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Filling the gaps?: interpreting museum collections through performance

The world in which museums operate, and the public (or publics) that visit them, have changed dramatically in recent decades. As institutions, museums vie for a share in leisure consumers' time amidst an increasing number of competing demands, and, in the process of competition, have had to become more service-oriented, often promoting themselves as destinations in their own right. Concurrently, their content and context has come under increasing scrutiny in the guise of the 'new museology' (see Ross, 2004; Vergo, 1993).

The new museology movement advocates more inclusive (less divisive) buildings, interpretations, audiences and even collections: in the words of Max Ross, creating a more 'democratic climate' which simultaneously ethically justifies their continued existence (Ross, 2004: 84). New museology proposes that objects are not signs to be interpreted in a singular manner, but can in fact hold multiple meanings – as many meanings as people who engage with them. It is acknowledged that the visitor brings their own 'living reality' (Burton and Scott, 2003) to the institution as opposed to being part of a homogenous group of visitors.

Alongside this movement, and more generally in relation to cultural consumption in all its various (infinite) forms, there has been a growing emphasis on questioning what people actually *do* with the cultural artefacts they 'consume' (de Certeau, translated 1984; Fiske, 1989; Storey, 1999). What processes do people go through in the decoding and negotiating of meaning? Are they using artefacts as merely starting points for constructing their own meanings; narratives that privilege the individual's own history, education and ideology?

In acknowledgement of this shift in emphasis, the incorporation of individuals' narratives into the output of cultural institutions themselves has become increasing practice (think for example of the opportunities afforded by the BBC, newspapers and other organisations for submission of personal narratives through their websites). Included in this trend are museums that, often utilising new media, afford both groups and individuals within society an opportunity to respond to sites, collections, artefacts, and even the process of collecting itself. In this sense, we could be seeing a step toward what Hewison calls a 'critical culture which engages in a dialogue between past and present' (Hewison, 1987: 144). As a result of such a culture, according to Hewison, we might see a negation of the 'bogus history' of a heritage industry which seeks to seduce and capitalise on a past that never was. In a profound admission, these new practices of open response and engagement recognise that the

traditional museological view that museum narratives represent legitimacy is itself a bogus history (for further discussion see Roberts, 1997).

The recognition of multiple narratives, viewpoints, wisdoms and cultures means that the interpretation of collections/exhibitions has had to change (Bennett, 1995). There is a move toward 'filling the gaps', a self-conscious admission that the museum itself, and its collections, are artefacts, often themselves indicating a past we have since found fault with. Rightly or wrongly, interpretation through live performance is often seen as a means of filling gaps, giving voice to those people who have historically had no presence within the collections.

Since opening their doors to a modest public, museums have constructed narratives and presented a world view that is necessarily incomplete and shaped by the 'present' of its creation. In this sense, museums have been 'performing' history for years (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Davis, 1995). In a more overt sense however, through the use of dramatic interpretation and 'museum theatre', they have been performing history also. As regular offerings to visitors, museum theatre is particularly attractive in relation to sites' social inclusion agendas, community outreach responsibilities, and education policies.

The practice of museum theatre has undergone much institutional evaluation over the years, but little rigorous research activity has concentrated on its use and various impacts (positive or negative). With this in mind, the Arts and Humanities Research Council are funding a three year investigation (2005-2008), Performance, Learning and 'Heritage', at the University of Manchester. This paper first contextualises museum theatre as an increasing practice utilised world-wide, and then details current debates informing the research project using interim findings from the first of four case studies.

Contextualising museum theatre

Museum theatre is one way in which museums (and heritage sites) have attempted to aid meaning making, and explore the polysemous nature of objects, collections and sites. Defined by Jackson and Leahy as "the use of theatre and theatrical techniques as a means of mediating knowledge and understanding in the context of museum education" (Jackson & Rees Leahy, 2005: 304), 'museum theatre' is a term that has been used to cover a variety of activities including: storytelling, first and third person interpretation, demonstration, gallery performance, living history, re-enactment and visitors in role (For further unpacking of these terms see Ford in Blais, 1997; Hughes, 1998; Bridal, 2004; Tivers, 2002; Hunt, 2004). The

nuances of each, and the overlaps that undoubtedly exist within their use, make museum theatre easily as complex a term as both 'museum' and 'theatre' independently. As Tessa Bridal points out, the width of the term, coupled with the breadth of sites that utilise it, has led to much debate about the suitability of a term which highlights museum as the setting, and theatre as the activity.

There are however a number of similarities that bind most forms of museum theatre (and differentiate them from theatre in more traditional settings); they are often free to view, take place in non-'theatre' settings, relate in some way to the museum or its exhibits, and are free of the fourth wall, often acknowledging and interacting with their 'audiences' and even encouraging participation (Bridal, 2004). There are also noticeable similarities to traditional theatre, such as the use of costumes, props (although not in all instances), and sometimes a set, music and lighting. They are also predominantly pre-scripted and have undergone direction.

Museum theatre is charged with having a raft of benefits for those who engage with it, and these go beyond the formal education and outreach requirements of the institution. Performance is linked to a number of other 'side'-benefits of the museum experience including increases in empathy and curiosity, individual identity development or conversely, creating and solidifying community. For the museum itself, the performance can be seen as a way of upping commercial gain and visibility; possibly increasing the site's profile, or, perhaps more importantly, diversifying its visitor profile. Performance at museums and heritage sites must thus serve a dual function, it must be beneficial to the visitor by adding to their site experience, positively impacting upon their learning outcomes, and bringing the site to life, but it must also serve the trade of the site by bringing people in, ensuring their quality of experience and valuable word of mouth publicity in order to bring in more (and perhaps different) people. In this sense also then, it is thought, performance has the capacity to bring a site to life. As in other realms of our social and cultural experience, performance is seen as being an important and effective way of thinking about the world we live in and our place within it; 'Drama has become one of the principal vehicles of information, one of the prevailing methods of 'thinking' about life and its situations' (Esslin, 1995: 13).

But although discussed here in the context of new museology, and as a means of opening up exhibitions, performance is not inherently capable of engendering dialogue between visitors and sites and/or their collections. Far from it, performance is equally capable of being used to represent those traditional museological narratives outlined above, and nullifying debate. Detractors of museum theatre see it as capable of simplifying and omitting voices, but also,

according to Stacey Roth, of being 'misleading, incomplete, inaccurate, lopsided, rude, embarrassing, nostalgic, phony, too entertaining or theatrical, too shockingly unlike the present, or alternately, too homogenous with the present' (Roth, 1998: 21). This list of objections covers not only philosophical ground, but touches on practical considerations also. These include financial constraints, a lack of space, a lack of experience or a lack of staff. Any combination of these practical factors can render a performance 'phony', and an embarrassment for those who come into contact with it. It follows that persuading museum (or heritage site) directors or funders that performance is a valuable, educative tool is a job in itself – a job that is only beginning to be recognised as a legitimate one.

The increasing use of performance as a tool for interpretation within museum and heritage sites is thus controversial and contested, and its particular 'history' has been chronicled in some detail (see for example Anderson, 1984; Roth, 1998; Bridal, 2004). The practice has also been well evaluated at institutional level (including Bicknell & Mazda, 1993; Canadian Museum of Civilisation, 1992; Maloney & Hughes, 1999). I do not try and re-iterate these histories here. Needless to say however that the current research project has identified significant gaps in knowledge relating to the use and impact of the forms described above. Is performance better able to emotionally engage visitors and engender long term educational benefit that other museum techniques? Does this rely on a fundamental assumption that elsewhere in the museum interpretation is univocal, dry, stuffy, and embedded in 'the past'? Is museum theatre capable of altering individuals' conceptions of community, notions of self, and understanding of museums as institutions in general?

With the above in mind, and within the current theoretical landscape of performance studies, museology, cultural studies and education, the Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' project is carrying out a three year empirical investigation with a view to providing a number of outcomes. These include a project website (already available at www.manchester.ac.uk/plh), an in depth report, book and articles, an international conference, and an original performance piece which tests and builds upon findings from case study research. The length of time allotted to the project means that longitudinal studies are a possibility (revisiting sites and respondents over a period of time) – a rarity in research, a virtual impossibility in institutional evaluation.

The project relies on a multi-disciplinary theoretical framework (as its title implies), and a number of differing methodologies in order to collect 'data'. Methods include observation, participant-observation, visual recording, spatial mapping, interviews, surveys, focus groups and archival research. The dependence on each varies as the case study dictates. The first case

study at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (October 2005) involved the research team spending two days collecting questionnaire surveys from visitors (94 in total), filming performances, making observations, and holding focus groups (with a total of 38 people, adult visitors and family groups). 28 Individual focus group members have taken part in follow-up interviews (each was spoken to a few weeks after their trip to the museum, and then a further ten months later). Through such mixed methodology, we have amassed a wealth of data that will undergo analysis over the coming months.

The remainder of this article will introduce debates central to the research project through looking at data from this first case study. I look at the importance of the site in decisions appertaining to the use and style of performance; the visitor as audience member and the visitor as performer. In this instance, the exhibition ('Nelson & Napoleon', 2005) and the performance pieces, although overlapping, took place in separate areas of the museum. This separation is maintained throughout the following discussion, hence the term 'exhibition' refers to the collection of artefacts comprising 'Nelson & Napoleon', and 'performance' indicates the four differing 'actor-interpretation' opportunities observed alongside it. It is only when the above themes have been looked at in detail, and the longitudinal nature of the study has been completed, that we will be able to fathom where and if educational benefit has occurred.

The four performances under observation occurred at different sites within the museum and its environs, making up the 'Trafalgar Voices' live interpretation offering. Two were situated within the main museum building towards the entrance/exit, one took place in the museum's lecture theatre, and one in the Queen's House, a physically and thematically different space. The pieces are not however designed to compliment particular spaces, but with flexibility of location, and thus audience, in mind. The characters being presented during the data collection were; a Greenwich Pensioner, a Gunner aboard the Belleisle in the Battle of Trafalgar, a Midshipman aboard the HMS Victory, and (during one performance and presented by one performer) Lady Hamilton and Nelson's wife Fanny. The emphasis is very clearly on those people whose stories tend to go untold within exhibitions (perhaps with the exception of 'Nelson's women'). It is noteworthy that we never encounter the characters of Nelson and Napoleon themselves depicted in this way.

The site and interpretation of the intangible

The Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' project looks at both museums and heritage sites as performance 'venues'. It is hoped that through a varied case study approach, we can begin

to understand the differences (and indeed similarities) between work at these sites, and the impact on their various visitor groups (independent visitors and school groups specifically are of interest in the study).

As has been outlined above, museums are indelibly caught up in interpretation of the intangible – voicing those cultures and individual stories that have been absent from collections is a principal concern, and one that has often resulted in the employment of various performance techniques. Through looking at the historical narrative of an institution such as the National Maritime Museum, one can see how this has come about.

The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, holds the largest collection of British maritime exhibits anywhere in the world, over two million objects and texts (National Maritime Museum, 2005). The site utilises a rolling programme of displays and exhibitions over 45 galleries to allow opportunity for all collections and objects to be interpreted in their own unique and timely manner. Alongside opportunities for exhibit display, the museum has an eleven year history of running actor-interpretation programmes. The majority of performances making up these programmes are single performer first person monologues with varying levels of audience interaction. All pieces incorporate set factual data which it is the duty of the performer to interpret for their 'audience'. Some performance pieces involve the use of props or artefacts and reflect on their setting within the museum and its environs.

The museum cites its mission as being 'to illustrate for everyone the importance of the sea, ships, time and stars and their relationship with people' (NMM, 2005), but when it was established in 1934, the museum was given a very different range of responsibilities. Nowhere within the initial Act of Parliament that established the museum is there reference to a dialogical relationship between artefacts and the public. The museum's Board were charged firstly with administrative responsibilities, and secondly with a responsibility for preserving the objects that came into their care, where appropriate, selling, buying and lending them (NMM, 1934). There is no mention of the public, any educational commitment, or transparency of practice. Museum policy has undoubtedly changed since this time, and 'audiences' for output are crucial, a fact that is highlighted in the DCMS targets the museum is assessed against every year (a site visitor target of 960,000 according to NMM, 2006).

The National Maritime Museum currently hosts more than 1,500,000 visits a year from members of the public, but although these figures far exceed DCMS targets, there is still evident a concern that large sections of the population are *not* visiting. The Museum's Social Inclusion policy thus aims to 'develop and promote a sustainable programme for social

inclusion', 'ensuring equal access to the Museum's collections' (NMM, 2002), in particular, facilitating an increase in the number of visitors from the C2DE social demographic (currently 18 percent, NMM, 2005-6). One way of achieving this is through a robust and attractive marketing campaign, and this is where we start to see the museum highlighting its actor-interpretation programme.

Although the marketing policy papers themselves say nothing of the programme, we see it promoted to some degree through the museum's various publicity outlets. For the most part, the performance pieces are advertised as a part of the 'family' catch all; on the daily timetable, within the 'What's on for families' guide, on the family events web pages, and alongside family trails. Over the data collection period this was seen in evidence, and was commented upon by some within research focus groups as being problematic due to its inherent exclusion of other audiences who might lack the information, or assume that the performances will be pitched solely at children.

The performances are also promoted through the use of 'lollipops' around the museum. These generally include an image of the actor, and the title and times of the performance. On all instances we have seen, this has been accompanied by the name of the character who will be depicted during the performance, a hint at the Museum's mission of showing the relationship of the exhibits and displays with 'real' people who are absent from the collections. This also is evidenced on the Museum's website; "Stories from characters whose lives are linked with the sea and seafaring themes of our exhibitions" (NMM, 2005).

Performance is thus seen as a means of highlighting links between artefacts and people 'from the past', and a means of exploring narratives that might not be made explicit within the collections. In this way, we can see, the museum's priorities have shifted significantly in recent decades, and performance has been deemed a suitable way (but not the only way) of opening up the collections, narratives and debates.

The current research project however, aims not only to contextualise the use of performance within the historical narrative of the museum, but also to explore what happens during visitors' encounters with these modes of interpretation and what they gain (or otherwise) from them in the short and longer term.

The visitor as 'audience'

One topic on which the Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' project aims to shed some light is the visitor/audience crossover which museum theatre necessitates. Is there a point where visitors cease to be visitors and become audiences instead? Are they already displaying signs of being an audience when elsewhere in the museum (for example through their positioning, respect of 'space' and behaviour) Do they willingly suspend disbelief? Are they critically engaging or passively consuming?

The terms, by definition, can appear mutually exclusive modes of being; 'visitor' recognises the often solitary nature of an act (in this case a museum visit), 'audience' homogenises all of those spatially involved with an activity whilst paying scant regard to their level of engagement or interest. As physical activities they seem polarised, one being by definition active, the other, by assumption passive. But this binary opposition is rarely in evidence with respect to either museum visiting, or theatre attendance. Perhaps in this scenario, that of museum theatre, there is a slippage between the two. Given that most 'visitors' to museums are not anticipating that they will encounter performance, it is fascinating to observe what happens when they do. Often there are visible shifts in behaviour, sometimes accompanied by nods to theatre activity – switching off mobile phones, ceasing to talk, naturally assuming rows of seated/standing audience members even when they are not indicated. But conversely, there is often on display a lack of commitment to watching a piece of museum theatre. Unlike when one attends the theatre, there is rarely any money changing hands, any prior expectation, or any resultant obligation to see a performance through to the end.

This is more complicated again when one looks at heritage site activity where performance makes up a more sustained and integral part of the (paid for) experience. In these instances, often visitors know in advance that they will encounter characters 'from the past' as they traverse the site. This necessitates a different approach to encounters, perhaps one where visitors are less likely to assume traditional theatre audience characteristics. Unlike a visit to the theatre, one has numerous choices to make throughout the visit relating to level of interaction, physical positioning, and when to end the communication (if indeed one enters it at all).

With respect to the National Maritime Museum performances observed, and follow up interviews had as part of the Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' project, interesting conclusions can be drawn about what it means to be variously a visitor and an audience member.

Visibly, and as coincides with findings through observation at other sites, there is a split between performance and audience 'space'. The line is drawn, at all performance locations within the museum, by the placing of props within the intended performance space (whether on stage in the lecture theatre, or within the main museum itself), and the arrangement of audience space around it. This is often indicated by a row of chairs, a token number offering respite to those who really need it, and crucially, doing the job of differentiating the spaces. In this scenario there can be no doubting where the visitor should position him/herself if they want to become an audience member. Once performances begin, unless there is a specific call for physical interaction, both audience and performer keep within their own boundaries.

For those performances taking place in the museum's main public spaces on the ground floor, a secondary tier is often created around those who are seated by those who stand to watch the performance – often those who join as a result of hearing/seeing activity after its commencement. Those who are seated are thus inclined to display more commitment to watching the piece through to the end – either as a result of engagement or because there is a barrier to exiting the space in the form of those others viewing the piece. For those standing audience members, there is less commitment displayed, and no barriers to exit evident. For many of these people, it would appear the intention is, can only be (due to an obstructed view), to 'dip into' the performance piece. In one performance instance, the research team observed approximately 60 people standing and observing behind a seated area, and another 60 coming to investigate the activity behind these people before eventually leaving. There thus seems to be three tiers of commitment – those seated, those standing, and those displaying interest (but not commitment) at the back. These represent three quite differing 'audience' propositions, those seated displaying the behavioural traits of the traditional theatrical encounter, and those at the back treating (or perhaps being forced to treat) their encounter with the whole spectacle of the performance as an event to be passed over.

The shift from visitor to audience member is thus a complex one dependent on the site of the performance, your position within that site with respect to the performance activity, but also, I would suggest, on the level of induction one receives to the whole notion of performance and how it is likely to be 'staged' in the event in question. Insufficient induction (for example being approached by a character you were not aware of, whose purpose is not made clear, and who does not share the rules of the interaction with you) can lead to an embarrassing, futile exchange which leaves the visitor (for they surely never indicated they were happy to become an audience) unfulfilled, upset or angry. The 'rules', in the case of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, were made apparent from the outset on all but one occasion we

witnessed during our data collection. By setting up the space as one in which a theatrical encounter will take place, by advertising the piece in leaflets and programmes, and often with the actor having out-of-character interactions before the commencement of the piece, one understands what is about to happen. Where these steps are not apparent, or where the rules of the engagement were not explicit, some audience members left feeling they had got more than they bargained for. In this instance, it was the issue of audience participation that shattered the theatrical moment and left those individuals dissatisfied with the encounter. This is explored in the following section.

The visitor as 'performer'

As has been outlined above, differing 'audience' propositions are apparent for performance opportunities, and these are matched by differing levels of interactive possibility. It is often the case that interactivity or audience participation are seen as tools specifically aimed at the engagement of children, who are naturally assumed to be more inclined to involvement. This however is not the case for certain performances at the Maritime Museum, and is rarely the case for 'living history' encounters where interaction is deemed a significant part of the site offering. Previous research carried out has highlighted the complex nature of interaction between 'in role' (or even out of role) historical characters and visitors. Within these parameters, visitors not only become audiences, but are encouraged to 'play along', possibly even taking on character roles themselves. This suggests, as Gaynor Bagnell asserts, that often the 'barriers between audience and performers … are fluid and permeable' (Bagnall, 2003: 95). In this sense they become performers within the piece, and are perhaps responsible for a limited degree of co-scripting in the event itself. This appears to be a challenge that some relish, and others shy away from. They are perhaps more likely to do the latter when the engagement comes as a surprise and the 'rules' are not apparent.

The interactive nature of performance pieces observed at the Maritime Museum polarised some within focus group discussions after the event. In follow up interviews, one third of respondents who watched the more interactive performance piece professed to dislike the interactive element. This is a viewpoint that stays with people over time, and can become their dominant focus in discussions about the performance even ten months after the event (to be quantified through further analysis). These individuals were outnumbered by those who found the interactivity of benefit to their museum learning experience or an enjoyable aspect of the day, but were noticeable for their strength of feeling about the interaction.

Interactivity is of increasing academic concern across the field of communications and cultural studies, and its increasing use within museums reflects the concerns of the new museology. One method of defining a medium or text's level of interactivity is 'on the basis of the freedom granted to the user and the degree of interactivity of his [or her] interventions' (Ryan, 2001: 205); an interactive text is 'a machine fuelled by the input of the user (Ryan, 2001: 210). The emphasis on freedom in the interaction is paramount, as is the fact that this freedom has been granted to the user – in this sense it is perhaps more a reaction than an interaction, its perameters being previously defined and maintained throughout. This is certainly true of performance pieces within museums and heritage sites where true interactivity (if such a thing exists) remains a misnomer. The power to direct the course of the event remains very much in the hands of the actor. The 'user', 'audience member' or 'participant' can only input in a responsive rather than innovative way (even those interactions that disrupt the flow or aggressively attempt to unhinge the performance will be dealt with by the actor in character, and within the confines of the performance).

It appears that for optimum enjoyment and educational benefit for all, and in recognition of the polarity of viewpoints on 'interactivity', there has to be a choice built into any element of a performance that requires audience participation. Crucially, this choice (in whichever form it is expressed) should be clearly articulated and not become a negative self-selection indicated by leaving the performance space.

Interactivity in itself however is seen as being a positive aspect of the museum experience by most individuals we have spoken to. In the case of the National Maritime Museum, the exhibition in question was seen as being low in interactivity in comparison with the performance pieces, and this in turn was identified as negatively impacting upon the overall experience of encountering the artefacts. Perhaps in exhibitions also the notion of choice is paramount and user input and intervention must be on offer.

Implications for the research project

The research project takes as its primary focus the uses and impact of performance as a tool for learning within museums and heritage sites. Coming to conclusions about such 'impact', and finding adequate measures for it, will require complex negotiation throughout the lifespan of the project. The above areas of investigation will provide a suitable starting point for contextualising the performance event within the museum visit, and for understanding what takes place within that event – for groups or 'audiences' and for individuals personally. What happens afterwards is relatively unexplored territory, but the project will begin to shed

some light on this also. Initial findings from our first case study do not allow us to refute or support the assertion that performance is capable of engaging museum visitors in productive, different, ongoing relationships with sites, collections and individual artefacts, but they do suggest a number of interesting fields for further investigation. One such area of interest is respondents' use of opposing linguistic patterns in reference to the exhibition and performance opportunities on offer at the museum.

The Nelson and Napoleon exhibition received some heavy criticism in the focus group discussions carried out as a part of this case study (and in the follow up interviews). For the most part, this was due to the busy-ness of the exhibition for the period of the data collection, but was frequently backed up with negative commentary about its design. Due to both of these factors, even though many profess to have learnt more from the exhibition than the performance, it is often *in spite* of the exhibition that they have done so, not as a natural outcome of engaging with it. It is variously described as 'good', 'informative' and 'elegant', yet 'static', 'dry', and even 'self-defeating'. One focus group respondent adequately summed up the feelings of the majority as such; 'I think we are all saying it was stylish but didn't really work very well'. It seems that a sense of privilege was evident in engaging with the range and type of artefacts, but that the facilitation of that engagement was often frustrated by the exhibition itself.

Conversely, the performances inspire a much more positive initial response in follow up interviews. They are 'splendid', 'nicely done', a 'highlight', 'brilliant', 'excellent' and 'exciting'. It is assumed by some that they would be the more innately 'passive' experience, yet, in comparison to the exhibition they surprisingly become the more 'active' or 'interactive' of the two. They are also seen as being the more 'real' encounter, even though the exhibition is seen as being the more inherently 'authentic'. The performance is 'real', 'alive', 'life' and the character is a 'live witness', language that is not used to describe the exhibition and its artefacts. Perhaps as a result of this, the performer himself/herself is substituted for the performance 'it'self fairly regularly in discussion; 'he was brilliant', 'he was informative', whereas the exhibition represents 'they' (faceless museum people), and is talked about as being an 'it'.

As stated above, more respondents are of the opinion that they learnt something new in the exhibition than in the performance space (as stated in follow up interviews). This does not appear to have detracted from their overall experience of the performance however. Although respondents do not talk as frequently about the factual content of the performance, what they

do comment on is a resultant sense of 'immediacy', and a 'more empathetic understanding' of life on board ship.

It can be seen that in this scenario different museum offerings have varying effects on those people who engage with them and that the exhibition and performance have been successful in quite differing ways, perhaps between them giving a more holistic encounter with 'the past'. The ongoing research will allow us to build upon these initial outcomes, and compare them in a robust fashion with findings at other sites, and within very different performance opportunities. The majority of data collection for case study two took place at Llancaiach Fawr Manor, South Wales, in February/March 2006, and the performance events under study for case study three took place in August 2006 (with Triangle Theatre Company resident at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry). Case study four, which will take place at Manchester Museum in 2007, involves commissioning a new performance piece to both build upon and test emerging findings.

It is hoped that through these case studies, and with the support of a wider mapping of performance activity, the Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' research will offer insight into the suitability of performance as a tool for filling the gaps in collections, but also its ability to explore the complexities that are inherent within them and the practice of collecting itself.

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