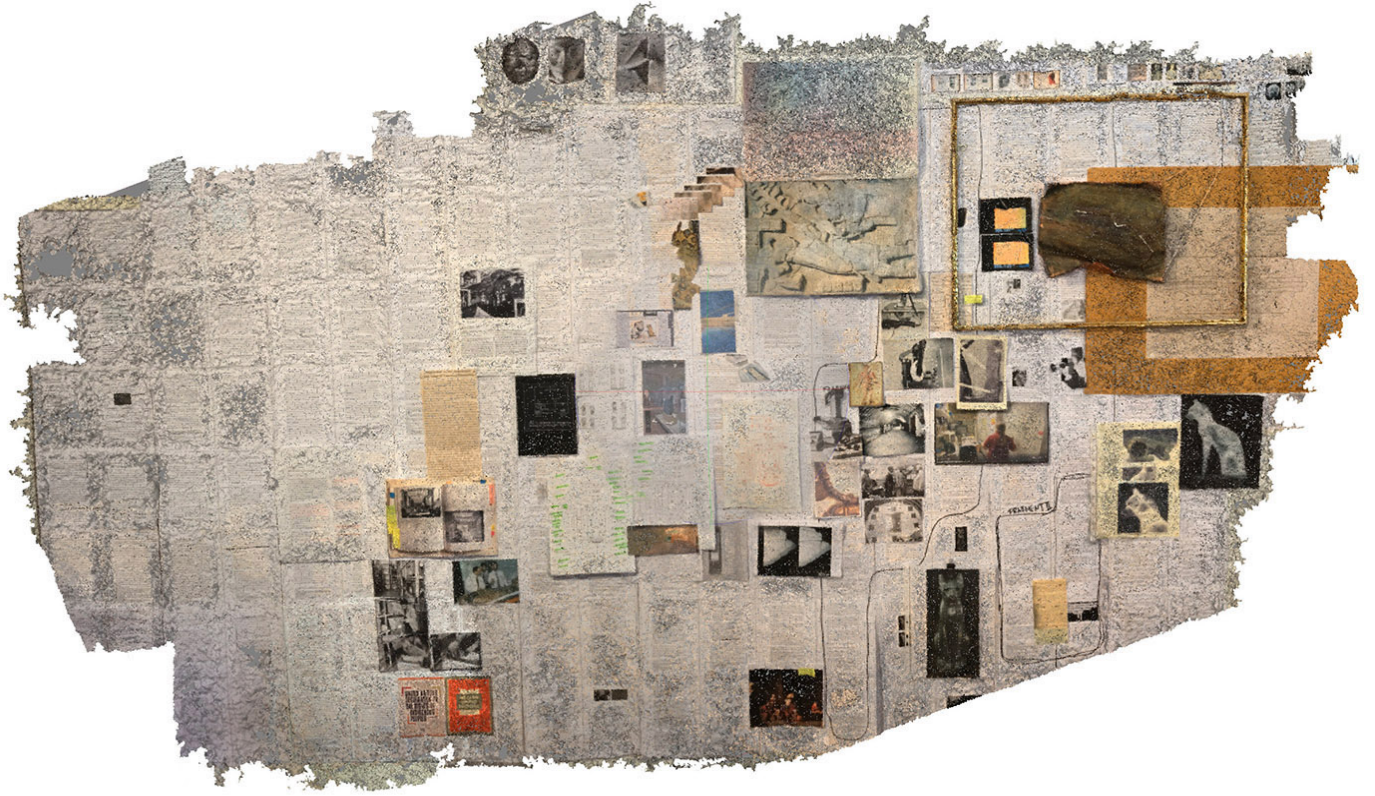
Figure 37 Fragment V: Fragments of Fragments. Kyriaki Spanou.

Figure 38 Documentation of the Research Process. Kyriaki Spanou.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The final chapter of this investigation elaborates on some further thoughts about the thesis, with the aim of identifying some of the key contributions to new knowledge, and other areas whereby this investigation might be applicable.

The research aimed to problematise, define and reassess a way to speak of *repair* in the context of the British Museum. One of the main motivations for this study is therefore to consider a museum's environment as a fundamental context for identifying, presenting and producing a critical discourse about *repair*. To do so, I have investigated how the politics of universalism and humanitarianism relate to the Museum's practices of collecting, preserving and displaying objects. The written thesis has outlined how the British Museum as a space, a technology, and an apparatus holds objects together but often splits their meanings apart. The unidimensionality of extractivism was examined in parallel with Google's omni-directionality promise in the virtual gallery tour of the Museum, as an exemplar of a technological solutionism. Following on from this, the thesis argues that the Museum as a geopolitical location, in conjunction with the mediation of international organisations such as the UN, UNESCO, ICOM and the media technologies involved in a museum display are complicit in the extractivist operations to the museum object.

Throughout the thesis I was primarily concerned with objects and artefacts contested by populations, nations and communities which have been subjected to *repair*. For example, the Gayer-Anderson Cat is a museum item which has been literally subject to *repair* by both its collector and British Museum scientists. My suggestion for an alternative way of encountering this object is by shifting our gaze to its cracks and therefore to various subjectivities who relate to its injury, and its restoration. This is not to argue that objects should not be repaired, but as Hicks highlights, to stress the need for the transformation of museums from sites of violence or trauma to 'sites of conscience'.[460] The aesthetic gesture of making an abstraction, to give sculptural form to the traumatised body of the museum

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[460] Hicks, 2020, p. 4.

object, and display this next to X-ray radiographs which evidence its injury, the account of its collector and the technical analysis of the object is an alternative way of suggesting that what we see when we encounter an object in a museum is not always quite what we see, due to the way the various political and sociological factors have impacted its journey prior to its arrival in the Museum.

In the case of the Torres Strait Islanders' claim, my concern is the ideological orientation of a *repair* in the British Museum. Therefore, the very documentation process of the TSI claim as archived in the British Museum website, including all the reports, the protocols that set the standards for the preservation of such objects – i.e., Human Remains policy, the letters exchanged – are evidence of a mythology which positions spirituality against technical knowledge, and cultural beliefs against the benefits of public science, and as such reinforces the Museum's universal claim as the ideal custodian.

Paying attention to how preservation may equally be a process of loss, erasure and denial, this PhD suggests a dialectic between destruction and *repair*. One that takes into consideration the affordances of the media systems, from the physical to the digital realm, from micro to macro scales. In doing so, this body of work has drawn links between the Museum's infrastructures, such as the backstage machinery utilised for the preservation of the object in the physical space of the Museum, and the operation of high-tech companies, such as Google, employed for preservation of the object in the digital realm. This is a key contribution of the thesis for museums due to the ways that the generated bridges justify how such technologies have been deployed in ways that reproduce colonial power relations. Moreover, drawing upon the shift towards the digital Museum and the links made between 'what is hidden' from both the physical and virtual display, I have outlined how digital representations of culture generate new spatialities, encounters and proximities which have further social and political impact in the context of colonialism and extractivism.

From this standpoint, an effective discourse on *repair* extends from narratives which often equal *repair* with fixing. On the contrary, it highlights *repair* as a

dynamic process, wherein the various subjectivities and technologies involved should be taken into consideration. The outline of these workflows through the unpacking of specific case studies, which convey *repair* as both physical and symbolic act is an original contribution of this PhD and an important outcome for museums, particularly noticing the proliferation of digital representations of culture. From this standpoint, a crack as a metaphor, a glitch, an error, an uncompletedness, is generative in terms of the ways it exposes the different layers and infrastructures involved in museums, and an aspect which I intend to further explore especially considering the shift towards the digital and the consequent neo-colonial, epistemic implications of the platform museum. Thus, this brings a different outlook to my future work across the disciplines of architecture and communication – one that alters the process of investigating a museum display through a media systems critique.

The *postabyssal* thinking suggested by Santos is central in this investigation, as it advocates for a process of a methodological decolonisation which allows for ways of knowing, rather than knowledge itself.[461] This is approached in parallel with the work of feminist scholars; Donna Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledge',[462] Karen Barad's notion of 'diffractivity',[463] and Sara Ahmed's notion of disorientation[464] as a political praxis. These notions were key for this PhD research, as they have influenced the use of situated practice as means of positioning myself within this body of work, and as such to interrogate a critical spatial practice from a situated and embodied perspective. Therefore, my way of responding to the central question of the research on *repair* involved interweaving my own investigations, observations, literature review and practice. From this point of view, *repair*, fracture, and disorientation became not only my means of investigating the British Museum, but also my way of undertaking this process with my subjectivity as researcher as an inextricable part of this investigation.

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[461] Santos, 2018.

[462] Haraway.

[463] Barad.

[464] Ahmed, 2006.

Following on from what Karen Barad has introduced as the agential realist framework, the 'diffractivity' of this body of work lies in the 'mutual constitution of entangled agencies' which do not exist as individual entities, but assemble together to produce specific phenomena.[465] One of the ways to contribute to the diffractive agency of this PhD – in the section 'Fragment V: Fragments of Fragments'– I stage the very process of my research as a *repaired* object, to indicate how this investigation captures the idea of *repair*. Therefore, processes which are continuously constituted and re-constituted through the material entanglements which reconfigure the 'becoming' of this PhD.

Considering the current debates regarding the return of the Parthenon marbles and my Greek nationality, taking a position regarding the return of these cultural artefacts is beyond the scope of this research. This is partially due to my acknowledgment of the complexity of these issues, and as it is something which requires a case-by-case approach. This research focuses on the exposure of the infrastructures, bureaucratic mechanisms and ideologies which contribute to the Museum's rhetoric of universalism in such negotiations, instead of examining specific repatriation or restitution cases. Moreover, the situatedness of this research does not relate to my ethnicity/nationality and most importantly, part of doing this research in this institution and in choosing this subject, was in order to break free from the confines of ethnicity, and instead to concern myself with what transcends these issues, as *repair*, loss, and *reparation* applies across cultures.

In the light of the emerging global challenge of reducing waste, in recent years there has been an interest in 'design thinking'-oriented approaches to *repair*. These have mainly stemmed from the urgent global challenge of reducing waste. Ben Bridgens and Debra Lilley discuss how the material change in an object status, such as damage and degradation, could engender emotional engagement with the object, pointing towards a product design practice in which an object's material change could be widely utilised as a design tool, to extend the emotional durability of products as opposed to the design of

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[465] Barad, p. 33.

durable objects.[466] In a similar vein, the concept of 'transformative repair' in Guy Keuleman's design framework highlights the importance of a *Kintsugi*-influenced design approach in which material records of object's damage and *repairs* may have the potential to respond to ecological and technological conditions, such as environmental pollution and climate change-related issues.[467] Tristan Schultz discusses *repair* within a broader decolonial design discourse and defines *repair* as that which should be part of a 'designer's vocabulary'.[468] Schultz argues for *repair* cultures which afford adaptation and resilience against the generalised notions of newness which have grown in capitalist and industrialised cultures with the rise of consumerism.[469] In doing so, Schultz distinguishes two emerging different cultures of *repair*. The first concerns entrepreneurial maker cultures stemming from productivist models from the Industrial Age. Within this context, we can think for example of the UK Made Smarter Innovation Hubs, which are set to 'accelerate digital innovation in the manufacturing sector, boost recovery and enhance productivity and sustainability'.[470] In contrast to these, Schultz identifies more innovative *repair* cultures, such as those which are practised either by people who voluntarily adopt ethics of care in terms of their relationships with objects, waste, sustainability, or traditional cultures of *repair* such as *Kintsugi* craftmanship in Japan (see section entitled 'Fragment I: Wear and Tear').[471] Noting the increasing proliferation of such productivist models of 'maker cultures' globally, Schultz argues that the former 'appropriate and reclassify' the latter for their own capitalistic needs.[472]

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[466] Ben Bridgens and Debra Lilley, 'Design for Next… Year. The Challenge of Designing for Material Change', *The Design Journal*, 20, Sup. 1 (2017), S160–71 (p. 164) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2017.1352715>.

[467] Guy Keulemans, 'The Geo-Cultural Conditions of Kintsugi', *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 9.1 (2016), 15–34 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496772.2016.1183946>.

[468] Tristan Schultz, 'Design's Role in Transitioning to Futures of Cultures of Repair', in *International Conference on Research into Design 2017* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017), pp. 225–34 (p. 227)

[469] Ibid.

[470] 'UKRI Invests £33m in Made Smarter Innovation Hubs', *UKRI: UK Research and Innovation*, 2020 <https://www.ukri.org/news/ukri-invests-33m-in-made-smarter-innovation-hubs/> [accessed 9 August 2021].

[471] Schultz, 2017, pp. 226-227.

[472] Ibid.

Schultz's decolonial approach to 'design thinking' links *repair* with the context of reuse and its role in transitioning to sustainable futures, and as such suggests the possibility that *repair* can become a 'decolonial design praxis'.[473] Although my research approach to *repair* does not resonate with a discourse which relates 'design thinking' to *repair* and sustainability, I believe that further applications of my work might overlap with what Schulz describes as technological exemplars of adaptation and resilience that is afforded by cultures of *repair*, and therefore I hope to contribute with new knowledge and practice in the current debates, whilst acknowledging the strong resonance between cultures of *repair* and museums. Therefore, I aim to further contribute within the larger contemporary discourse around *repair* by raising concerns regarding ethical and political questions about subjectivity, epistemic ownership, provenance and the archive within the context of museums. One that incorporates the complexities of cultural artifacts and communities, breaking away from the traditional acquisition, classification and preservation strategies in museums which are critiqued throughout the thesis.

Throughout this thesis I have referred to an emerging interdisciplinary scholarship of curators, artists, conservators and architects whose practice has challenged the 'orthodoxy' of conservation and contributes to the more general discourse regarding injustice and epistemic sovereignty in museums. For example, the work of conservators such as Jane Henderson and Eleanor Sweetnam has been an important reference to this research due to the ways that they have addressed the problematics of traditional conservation aesthetics and the inherent bias of the profession, challenging dominant preservation narratives and highlighting the complexity of power structures at stake.[474] Moreover, outputs of this PhD align with the work of artists and media related practitioners such as Moheshin Allayari and Nora Al-Badri whose practice touches upon the inherent power structures in museums, unpacking the role that new technologies have.[475]

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[473] Ibid., p.227.

[474] Henderson; Eleanor Sweetnam and Jane Henderson, 'Disruptive Conservation: Challenging Conservation Orthodoxy', *Studies in Conservation* (2021): 1-9. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00393630.2021.1947073>.

[475] Moheshin Allayari, 'Material Speculation: ISIS (2015-2016)', http://www.moreheshin.com/material-speculation-isis/; Nora Al-Badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles, 'The Other Nefertiti', *Aksioma Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana* <https://aksioma.org/the.other.nefertiti>.

In establishing a research framework capable of cultivating *repair* beyond cause-effect, dualist terms, my research may afford a broader contribution in addressing the *reparation* imperatives that increasingly influence contemporary cultural discourse in museums. From this standpoint, the research draws upon the work of curators such as as Wayne Modest, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Dan Hicks and Clementine Deliss whose work has significantly addressed issues of epistemic injustice and debates surrounding restitution and reparation, particularly in the context of anthropological museums in Europe. Moreover, the work of artist-activist Kader Attia has been at important reference to this PhD due to the ways that his research based artistic practice has foregrounded Western understandings of repair as a metaphor of cultural reappropriation in contrast to how non-Western cultures and societies engage with trauma.[476] Finally, this body of work connects to recent cultural heritage programs and initiatives which attempt to give new affordances to archives and museums, through processes of unlearning and decolonisation of Western epistemic traditions, such as the project 'Decolonizing Archaeology-related Photographic Archives' in Cyprus.[477]

The work of Forensic Architecture is an important reference for this PhD, due to the innovative ways in which forensic architecture practices establish a relationship between the events, the spaces in which they are registered, and the role of objects as evidential artefacts in the form of a spatial practice that unites art, architecture and law. In discussing the principle 'forensics' – meaning 'pertaining to the forum' –Weizman notes two distinct and interrelated spatial relationships that forensics entails.[478] The first considers the relationship between an 'event and the spaces within which it is registered,' and the other the 'relation between the object and the construction or the assembly of the forum to which it is addressed, or within which it resonates.'[479] For Forensic Architecture the

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[476] Manthia Diawara, Jacinto Lageira, and Kitty Scott. *Kader Attia: The Repair: From Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures*, ed. by Axel Lapp (Berlin: The Green Box, 2014); *Kader Attia: The Museum of Emotion*, ed. by Ralph Rugoff (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2019).

[477] 'Decolonizing Archaeology-related Photographic Archives', *CYENS Centre of Excellence* <https://museumlab.cyens.org.cy/project/decolonizing-archaeology-related-photographic-archives/>.

[478] Eyal Weizman, 'Forensic Architecture Only the Criminal Can Solve the Crime', *Radical Philosophy*, 2010 <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/forensic-architecture>.

[479] Ibid.

medium of the exhibition has a secondary function to the primary use of their artefacts as evidence in court cases. However, Weizman has elaborated on the issues generated by varying perceptions of the work of Forensic Architecture – when they present their work in cultural institutions such as the Royal Academy, they are faced with comments that define their work as evidence and not art, whereas when their work is presented in legal forums is viewed as art and not evidence, and as such they are not allowed as 'artists' to enter into the verification process.[480] In turn, he argues that it is important to understand the way in which, both technologically and socially, facts need to be re-established and the role that aesthetic practices such as architecture and art might play in the creation of that common process of verification.[481]

Although the work Forensic Architecture has been influential for this research, I believe that my work is distinguished in an important way. Throughout my investigation, my subjectivity as a researcher is entangled within the very process of this research, and in this way the methods which have been used in order to proceed through this enquiry are inextricably linked with my situated knowledge, and partial perspective. The outputs of this research are not merely evidencary representations of the issues discussed throughout the chapters of the thesis, in a cause- effect relationship, but instead open-ended processes and methods which would eventually allow further reflections regarding the role of spatial design practices, issues of representation and situated knowledge. This body of work includes subjectivity as actively involved in the 'becoming' of the practice, which takes a different pathway from how spatial practices such as that of Forensic Architecture combine objects, models, abstractions with architectural evidence as a process of verification.

The original intention of this PhD was that its practice components would comprise an installation that accompanies the written thesis – as it is also stated in the introduction chapter. However, the practical limitations of the Covid pandemic as well as the shift into the online mode, didn't allow this to

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[480] Eyal Weizman, 'Forensic Architecture - A Lecture by Eyal Weizman' (Haus der Kunst, 2018) [YouTube Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bc49ppFXG1w>.

[481] Ibid.

happen. As a consequence, most of the practice components have been developed and presented in a web-based format, and occasionally in the form of a video essay or a performance lecture. This shift from physical to the digital realm as a means of documenting and presenting the research, was fruitful due to the ways that enabled performative operations between words, images and objects in an open-ended manner for the dissemination of the research.

From this standpoint, having as a central concern the uses or misuses of emerging technologies and their potential in museum environments in parallel with the suggested discourse on *repair*, the trajectory of this body of work is one that unites artistic interventions with archival work and situated practice. This also extends to what Rendell has termed as 'critical spatial practices', due to the way that 'they have both critiqued the sites into which they intervened as well as the disciplinary procedures through which they operated'[482] which also justifies the cross disciplinary nature of this study in communication and architecture.

Part of this piece of work has already been presented and disseminated in various settings within and outside academia. For example, at the *Cast Away* satellite event at the RCA End of Year Show (2021), in the lecture performance the *Void* as part of the RCA Research Biennale (2021), and at the Venice Architecture Biennale (July 2021). The *Cast Away* satellite event across the Information Experience Design and the History of Design programmes at the RCA was centred on questioning casts as museum artefacts in the spirit of the V&A Cast Courts.[483] In turn, what was at stake in the talk was how acts of conserving, as acts of prolonging, may be violent acts, and part of this violence is what is being missed and excluded when preserving the object in the archive. The *Void* was a performance lecture in collaboration with scenographer Steve Salembier, as part of the Fiction Feeling Frame collective at the School of Architecture (SoA)[484] for the RCA Research Biennale (2021). The lecture was conducted as a silent

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[482] Jane Rendell, *Critical Spatial Practice* <https://criticalspatialpractice.co.uk/> [accessed 9 May 2021].

[483] The event was organised by IED MA student Lorenzo Piazza with contributions by Dr. Sarah Cheang, (Acting Head of History of Design), HoD student Toni Rutherford, Visiting Lecturer Gian Luca Amedei, and Dr. Claude Dutson.

[484] Adam Kaasa, Thandi Loewenson, and David Burns, 'Fiction Feeling Frame' <http://fff.industries>.

conversation, drawing parallels between the void of an empty gallery and the void of the cracks of broken objects, blended together in a visual narrative. As part of my involvement at the Fiction Feeling Frame collective at the SoA, I was invited to participate in a 24-hour long durational performance at the Venice Architecture Biennale under the curatorial theme of 'How can we speak to one another? How can we speak together?'.[485] This was conducted as a joint conversation with artists and researchers Sean Cham and Osman Yousefzada, exchanging thoughts and ideas regarding *repair*, fragility, duration and rupture as conditions which not only link with museums, but more generally relate to how our digital experience often overlays our corporeal experience during the Covid-19 pandemic, and further social and political impacts.

I have started to take themes from my PhD research into architectural design pedagogy. As part of the Media Studies elective at the RCA School of Architecture, I developed the postgraduate unit-concepts, 'Feeling Things' and 'Processes of Repair'. The units consider critical compilation strategies which focus on grouping disparate media or ideas to create new relationships through their formal proximities, beyond traditional representational forms of spatial practice documentation. Students focused specifically on themes around provenance, objects as storytellers and what is being hidden or suppressed in the museum archives.

This PhD – like the museum objects it examines – involves multiple intra-actions and values, and it will generate opportunities for new ways of knowing the certainties and uncertainties of *repair* as part of contemporary cultures of display. As the title of this thesis suggests, 'Unfixing Repair', aim of this body of work is not to suggest design solutions regarding more efficient ways of restoring or preserving objects. This is neither about perfection, completeness, solutionism,

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[485] In response to the Venice Biennale Architecture 2021 curator Hashim Sarkis' framing statement 'How will we live together?', the curatorial project RELAY invited architects, artists, activists, curators and designers around questions of building a collective voice: 'How can we speak to one another? How can we speak together?' In "Relay', Biennale Architettura, 16-17 July 2021, *Fiction Feeling Frame* <https://relay.fff.industries>.

or innovation rhetoric. This PhD is about exposing the ambiguity of such constructs and destabilising dominant narratives of preservation of cultural artefacts, by highlighting the infrastructures and systemic ideologies at play for sustaining what is in the museum and how they impact not only the way that the object is displayed, but more importantly the object's relationship with the space and the audience.

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