

## Melissa Shiff's *Ark/Archa*

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Commissioned by the Jewish Museum in Prague this past year in celebration of the centennial of its founding, *Ark/Archa* is a site-specific video installation by the Canadian media artist Melissa Shiff. As its title suggests, the piece is shaped in the form of an ark, but it is fabricated out of translucent material so that it functions both as a sculptural form by day and, as the artist describes it, “a massive three-dimensional movie screen” by night. During its presentation in Prague, *Ark/Archa* was installed in the former Jewish ghetto—in an alleyway between the Old Jewish Cemetery, with its vertical layers of listing gravestones, and the historic Pinkas Synagogue, which dates back to the sixteenth century and, since the 1950s, has served as a memorial to the nearly 80,000 Holocaust victims from Moravia and Bohemia whose names are inscribed on its bare walls.

Shiff's installation opened in mid-September 2006 shortly before the Jewish New Year (5767) and closed in mid-January. Earlier in the spring, the museum had installed *Postmodern Jewish Wedding* (2004), a collaborative work by the artist and her partner Louis Kaplan, as a projection piece shown daily on a screen placed above the altar of the gilded Spanish Synagogue. *Ark/Archa* also travels to the

Jewish Museum in Munich and is on view there [dates tktk].

At the core of *Ark/Archa* is a bit of revealing wordplay that deftly negotiates between the figure of the ark and the role of the archive. Shiff locates in the Biblical reference to Noah's Ark a symbolic composite: both a vessel capable of surviving an epic flood, and a floating archive whose bestial cargo was to serve as the source of survival for all the earth's fauna. The ark also has particular resonance with the Prague site, which has witnessed repeated flooding that dates back to the mid-eighteenth century and includes the devastat-



ing floods of August 2002. This was the operative metaphor for the artist; it provides both an insight into one of the fundamental purposes of the museum—"to salvage and save precious objects that might otherwise be destroyed by natural disasters or human catastrophe"—and the resonant form in which to journey back through a traumatic century.

The work that is projected onto the gridded screen-prow of Shiff's ark is a 30-minute tape that condenses not only the century of the museum's existence but equally the millennial history of Jewish life in the Czech lands and the four millennia that separated the launch of the biblical ark from that of Shiff's virtual one. The piece opens with the Hebrew letter aleph, symbolizing both the foundation of language

and the genesis of the world. As Shiff describes it, the letters are replaced by numbers, "the first theme of the video—numbers that serve as the basis of any archival system." Water imagery appears, and we are in the early days of the Judeo-Christian creation myth. With numbers referencing historical dates (1056 for the Biblical flood, 5650 for the founding of the museum) and suggestive of a Kabbalistic numerology, black-and-white imagery chronicles the destruction of the Jewish quarter of Josefov in the mid-1890s and frames the museum's founding with the query, "What was salvaged?" From the ashes of Josefov emerged the sacred objects and artifacts from daily life that would initiate the collection of the Jewish Museum.

The longest segment of this history focuses on the late 1930s and early 1940s, when any sense of affirmation about the survival of this culture was offset by the knowledge that the influx of these artifacts stemmed in large measure from the demise of their owners and the synagogues in which they were originally housed. *Ark/Archa* in this way resembles what the French artist Christian Boltanski—speaking about Chantal Akerman's *D'Est* (1993), a personal moving-image journey through Eastern Europe following the end of the Soviet Union—called a "ghost story." The spectral character of Shiff's projections, coupled with the footage and photographs of people and places that survive only as images, capture perfectly the tragic aspect of this historical chronicle. All that endures are the symbols of faith left behind, and in particular the Star of David, whose transformations—from a wrought-iron star salvaged



from a synagogue to the yellow star of the Nazi era inscribed with “Jude” to the red star of Communist rule—become markers of the shifting fate of its people.

Much as *Ark/Archa* serves as a vessel both for containing and displaying the artifactual history of a people, its form suggests another aspect of its impulse to preserve. It is here that Shiff initiates another ghost story of sorts in the tale of visionary artists and filmmakers who, as part of a history that is co-terminous with that of the Jewish Museum, attempted to engage the moving-image medium as a resolutely contemporary art form. Careful viewing yields traces of these artists and their practices: the great Soviet film theorist and director Sergei Eisenstein, whose “polyphonic montage” imbued emotional resonance to non-emotional material; his compatriot Mikhail Kaufman (known by the poetic nom de plume Dziga Vertov), whose “kino-eye” techniques captured the complexities of daily life that escaped the human eye; and Esther Shub, who pioneered the making of films from archival footage. There are moments when Shiff’s handling of graphic elements (numerals, geometric shapes and figures) evokes the work of a film artist like Oskar Fischinger, whose an-

imated pieces aspired to create a universal language consonant with both human knowledge and spiritual enlightenment.

All of these artistic voices, and many others, would be silenced by the very events that brought the near destruction of Jewry in the Czech lands. Shiff’s visual repository accords them a place alongside that of the objects of veneration and implements of daily use. In so doing, she joins a handful of media artists, including Bill Viola and Mary Lucier, Beryl Korot and Chantal Akerman, who have placed this contemporary form of the moving-image arts in the service of probing the past—creating time machines that transport us into historic sites, sacred spaces, and arenas that challenge the limits of sacrifice and faith. These works seem to channel some of the artistic character of the prewar era while providing secular access to sacred spaces, creating what art historian Margaret Olin would term “a dispassionate, inclusive ground that allows interchange between groups.” It is this forward-looking vision that opens up the hidden workings of the archive to a broader community and imagines a second century of preservation and engagement for the museum.

## Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

Glasgow, Scotland

*Elaine Heumann Gurian*

Beware, dear reader! You are about to read an unrestrained rave about Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow, Scotland. It also contains a huzzah for the director, Mark O'Neill, who—having written so many thoughtful museum pieces—has now brought forth a substantive example of his thinking. There are a few memorable paradigm-shifting museums that come along in any lifetime. I think of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Te Papa: The National Museum of New Zealand; and the Guggenheim Bilbao. They are directed by chief executives who have vision and audacity. I add the Kelvingrove to the list.

The building is a giant imposing Victorian confection listed in historic registers—the kind that, in the past, usually led to tomb-like quiet and a preponderance of scholarly visitors. Nevertheless, even before the reinstallation, Kelvingrove was much beloved; it was reputed to be the most visited museum in the United Kingdom outside of London. In the past, the museum was special though slightly spooky, a dull and dim place stuffed with a large collection of uneven quality, here and there containing mysterious treasures.

What did O'Neill and his staff do to change the museum from that old fashioned mausoleum into the home base of the Glasgow community? They closed the museum for three years, refurbished and restored the building, and reinstalled the collection at a cost of 30 million pounds.

They reclaimed the original feel of the building, keeping the Victorian fairy tale magic assigned to castles, but adding light and gently warm colors. They installed a food service of surprisingly delicious and affordable comfort food and put the café in a wonderful people-watching place.

The museum reopened in July of 2006 and has become a “people’s palace,” in the words of reporter Laura Cumming, writing in the *Observer* (2006). The museum, she said, has been “unapologetically reconceived with [children] in mind,” even to the rehangings of several paintings at the visual level of a nine-year-old. She added: “The new museum, so imaginatively and empathetically redesigned, deserves as much and more love as the old. It is reason enough to visit Glasgow, and in its incredible range embraces the rest of the world. Not so much a museum of culture as of life itself, Kelvingrove is almost unique: part National Gallery, part V&A, part British Museum and Tate—all in one building.”

Late on a Saturday in November, a broad cross-section of folks filled the museum: meeting each other, snacking in the café in the big entrance hall, and generally wandering about. Families are the intended audience of the reinstallation, and families abounded. It was dark, cold and rainy outside (tourist season in Glasgow being a dim memory), and yet the museum was filled—obviously the well-loved winter clubhouse of the city. And for good reason. Admission is free. Nothing is dumbed-

down. The installations are amusing and great fun, as well as intellectually demanding.

The staff and the designers have executed a surprising installation strategy not to be seen anywhere else. Each gallery throughout the museum is constituted as a topic or story made up of multiple shorter vignettes. Each episode or vignette consists of a small, self-contained exhibition on a focused subject, which resonates with other vignettes (sometimes three or four of these per gallery or room). For instance, I came upon a display where the question was asked, "What does it mean to be Scottish?" The display held artifacts—some memorable, some not—and a set of videos in which individuals talk. In one video, two boys aged 11 or 12 are seen running near a historic bridge. They say, "It feels very nice to be close . . . to such a famous bridge . . . and such a famous village." They talk about a snuff box (which is in the case) decorated with a scene from the Robert Burns poem "Tam O'Shanter." They recite the poem in the original pronunciation. And they say about the poem, "It's funny and it's exciting . . . and it's frightening . . . and it gets you on the edge of your seat, really." After more chat, they conclude with "Heck, yeah, it makes me proud I'm Scottish!" The presentation is simple, fetching without being cloying, and—taken together with the other videos—effective. I think about what I would say about being American.

This pattern repeats in other galleries. Overall, it's like spending time with an edited volume of short stories of unequal lengths. Each vignette contains objects, text, and often an interactive element. These installations are of irregular length and shape. They fit together like puzzle pieces, and like puzzle pieces, each can be lifted and

changed by staff over the course of a year to refresh the exhibits without de-installing the whole gallery. Each episode or vignette is both intellectually self-contained and also makes some associative cumulative sense with the one that abuts. Each vignette is based on an intriguing question. The answer is not imposed. Rather we are given the evidentiary visual pieces needed for a satisfactory solution. In the center of many areas is a family-friendly interactive so the children can play with something relevant. The parents stand about, casually minding their charges, while studying the pictures on the walls and discussing the issue at hand. Often, audible pondering can be overheard. A whole family may be engaged in some part of the question.

These installations are, in turn, brilliant, funny, intriguing, and controversial. I felt free to cease engaging with the posed question and just gaze at the objects (which I did sometimes), but I was soon caught up again in the visual puzzles. A case called *Patterns of Change*, for instance, presents Native American beadwork and examines the European influences (such as the shape of the Glengarry, a Scottish type of hat) that were incorporated into Native crafts. The case is small, it's in an area filled with other cases concerned with other issues of design, and the episode works alone and coheres with the others. Visiting this room, I pondered the diversity and human ingenuity in design worldwide.

In another room is the gem many foreign visitors (myself included) go to the museum to see: a portion of the Women's Tearoom designed by Glasgow-born architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh, leader of Art Nouveau in Scotland. The tearoom opened at 91-93 Buchanan Street, Glasgow, in 1896. It is set in the middle of the gallery. As you circulate

around it, you come upon a picture of the tearoom in use in 1900. The caption reads: “. . . tearooms provided women with spaces where they could meet for lunch or tea after they’d been shopping in the new department stores.” Taken together, the photo and the real tearoom have enough clues so that in my mind’s eye I am transported, dressed in the finery of the time, having tea with friends.

Describing this pattern, Cumming noted that the aim is to organize everything by stories: “. . . the story of the Scots POWs who painted icons on sacks . . . of the local optician inspired by his color-blindness charts to make paintings that look amazingly like Signac’s . . . of Rembrandt’s man in glinting armor. And having drawn you in through narrative, they keep you hooked with odd life-art juxtapositions—a velvet-covered Venetian helmet among the Carpaccios, a real butterfly among the ornamental ones in the Mackintosh rooms, a razor-bill next to a silver scimitar.”

A similarly enthusiastic review by Iain Gale in *Scotland on Sunday* (the *Scotsman* newspaper) described the potential difficulty in handling politically sensitive items.

How, for example, without causing potential offense do you exhibit a copy of the Koran taken by a Scottish officer from a battlefield during the second Afghan war of 1879? O’Neill’s ingenious answer has been to ask a member of Glasgow’s Muslim community to comment upon the piece. His words and image are exhibited alongside the beautifully worked holy book. A similar treatment has been accorded a display on the Indian Mutiny, although the comments are a little more fiery. Such arresting visual explanations are typical of the enlightened thinking behind these eclectic displays (2006).

In its reinstallation, the museum first did visitor research, then created displays that target various visitor groups: families, under-fives, teenagers, non-experts, and school groups. The labels and interpretive panels, films, audio and interactive activities are adjusted to best serve a specific target group. Exhibit areas can change during the year, since many visitors return to the museum often. The museum claims that it is first in the U.K. to arrange information in this way, throughout the building. And I’m not alone in singing its praises. Iain Gale, in *Scotland on Sunday*, went all out for the museum:

Personally, despite my slight reservations, I am inclined to stick my neck out and say that not only will the new Kelvingrove prove even more popular than its predecessor, but that, unorthodox, innovative and ever so slightly irreverent as it is, it might just emerge as a model for the future of all museums (2006).

So reroute your anticipated travel, go to Kelvingrove, sit in the café, and wander about, hearing people discussing art history, indigenous and colonial objects, natural history stuffed specimens and contemporary cultural issues. See the multicultural evidence of our world arranged in unexpected displays and view the broadly diverse audience busily exploring enthusiastically and amicably. Become convinced that great treasures, lateral thinking, poetry, gentle humor and difficult political questions can all reside comfortably in the same museum. Kelvingrove is a brainy, charming, inclusive, thought-provoking museum full of collections of note and odd bits warmly embraced by the people. May we all take this example to heart.

## References

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## ***Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions***

**Edited by Suzanne MacLeod**

London and New York: Routledge, 2005.  
Paperback, 256 pages. \$39.95.

## ***Museum Texts: Communication Frameworks***

**By Louise J. Ravelli**

London and New York: Routledge, 2006.  
Paperback, 200 pages. \$41.95.

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I fondly remember the days when the number of books written for or about the museum profession spanned less than one shelf in the library and I could keep up with new publications. That would have been the mid-1980s, when I was just entering the profession and embraced every new publication with the kind of curiosity and enthusiasm that people with culinary interests would feel about the opening of the first French restaurant in town.

Despite my nostalgia, I would not want to return to that time. Nor would I want to revisit the mid-1990s and the commotion brought about by newly-published museum theory and critical analyses by scholars outside the museum profession. While the introduction of critical and literary theories to the study of museums was exhilarating, it triggered a certain consternation among some museum colleagues, who bridled at these critiques of implicit political

messages inscribed in exhibitions. For the museum professionals, having their work scrutinized for unspoken subtexts was, I imagine, like being psychoanalyzed against their will—and in public, no less. In fact, metaphors of battle were sometimes (and still are) invoked to describe a theory/practice divide wherein theoreticians were accused of not knowing what it was like “to be in the trenches” of daily museum work. There was a certain validity to such accusations, but I prefer a more peaceful metaphor to describe today’s museum discourse, especially given the quantity and intellectual variety of books being published: It’s as if we’ve moved from a small town where there was one restaurant to a big city where there are all kinds of dining options, including some that offer creative combinations of different cuisines.

Among the diverse offerings, two recently published books in the Routledge Museum Meanings series offer useful theorization of practice and respond helpfully to the notion that museum visitors actively make meaning from their experiences. That notion, which developed from literary as well as educational theories, has reached the status of uncontested truth among museum professionals. Both *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions* and *Museum Texts: Communication Frameworks* offer an important counterbalance to this widely held view, reminding us that although museums don’t *determine* the meanings that visitors take away from exhibitions, they do *construct* meanings at the same time that visitors do. The ways in which museums make meanings range from the subtleties of architectural and exhibition design to the explicit assertions offered in exhibit texts. The meanings of any single feature of a museum or



exhibition are neither static nor transferable to other situations. Instead, museum meanings are constructed in the interplay among social, temporal, and institutional contexts in which museum professionals and other stakeholders collaboratively negotiate various objectives and ideals. This interplay is extraordinarily complex, as is made evident in both books, which share an overarching purpose of helping museum professionals become more skilled at articulating and communicating the intended meanings of their institutions, exhibitions, and programs.

*Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, edited by Suzanne MacLeod, a lecturer in the museum studies department at the University of Leicester, England, is an anthology of 17 essays by people who have worked in or with museums, including architects, designers, museum directors, project managers, and university faculty members. Their essays are diverse, including historical and conceptual analyses, descriptive accounts of specific projects or trends, and reflective discussions of the relationship between architectural design and the social purpose of museums.

The historical and conceptual papers may be of practical interest to museum professionals who are in the pre-planning or brainstorming stages of a building expansion, new exhibition, or other major museum project. During such early stages, exposure to this breadth of ideas will help keep the creative juices flowing and challenge project team members to ask big socio-cultural questions, such as why some subjects, viewpoints, or histories are deemed worthy of being represented in a given museum experience at a particular place and time. In MacLeod's own contribution, an essay titled "Rethinking Mu-

seum Architecture: Towards a Site-Specific History of Production and Use," she looks at the 120-year history of Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool and notes that the original architectural design and subsequent expansions are best understood in historical context and, especially, as "social and cultural product[s]." She describes how each change to the Walker was shaped by the agendas of various people and associations, how each represented one possible spatial solution to a perceived need (as opposed to reflecting what MacLeod calls an "iconic architectural moment"), and how the museum would continue to be reshaped by the ways in which people used the space.

While MacLeod's essay focuses primarily on architectural reshaping, others focus on the relationship between exhibition design, theories of knowledge, and social values. For example, in an essay entitled "Representing Enlightenment Space," Beth Lord asks why, in the early twenty-first century, several museums have created exhibitions that mimic displays that were produced in the eighteenth century. She astutely describes three exhibitions and notes how they increase public access to collections previously in storage while also challenging visitors to consider the nature of museum representation. Some of the implicit (and sometimes unintentional) social messages of museum representation are analyzed in essays such as Richard Sandell's, titled "Constructing and Communicating Equality: The Social Agency of Museum Space." Here Sandell (who is also the author of *Museums, Prejudice, and the Reframing of Difference*, just published by Routledge) contributes to philosophical debate about the role and responsibility of cultural institutions. After a brief account of how museums historically privileged

and/or excluded representations of some groups of people, he describes three ways in which more recent exhibitions accommodate diversity: as compensatory, celebratory, or pluralist representations, which can be distinguished from one another in terms of exhibition layout, style, and content.

Just as theoretical and conceptual analyses have potential practical application during the pre-planning and brainstorming stages of architectural and programmatic endeavors, the volume's descriptive accounts of projects and trends may be useful to museum professionals immersed in actual planning and design. For example, Moira Stevenson's essay, "From Cultural Institution to Cultural Consumer Experience: Manchester Art Gallery Expansion Project," may help museum workers anticipate issues, articulate objectives, outline funding requirements, and justify the need for experienced outside consultants. Her essay describes the processes involved in planning and executing a museum expansion that redefined the museum's mission to be more inclusive of diverse community perspectives. Her chronology (written in a surprisingly dispassionate tone, given that she was the managing director of an exciting expansion) begins with the Manchester Art Gallery's application for funding and proceeds through the proposal and planning decisions. Along the way, it reports on the complex interactions among the primary players: consultants, architects, museum staff, and so on. It concludes with findings from a summative evaluation of new exhibitions, which point to new challenges that the museum staff members are now addressing.

Other descriptive essays included here take note of the widespread shift in museum exhibitions from an emphasis on

disseminating knowledge to an emphasis on presenting narratives. Sophia Psarra's essay, titled "Spatial Culture, Way-Finding and the Educational Message," describes the influence of this shift on spatial configurations at four museums. In her view, "museum design has two fundamental problems to solve: a route structure that facilitates the encounter between the displays and visitors, and spatial mechanisms that aid orientation and enable the building and exhibitions to be seen as one whole." Route structures and spatial mechanisms, as Psarra describes them, are approached quite differently in the telling of a narrative intended to accommodate a range of visitor experiences than they are in the reporting of factual knowledge.

The third type of essay in *Reshaping Museum Space*—reflective analyses of the relationship between architectural design and the social purpose of museums—will be of practical interest to museum professionals interested in expanding the demographic profile of their visitors. Among these, Elaine Heumann Gurian's "Threshold Fear" is perhaps the most essential reading. She draws upon her experience as a former deputy director of several major museums and her international consulting work to outline both the explicit and implicit obstacles that deter some people from entering museums. She also offers practical advice for overcoming such obstacles, some of it drawn from observations of the spatial aspects of visitor-friendly non-museum venues, such as malls, theme parks, libraries, and zoos.

While I've described the potential practical applications of the essays in *Reshaping Museum Space* according to three types of essays, the book itself is not organized along those lines. Instead, MacLeod groups the papers into four loosely defined topic

areas: "On the Nature of Museum Space," "Architectural Reshaping," "Inside Spaces," and "Creative Space." Among these, "Architectural Reshaping" (which looks at museum expansion and renovation projects) and "Inside Spaces" (which focuses on exhibition design) are the most cohesive, with each essay contributing to an overarching idea. The other two sections are more of a mixed bag. "On the Nature of Museum Space" includes four interesting stand-alone papers, but it is not clear why two of them are in this section rather than another. The last essay in this section, by David Fleming, is titled "Creative Space," which suggests that it should appear in the thematic section with the same title, instead of here. Furthermore, the essay by Ross Parry and Andrew Sawyer, "Space and the Machine: Adaptive Museums, Pervasive Technology and the New Gallery Environment," recounts a history of museums beginning with seventeenth-century *Kunstkammers* and *studios* in terms of their information and communication technologies. The authors argue intriguingly that "the museum has always been an information communication technology, and its curatorial expertise, quality content and impeccable branding can be expressed and leveraged in the new [digital] media as they can with the old." But the placement of their contribution is confusing; as I wonder why it wasn't situated in the "Inside Spaces" section, I also wonder if I've somehow misinterpreted the intended theme of this section.

Given these organizational questions, the book would have benefited from a clearer framing by MacLeod. Her thoughtful introduction characterizes museums as flexible spaces that, in the late twentieth century, began to be designed in ways that resist or refashion historically iconic mu-

seum architecture. She notes how specific essays in the book address the history, reshaping, and reconceptualizing of iconic architecture, but she has inexplicably chosen not to make this the thematic armature of the volume. Nor does she ever really explain the armature she did choose. In a brief paragraph at the end of the introduction, she notes the four thematic sections, but doesn't illuminate how or why she came to organize the papers in this way. I assume that MacLeod had a cogent rationale for this organization, but it would have been helpful to know what that was.

By contrast, structural clarity is one of the strengths of *Museum Texts: Communication Frameworks* by Louise J. Ravelli, a senior lecturer in linguistics at the University of New South Wales, Australia. Like *Reshaping Museum Space*, Ravelli's book is intended to provoke a deeper understanding of museum practice. It focuses primarily on the written texts that museums create, especially exhibition wall texts and object labels, and explains, from the perspective of linguistic theory, how text makes meaning. This theoretical perspective is new to museum studies literature, which Ravelli acknowledges as she introduces a specific technical vocabulary for understanding how effective written communication is structured differently for different purposes. In the introduction, she offers an overview of *Museum Texts* and situates the book in relation to other publications that describe communication models or present "how-to" tips for writing effective text panels and labels. She also notes that text makes meaning through three frameworks—organizational, interactional, and representational—that operate together and influence one another.

Within the field of linguistics, the phrase "organizational framework" refers

to the communication genre, as Ravelli explains in her second chapter. Genres of written text include procedure, narrative, report, explanation, exposition, directive, and discussion. The genres, in turn, refer to the social purpose of the text. For example, the purpose of a report is to provide readers with an accurate account of something that has transpired, whereas the purpose of an exposition is to convince the reader that the author's interpretation of facts is appropriate or useful. Ravelli herself argues that authors of museum texts ought to have not simply a clear sense of topic, or what Beverly Serrell calls "a big idea" (1996)—they ought to also have a clear sense of linguistic purpose. What makes one genre more appropriate than another, as Ravelli explains, "is dependent on so many factors—the purpose of the exhibition, institutional values, anticipated audience, place within the exhibition." But she doesn't suggest that any given exhibition would feature only one genre. Instead, the exhibition might have one overarching genre supported by text panels using various genres, each of which contributes to the over-arching genre.

Genre constitutes the macro-level of the organizational framework. At the micro-level of the organizational framework, which Ravelli discusses in the third chapter, are various aspects of the flow of information, including mode, complexity, and nominalization. Different modes are distinguished from one another on two dimensions: contact/feedback and role. Ravelli helpfully characterizes each of these dimensions as a spectrum. On one end of the contact/feedback spectrum lies casual conversation (which allows for maximum feedback), while at the other end might be an academic treatise (minimum feedback). The role spectrum, which has

to do with the situational functions that language plays, ranges from active to reflective. For example, commentary offered during a game of sport is active while a history of a sport is reflective. Texts written for museum exhibitions may fall at different points on such a spectrum, as Ravelli illustrates with three excerpts from text panels written for an exhibition about death in ancient Egypt, which was organized by the Australian Museum. Each sample text panel represents a different mode, or degree of implied contact and feedback between author and reader.

In addition to mode, Ravelli explores museum texts in terms of linguistic complexity (characterized by lexical density and grammatical intricacy) and nominalization (how specific grammatical elements such as nouns, verbs, and so on serve particular rather than universal functions in individual sentences). To get this somewhat technical material across to museum professionals, she introduces and adequately explains a host of linguistic terms, helpfully diagramming selected sentences from exhibition texts. Her point in offering what is essentially an introduction to linguistic analysis is not to claim that such analysis is a necessary step in writing effective museum texts, but rather to debunk some widely-used guidelines for writing exhibit texts. For example, she notes instances in which passive sentence structures are sometimes necessary for the sake of clarity and flow. She also shows that the often-repeated rules about how many words should be included in object labels or text panels don't hold true in all contexts.

The fourth chapter of *Museum Texts* examines the "interactional framework" through which text makes meaning. This phrase refers to the implied roles of writer and reader and the implied relationship

between them, which Ravelli explains by contrasting some paradigmatic features of traditional museum texts with examples what Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has called a "post-museum" model (2000). The role of text in the modernist (that is, traditional) museum is to present authoritative knowledge to a novice audience. The style is formal and impersonal, and the stance is neutral and objective. In the post-museum model, by contrast, the text casts writer and reader as equal partners. The style is informal and personal, while the stance is opinionated and subjective. These distinctions, however, are not either/or choices but rather endpoints along a continuum, and they offer important ways for museum professionals to think about actual and potential visitors. Ravelli suggests that, rather than identifying visitor demographics and then writing to the actual audience, museum texts should be written for who visitors *can be*—for the role they are invited to play by the museum. As she notes, "[t]his enquiry does not replace a concern with the individual and their [sic] learning processes, but complements it."

Then there's the none-too-simple matter of what the text is actually about, which Ravelli characterizes as its representational framework. The representational framework is a way of understanding the complex means by which written text makes meaning. An exhibition text might present technical concepts, build a sense of taxonomies, or offer a portrait of some aspect of the world. After explaining these three frameworks, Ravelli devotes a chapter to suggesting that they can be applied not only to analyses of written texts but also to understanding how exhibitions and institutions make meanings as "spaces that can be read." In so doing, she addresses some of the issues represented in MacLeod's book,

though in a different manner. Among the essays in *Reshaping Museum Space*, those that focus on case studies describe specific practices in terms of theory, helping explain why an expansion took a particular shape or an exhibition offered a particular scope. In *Museum Texts*, Ravelli works from the opposite direction, from theory to practice, suggesting that the three frameworks—organizational, interactional, and representational—are universally applicable to an analysis of any exhibition or museum. That's not say that her perspective is at odds with those of the authors in MacLeod; Ravelli theorizes technique while authors included in *Museum Spaces* theorize sociopolitical and epistemological aspects of particular museum experiences.

Ravelli notes that she considers her discussion of exhibitions and institutions as spaces that can be read to be "exploratory and suggestive; the main purpose is to indicate the *potential* of this approach, and to show that an extension of the communicative frameworks beyond language, to broader notions of 'text' can be a productive one." I found it to be productive in the sense that Ravelli contextualizes her ideas within a broad body of literature. She draws from numerous publications about exhibition design and discusses key concepts (for instance, various models for designing the circulation path of an exhibition, visual methods for engaging visitors, and degrees of potential visitor interactivity with exhibit components). Exhibition designers will find familiar terms, and students of exhibition design will find a helpful synthesis of the myriad factors that exhibit teams consider as they articulate the meanings that they hope to communicate by visual, spatial, and experiential (as well as written) means. Indeed, the familiarity of terms and ideas was a welcome repast