idea journal

about

IDEA (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association) was formed in 1996 for the advancement and advocacy of education by encouraging and supporting excellence in interior design/interior architecture education and research within Australasia.

www.idea-edu.com

The objectives of IDEA are:

1. Objects

3.1 The general object of IDEA is the advancement of education by:

(a) encouraging and supporting excellence in interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research globally and with specific focus on Oceania; and

(b) being an authority on, and advocate for, interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research.

3.2 The specific objects of IDEA are:

(a) to be an advocate for undergraduate and postgraduate programs at a minimum of AQF7 or equivalent education in interior design/interior architecture/spatial design;

(b) to support the rich diversity of individual programs within the higher education sector;

(c) to create collaboration between programs in the higher education sector;

(d) to foster an attitude of lifelong learning;

(e) to encourage staff and student exchange between programs;

(f) to provide recognition for excellence in the advancement of interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education; and

(g to foster, publish and disseminate peer reviewed interior design/interior architecture/spatial design research.

membership

Institutional Members:

Membership is open to programs at higher education institutions in Australasia that can demonstrate an on-going commitment to the objectives of IDEA.

Current members:

AUT University, Auckland
Curtin University, Perth
Massey University, Wellington
Monash University, Melbourne
Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane
RMIT University, Melbourne
University of New South Wales, Sydney
University of South Australia, Adelaide
University of Tasmania, Launceston and Hobart
University of Technology Sydney, Sydney
Victoria University, Wellington

Affiliate Members:

Affiliate membership is open to programs at higher education institutions in Australasia that do not currently qualify for institutional membership but support the objectives of IDEA. Affiliate members are non-voting members of IDEA.

Associate Members:

Associate membership is open to any person who supports the objectives of IDEA. Associate members are non-voting members of IDEA.

Honorary Associate Members:

In recognition of their significant contribution as an initiator of IDEA, a former chair and/or executive editor: Suzie Attiwill, Rachel Carley, Lynn Chalmers, Lynn Churchill, Jill Franz, Roger Kemp, Tim Laurence, Gini Lee, Marina Lommerse, Gill Matthewson, Dianne Smith, Harry Stephens, George Verghese, Andrew Wallace and Bruce Watson.

AADR
ART
ARCHITECTURE
DESIGN
RESEARCH

IDEA
Interior Design/
Interior Architecture
Educators Association

cover image

Lying motionless, listless. Consuming time; being present, each moment folds into another. Surfaces becoming expanses of inflections of hue. Normality expands into a stream of observing luminosity. Still image from video by Chora Carleton, 2021.

this issue's provocation

(Extra) Ordinary Interiors calls for contributions from academics, research students and practitioners that demonstrate contemporary modes of criticality and reflection on specific interior environments in ways that expand upon that which is ordinary (of the everyday, common, banal, or taken for granted).

This theme has two agendas: First, the desire to amplify critical reflection as a key practice of the disciplines associated with this journal's readership. In short, to prompt interior designers, interior architects, and spatial designers to be more proactive and experimental in asserting their specialist knowledge and expertise as critical commentary. This asks authors to reconsider the role of critique and criticism in their scholarly and creative works, or, to demonstrate how to reflect critically upon a design and to locate the design's relation to material, political, social, cultural, historical and geographical concerns. Such an enterprise may reveal whether models of criticality centred on judgement, authority and historicism are relevant, constructive, insightful or generative, or, as Bruno Latour poses, have they 'run out of steam'?[01] This exercise may prompt some to revisit key thinkers who pose new discursive, visual and temporal models for critical practice in this recent age of criticality. We draw your attention to *Critical Spatial Practice* by Nikolaus Hirsch and Markus Miessen, which asks for thinking "about 'space' without necessarily intervening in it physically, but trying to sensitise, promote, develop and foster an attitude towards contemporary spatial production, its triggers, driving forces, effects and affects… [to] speculate on the modalities of production and potential benefits of the role of 'the outsider.'"[02]

We also look to Jane Rendell's introduction to *Critical Architecture*, which asserts that criticism and design are linked together by virtue of their shared interests in invoking social change.[03] Whether it takes written, built or speculative form, criticism is an action, which according to Roland Barthes, is a calling into crisis, a moment where existing definitions, disciplinary boundaries and assumptions about normativity are put into question.[04]

The second agenda of this journal issue takes heed of the ordinary, and how, in its intense observation, what is normal or often taken for granted exceeds itself, becomes extra or more ordinary. Everyday spaces such as supermarkets, service stations, laundry mats, hardware stores, parks and four-way street intersections, and banal gestures such as washing the dishes, walking the dog or street sweeping become subject to critical scrutiny and introspection. Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage Around My Room*, Julio Cortázar's *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*, and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* are but a few historic examples that draw out critical depth and aesthetic meaning about ordinary interiors, interiors understood in the most liberal sense.[05] What new actions to the crisis of critical commentary lurk restlessly in ordinary interiors?

While a nostalgic or romantic response to this journal's theme may dwell on interior situations with no special or distinctive features, or explore the persistence and abundance of ordinary interiors, even commonplace spaces, noticed or not, it can not be denied that recent pandemic events world-wide have flung the many facets of everyday life into crisis, including long-standing notions of proximity, intimacy, hapticity, privacy, freedom and rights to access 'essential' services. For many, the world has become home and home has become an internal world, an interior contaminated or augmented by virtual technologies serving as lifelines to a previous highly social and diversified lifestyle. As the interior of one's domestic space finds coincidence with one's isolation bubble, many are finding that interiority and interiors are conflating to take on new meaning, new function, and new configuration. Ordinary scenes of dead flies on windowsills, sun rays pointing to poor house-keeping habits, mounting bags of uncollected rubbish and recycling, shuffling of mattresses, improvised work surfaces, revised chores rubrics, commandeering of the bathroom, and the commodity of headphones and adapters highlight an intensified condition.

Authors are prompted to practice a form of critical reflection on one (extra) ordinary interior.

01 Bruno Latour. 'Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,' In *Critical Inquiry - Special issue on the Future of Critique* 30, no. 2 (2004): 25-248.

02 Nikolaus Hirsch and Markus Miessen, 'Architecture and Critical Spatial Practice,' 1 May 2020, criticalspatialpractice.org.

03 Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser and Mark Dorrian (Eds), *Critical Architecture* (Oxon UK, USA and Canada: Routledge, 2007), 4.

04 Roland Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, translated and edited by Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (London and New York: The Althone Press, 1966).

05 Xavier de Maistre, *Voyage Around My Room*, translated by Stephen Sartarelli (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1994); Julio Cortázar, *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*, translated by Thomas Christensen (San Francisco: North Point Press 1986); Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* [1931] (California: Harvest Books, 1978).

in this issue

[ij]   vol.18, no.01   (extra)ordinary   research   edward hollis   pre- and post-lockdown encounters   65
       2021   interiors   paper   rachel simmonds with the grand gallery of the
                                                                    national museum of scotland

re-collecting space: pre- and post-lockdown encounters with the grand gallery of the national museum of scotland

Edward Hollis
University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh College of Art

0000-0002-5160-6286

Rachel Simmonds
University of Edinburgh,
Edinburgh College of Art

0000-0002-0477-4797

abstract

As the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has noted, 'museums were supposed to be an objective archive of the past… but this does not mean the museum is simply a resting place.'[01] The museum is a public space, but it also has its origins in the *Wunderkammer* of private collections. The tension between the two — public display and private appreciation — is still present in the museum. As the artist Remy Zaugg reflected in 1986 in relation to the places of encounters between artworks and people in the public spaces of the art museum: 'The relationship between a singular work and a singular beholder is intimate almost private.'[02] Internally, museums function at both macro and micro scales simultaneously, and at public and private levels of engagement.

This article investigates the tension between public display and private appreciation by examining one such museum interior that has, in recent months, oscillated between being a public institution and a private collection. The Grand Gallery of the National Museum of Scotland (1866) is one of the most popular public spaces in Edinburgh. On 17 March 2020, this interior changed when lockdown closed the doors of the museum to the public. However, the interior and its objects did not remain at rest during this time. Reflecting on two visits to the Grand Gallery, this article discusses this change in the context of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Through primary observations, historical and theoretical investigations, this article exemplifies how the experience of an ordinary public interior was reconceptualised during the COVID-19 pandemic by restating relations between objects, people, and the notion of being in the public sphere, both physically and in the digital realm.

[ij]

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

66

introduction

On 24th February 2020, we visited the Grand Gallery of the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, UK. On the face of it, there was nothing extraordinary about this public interior, which, though grand, is a common building type in many cities in the western world. Such spaces are plentiful in this small city and we had visited this interior many times before. In fact, we made a second visit on 30 October the same year.

In the time between these two visits, the world altered radically (and continues to do so) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The changes have been so drastic that drinking a cup of tea in a museum café has become an extraordinary and unusual experience. This article argues that these changes represent fundamental shifts in the relationships between people, people and objects, and people and the digital sphere. These recognisable changes are embodied in the public interior of the Grand Gallery.

Framed by a historical analysis, two visits to the Grand Gallery of the National Museum of Scotland in 2020 are examined — one before, and one during lockdown. The article seeks answers to the following questions:

> How has the Grand Gallery of the National Museum of Scotland been conceptualised as an interior over its one-hundred-and-fifty-year history?
>
> How did this conceptualisation make itself evident in our experience as pre-pandemic visitors in February 2020?

How was this conceptualisation reconceptualised in the eight months between our two visits?

What might these two experiences have to say about the broader conceptualisation of this museum's interiors in the future?

Before considering these questions, it is useful to frame the Grand Gallery in discourses around the shifting nature of interior museum spaces, from their origin in private and personal encounters with objects, to the public interiors of 2019.

the public interior

Key to this research is how we approach the notion of the public interior, what we mean by 'public', and the ways in which we, as private citizens, encounter one another, and objects, within public interiors. As the museologist Jennifer Barrett argues in *Museums and the Public Sphere*,[03] the exhibition and the museum have long been associated with the rise in the modern era of the public sphere, as both an idea and an inhabitable space. She writes that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

> promenading, or walking, in public spaces in the city and surrounds was a significant aspect of public life, and is represented in Western art and socio-historical accounts of the period. The city became the obvious site for the new bourgeois public to see itself.[04]

[ij]

vol.18, no.01   (extra)ordinary   research   edward hollis   pre- and post-lockdown encounters   67
2021   interiors   paper   rachel simmonds   with the grand gallery of the
                                                                   national museum of scotland

At that time, the exhibition and the museum were, like the post offices and railway sheds, gin palaces and hotel lobbies, parks and winter gardens, a new type of interior — the public, urban interior — that came into being as a separate sphere to the private interiors of the home. The story of the public interior is one that has been told in various ways by interior and architectural theorists. Penny Sparke's *The Modern Interior*[05] posits the discipline of interior design as a détente between the separate public and private spheres of the modern city. Charles Rice's *Interior Urbanism*[06] studies the urban interiors of the architect John Portman, while Mark Pimlott's the *Public Interior as Idea and Project*[07] attempts to establish a typology for the genre.

Much of this article focuses on our experience of a museum interior in a time of great change in the public sphere. Social distancing, quarantine, the closure of almost all public interiors, and a rapid process of digitisation in 2020 has challenged previous conceptions about how the public domain is occupied and constructed.

What do we mean by the word 'public' when we refer to public interiors? Barrett's explanation begins with competing accounts of the birth of the modern museum: of the will of the physician, collector and botanist Sir Hans Sloane, who left his private collections to the British state in 1753 to establish the British Museum, or of the decision of the government of Revolutionary France to turn a royal collection over to 'the people' to form the Louvre in 1792.[08]

The public, Barrett observes, is more than an inchoate mass of people, and public spaces are more than the gaps left between private ones: both have a form. Barrett builds on the work of philosophers Hannah Arendt and Juergen Habermas to argue that the social and spatial form of the democratic state and its public(s) are arenas of and for, not just harmonious conversation, but agonistic debate, and so, therefore, are the public institutions and interiors created by and for them, museums included.[09]

Modern museums, as symbols of statehood — a condition shared by all citizens of the new nation states of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries — and media for instruction of a supposedly ignorant population by a class of scientific experts, were often created for rather than by the people. As such, their making involved a tension that the sociologist Bourdieu observed in his studies in the 1960s and 1970s: however much museum directors and curators tried to 'reach out' to the people, they ended up reinforcing differences of class and education that determine the capacity to be comfortable or not in their interiors.[10] The London curator, Nick Merriman, expands on this point in *Visiting Museums as a Cultural Phenomenon:*

> A consideration of the recent literature on museums and the 'heritage debate' shows … little concern being demonstrated for the experience of those who actually visit them. We do not therefore know how people use museums and whether they assimilate the messages, intended

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

68

or unintended, that museums give out, and consequently museums and exhibitions are rarely planned with a clear understanding of the composition and expectations of their clientele.[11]

In response, museums in the 1980s and 1990s sought, sometimes reluctantly, to change their role. 'The New Museology', as it was termed by Merriman among others, reconceived visitors as museum audiences and partners in the production of new knowledge.[12] The result was a new sort of a museum, which was summarised by the former Director of the Guggenheim Museum, Thomas Krens, in his formula for the twenty-first century institution, as 'a great collection, great architecture, a great special exhibition, a great second exhibition, two shopping opportunities, two eating opportunities, a high-tech interface and economies of scale via a global network.'[13]

The objects within
Before the evolution of museums as public institutions, collections of precious objects resided in private collections which were only accessible by invitation. Few people encountered these objects and when they did, that encounter was more intimate than it is today. As art historian Barbara Stafford explains, objects were performatively discovered in cabinets.[14] The doors of the cabinet would be opened, often revealing a lustrous and surprising miniature interior. Then the doors within the doors would be opened, followed by the drawers within the doors, until the hidden object would be picked up and handed around. Paintings were placed on easels so that they could be examined at

close quarters, often with a magnifying glass. Sculptures would attract social groups of learned scholars, often referred to as *literati*, to discuss them within the context of a social occasion.

Paradoxically, the transfer from private to public ownership noted by Barrett above created a distance between these objects and the public who now own them. Partly, this was to quarantine the objects from the millions of new and unwashed hands that might touch or damage them; the nineteenth century was, after all, the age in which bacterial infection and epidemiology were subjected to intense scientific scrutiny. But it had another consequence: encounters with objects lost their haptic qualities. This shift took place in a cultural imaginary of speculation, enlightenment, vision, and numerous other forms of visual metaphor for understanding. If, as Stafford explains, the intricate cabinet is the symbol of the intimate and tactile engagements of the early modern *Kunstkammmer*, the glass case — and the glass hall — are the symbols of the high modern museum; their transparent but impenetrable 'glassiness' the guarantor of both visuality and hygiene.[15]

The dominance of the visual found its cynosure in the modern art museum. For example, the large scale and tenor of impressionist and subsequent canvasses demanded that audiences stand back from the work to see the whole painting at once. The result is not just a spatial experience; it is also a social experience. Prior to 2020, the public who visited an art gallery would have

[ij]

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

69

been dispersed across the room, standing in more or less silent and solitary contemplation, a posture and formation that the Swiss artist Remy Zaugg crystallised in his manifesto, *The Art Museum of My Dreams or a Place for the Work and the Human Being.*[16] Here, he contrasts the purportedly public nature of the museum and the private act of occupation that typifies it.

Zaugg's observation is cast in a different light by sociologist Richard Sennett's reflections on visual encounters in *The Fall of Public Man*[17] and *the Conscience of the Eye,*[18] in which he paints a pessimistic picture of a modern public space; a place where we are all free, all alone, condemned and content to observe one another at a distance across the vast plazas and lounges, through the plate glass windows of the modern city; a place where we are destined to see, but never to touch, hear or smell. It is an eighteenth-century picture that, today, could be considered a prophecy for the social distancing we now know.

In the 1990s, museum administrators embraced 'new museology,' although sometimes reluctantly. In 1997, the London curator, Colin Sorensen, described museums as theme parks and time machines:

> I heard one museum official encouraging his colleagues to extend their 'pastoral care', another asking for galleries that created 'total immersion experiences', and a museum director extolling the near-mystic insight to be derived from 'hands-on' contact with the exhibited relics.[19]

These aspirations to treat the museum as a space of public entertainment resulted in numerous experiments. Sorensen suggesting that new audio-visual media were going to become the greatest ally of the new museology in the years to come, because it brought the dead objects back into a living context.

> …It was not my wish to transform museums into galleries of flickering screens…[but] perhaps we should learn to understand these newer 'time machines' and employ them in a comparably lucid manner. We might even evolve our own audio-visual language, if we are not too inhibited by the 'art of film.'[20]

As a public interior, the museum's role is to accommodate, to educate, and to celebrate the public for whom it has been created. In centuries of modernity characterised by rapid change, it has been no simple task to live up to this role, as conceptions of the public, including the interiors that house the museum objects, have ebbed and flowed. These conceptual shifts have altered the material and sensual ways in which we encounter objects in public museum interiors, from the haptic intimacy of the premodern cabinet to the distance, visuality, and solitude of the modern museum, to the sense of engagement conjured up by digital media. The effects of the 2020 pandemic on public life and public interiors were no less daunting or significant.

[ij] vol.18, no.01   (extra)ordinary   research   edward hollis   pre- and post-lockdown encounters   70
      2021   interiors   paper   rachel simmonds   with the grand gallery of the
                                                                        national museum of scotland

Pre-pandemic

In February 2020, we made a visit to the Grand Gallery of the National Museum of Scotland. To view the collections within this wonderful building wasn't the primary objective of our visit. Honestly, it was because the gallery café was conveniently located close to, but not within, our university campus, and we just wanted an alternative place to meet with free wifi. The café furniture was not ideal for a meeting; we could hardly hear ourselves speak over the cacophony of clattering trays and visitors, and with no easy access to an electrical outlet, the laptop soon died.

Whilst this was not an ideal setting for a meeting, we did not pay too much attention to these inconveniences, which counted for little when weighed against the benefits of being there: at work, but not 'at work'. We were surrounded by an eclectic collection of exhibits that at least provided an appealing visual backdrop for our meeting. Our conversation was rendered private and economical by the noise of countless others. At the time, there was nothing extraordinary about such an experience. It was, however, to prove a very important visit in relation to our view of the museum over the coming months.

History of the National Museum of Scotland

This section will set that visit, and the space in which it took place, in an historical context, to show how the construction and the development of the Grand Gallery reflected some of the wider concerns about the museum as public space outlined above.

The foundation stone of the museum was laid on 23rd October 1861, an event that coincided with the last public appearance of Prince Albert, who had arrived by carriage, having performed the same ritual for a new post office building adjacent to the railway station half an hour before.[21] This is a telling historical detail. A decade before, Albert's patronage had graced the Great Exhibition of 1851, and like the Great Exhibition (and indeed the post office building down the road), the new Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art represented an attempt to build a space to edify and accommodate a new phenomenon: the Scottish public. How was this space imagined at the time?

vol.18, no.01   (extra)ordinary   research   edward hollis   pre- and post-lockdown encounters   71
2021   interiors   paper   rachel simmonds   with the grand gallery of the
                                                                 national museum of scotland

Figure 02:
Prince Albert at the opening of the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art in 1866. Image credit: National Museums of Scotland.

Figure 01:
Francis Fowke, design drawing for the Grand Gallery of the National Museum of Scotland. Image credit: National Museums of Scotland.

The first image of the museum interior is a design drawing prepared by the engineer Frances Fowke, depicting a schizophrenic interior illustrating just how new (and therefore difficult to design) a public interior was in the 1850s (Figure 01). The interior appears as a utilitarian shed of cast iron and glass vaults over a baroque staircase that would not look out of place in an aristocratic palace.

The second image (Figure 02) of the interior depicts it as a throne room for the opening of the building by Prince Albert in 1866. A dais, a throne and a canopy occupy the western end of a space whose public have been conceived as courtiers. In this case, the public is understood as those people who are associated with the elite of the imperial nation state.

[ij]   vol.18, no.01   (extra)ordinary   research   edward hollis   pre- and post-lockdown encounters   72
       2021   interiors   paper   rachel simmonds with the grand gallery of the
                                                                       national museum of scotland

Figure 03:
The Grand Gallery in the late 19th
century—a world of glass cases.
Image credit: National Museums of
Scotland.

Figure 04:
The Grand Gallery c.1880. Image
credit: Historic Environment
Scotland.

The collection itself was newly 'public'; it belonged to the state. Part of the collection had been gathered by a private society of antiquaries from 1780 onwards. The natural history specimens had been gifted by professors at the University of Edinburgh, which was located adjacent to the Museum; and another portion of the collection had been more recently purchased (some of it from the private exhibitors of the Great Exhibition) to institute a newly founded industrial museum in 1854. Subsequent images of the interior showing it filled with exhibits betray the tensions inherent in curating such an encyclopaedic public collection.

Photographic images made in the 1870s and 80s chronicle an interior crowded with glass cabinets, which contained lenses, models of lighthouses, and examples of the machinery which turned them (Figures 03-04).

Incongruously, the walls were hung with paintings depicting religious and classical themes. By the 1890s, this juxtaposition had been complicated by a collection of architectural plaster casts. The balconies were now filled with glass cases containing ethnographic exhibits.

[ij]　vol.18, no.01　(extra)ordinary　research　edward hollis　pre- and post-lockdown encounters　73
2021　interiors　paper　rachel simmonds　with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

Perhaps in anticipation of the impossibility of ever making sense of this shifting collection, the interior architecture is utilitarian, as we have seen. Like Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace of 1815, it is a cast iron cage, some three stories high and around eighty metres long, illuminated by a glass roof designed to provide clear and neutral daylight. The visual examination of artefacts is clearly the purpose for which this space was turned, if not originally conceived.

But this is not the sort of spectacular display one might encounter in a modern museum. These nineteenth century photographs were generally taken from the first-floor gallery; however, at ground level, the interior would have been experienced as a labyrinth of tightly packed glass cases that invited close inspection. Other visitors would have been glimpsed as individuals through these cases, as flaneurs rather than en masse.

In these images, this interior already embodies the tension between its role as a public interior, and its role as a storehouse of edifying objects for expert study. Major alterations to the space in the late twentieth century continued to develop this problematic relationship between object and visitor.

Around 1970, the entrance hall was dramatically reconceived as a rather more radically democratic public space (Figure 05). The crowded labyrinth of glass cases and plaster casts were removed, leaving a vast empty travertine floor behind, similar to a piazza. Like a city square, this space was punctuated by a few monumental landmarks:

Figure 05:
The Grand Gallery pictured in 2006. Image credit: Historic Environment Scotland.

[ij]

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

74

a totem pole, a lighthouse lamp, a clock, and a large Buddha. Like an urban park, this space contained two ponds, whose fish soon became the major attraction of the hall.

In the early 1990s, this sense of the space as a sort of town square (suitably enclosed for a cold country) was further reinforced with the introduction of a temporary café that lasted for a few years, and whose scraping metal furniture and potted plants had all the feel of a street in a sunnier clime.

At the turn of the millennium, another major transformation of the space responded to yet another shift in the understanding of the museum as a public space. By this time, the Royal Scottish Museum had been rebranded as the National Museum of Scotland, and the building was considerably extended. In 2001, legislation made access to permanent collections of the National Museum and galleries free to the public, which increased visitor numbers to the building. The result of this transformation was that the Grand Gallery itself took on an even more civic air. Used for grand social events and the gathering place for increasingly large parties of schoolchildren and tourists, it became not just a park-like space of café and pond, but a place of public assembly.

In 2011, the museum's gallery interior underwent a further major re-organisation in response to these new pressures. All the lowlier functions of a modern museum — shops, cloakrooms, lavatories, education rooms, cafés, restaurants — were relocated to a newly accessible basement floor underneath the gallery. Exhibits that inhabited the Grand Gallery were further edited — colonial embarrassments like a totem pole from Canada being discreetly removed. The café was moved upstairs to occupy a sort of viewing terrace. The main floor of the hall was thus made available for public events of any sort.

The few exhibits that did remain in the hall were spatially rationalised: in a nod to the museum's own history, the whole new ensemble was connected by a grand double stair which also acts as a gigantic cabinet of curiosity. This exhibit, named *Windows on the World* (Figure 06), contains over 800 objects related to Scotland. The diversity of these objects was intended to showcase the diversity of the collection and, by implication, the publics that came to see it.

[ij]   vol.18, no.01   (extra)ordinary   research   edward hollis   pre- and post-lockdown encounters   75
         2021   interiors   paper   rachel simmonds   with the grand gallery of the
                                                                           national museum of scotland

Windows on the World is intimately linked to the circulation through the building, and as a result it is impossible to stand for any length of time to examine its exhibits without obstructing the passage of other visitors. As such, the objects displayed within it become part of a spectacle. Their close assemblage in one gigantic cabinet, generally appreciated as one element from a distance, was used to stand in for the richness of the museum collections, rather than repaying detailed examination one by one, as they might in the crowded glass cases of the nineteenth century museum. It is as if one of the prophecies of new museology had been fulfilled: the museum had become a space of public circulation, resort and spectacle, from which the actual exhibits receded from their specific educational functions.

[ij]

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

76

Those educational functions were now carried out by other means, such as the touchscreens that dotted the space and provided more in-depth information, as well as the app and website to which all visitors were directed. The re-curation of the museum and collections in 2006 was accompanied by a digital relaunch of the museum's web presence as significant as any architectural intervention.

As a result, the appreciation of *Windows on the World* and the interior it occupies was hybridised and doubled. Direct apprehension of 'real' museum objects was made fleeting and cursory. Thoughtful interpretation took place, not in the physical museum per se, but in its other, digital avatars. The museum experience was one made primarily via touchscreens in the gallery or offsite altogether.

These major changes to the Museum were afforded by developments in digital technology over the preceding decades, in answer to the 'prophecy' of renowned museum curator, Colin Sorensen, around audio-visual media in 'the new Museology of 1997'.[22] As he predicted, the proliferation of audio-visual media had an interesting consequence for the physical, as well as the virtual museum interior, which became a place of objects to be examined as well as sounds and movement to be experienced.

The Grand Gallery of the museum started as an ambiguous interior: a throne room that was also a space thrown open, at no cost, to the public; a place of wonderful profusion that was also a scientific engine of knowledge. Its many transformations since

that time have only served to accentuate and restate those ambiguities as the terms that define them fluctuate through time — 'public', 'national', 'educational' — and each of these transformations has left its mark on the interior that, just before 2020 happened, we had our meeting in.

the covid-19 context
Visit in October 2020

On 17 March 2020, the National Museum of Scotland closed to the public, and did not open its doors until 19 August 2020. When it did, things were very different.

Our second visit on 30 October 2020 had to be planned in a way that would have been incomprehensible to us on our visit eight months earlier. No longer could we just wander in off the street. Tickets were made available online, in timeslots within the reduced opening hours, to control the number of visitors, so that social distancing could be observed within the interiors of the museum. At the time of our visit, it was possible, under COVID-19 regulations in Scotland, for two people from separate households to meet, although they were required to maintain a distance of two metres from one another, and to wear masks.

We met outside the museum so that we could enter at exactly the same time. This made for a strangely formal rendezvous, made more peculiar by the fact that this was our first in-person meeting in several months, and we were both now wearing masks. As this visit, unlike any previous one, required both planning and special equipment, our

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

77

senses were much more focused on our surroundings. This sense of strangeness continued in the systems of queueing and checks we had to pass through before being allowed to enter the building itself. Once inside, and after a further sanitisation of our hands from one of the numerous stations throughout the space, we were handed a map of the designated route through the interior (Figure 07). Only then were we able to properly start to move about inside the museum, and to ascend the stairs by the *Windows on the World* exhibit into the Grand

Gallery. Initially, only the entrance hall and first floor level were open to the public, but by the time of our visit in October 2020, access had been permitted to most levels in the building.

To be in this familiar space eight months after our initial visit, and in very different circumstances, was slightly disconcerting. Our new experience of the Grand Gallery made us acutely aware of the overlaps and disjunctions of the perceived space and the interior we remembered.

Figure 07:
October 2020 route map. Image credit Rachel Simmonds.

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

78

Museum in lockdown

During the first UK lockdown from March to August 2020, when the Museum was completely closed, the only people who engaged with the objects were a skeleton team of security, curators and conservators (Figure 08). They worked to ensure the continued maintenance and protection of the objects in their care. Whilst this work may have been familiar to those staff, and while it may have taken place in a space now shut off from the world outside, the impact of COVID-19 was ever evident in new requirements relating to social distancing and mask-wearing.

Whilst the objects themselves were not physically available to the public during that time, many became more accessible than ever through other means, with lockdown accelerating a process that had been underway for some time.

Since 2006, interaction with the museum had become increasingly digital, with interactive displays and an online catalogue, through which over 700,000 holdings could be accessed. To enrich this resource, curators and specialists provided written insights into their roles and work, and short films narrating the micro-histories of many objects. Ironically, lockdown not only created a more urgent need for this online presence to be expanded, it also provided time for staff to focus on its production; as a result, this museum, like many others, was able to make more information digitally available.

In lockdown, the public presence of the museum ceased to be manifest in a physical interior; it was entered online. At the same time, in the 'world outside' in which people were learning to meet friends and family on zoom or skype rather than in a restaurant or in their living rooms, we were all becoming more comfortable with digital engagement.

Unlike its physical counterpart, with its strict visiting hours and single location, this new virtual museum allowed for time to browse and explore in a new way. Collections could now be viewed at any time of the day of night, anywhere in the world, and in some cases in a 360-degree format. In many cases, scans and photographs made it possible to see the backs and the bases of objects that would have been invisible to anyone visiting them in the 'real' museum. This engagement was also uninterrupted by other people, or, indeed, the distractions posed by other objects in the museum; this enabled, not just immediacy of access, but also more substantial possibilities for encounter.

A hybrid experience

Continuing our physical visit, we followed the animal footprint-themed stickers on the floor that directed us around the space, and we began to point at the familiar. It was reassuring to see that the pandemic had not altered everything. But there was one thing that was entirely different: the noise.

[ij]   vol.18, no.01   (extra)ordinary   research   edward hollis   pre- and post-lockdown encounters   79
2021   interiors   paper   rachel simmonds   with the grand gallery of the
                                                                          national museum of scotland

Figure 08.
Care technician with exhibit
cleaning during lockdown.
Image credit: Stewart Attwood
Photography 2020 for National
Museums of Scotland.

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

80

We had scheduled our visit to avoid times when children would be likely to be in the building; and this meant that the majority of the twenty or so people we encountered were adults. Standing in the Grand Gallery, we were struck by the silence, and then, very soon afterwards, what an unexpected pleasure that was. It also made us keenly aware of the sound of those few people in the space, and brought the realisation that during lockdown, the silence must have been even more acute.

The silence was not just due to the reduced numbers of people, adhering to guidelines that prevented interaction and conversation: the objects themselves were silent.

Figure 09:
Millennium Clock floor and interactive screen signage, October 2020. Image credit Rachel Simmonds.

Of course, the museum does not contain any live exhibits. Everything in it is dead, including Dolly, the world's first cloned sheep; but we soon realised that many of the exhibits had, before lockdown, made noises: most notably, the *Millennium Clock* situated to the south side of the Grand Gallery; this, in turn, had influenced the movement of people through the space. Gone were the crowds drawn to the clock as it played a Bach concerto on the hour, to watch its automated display of the best and worst of the 20th century. Instead, the clock sat silent. Stickers had been placed on the floor showing us where we could look at it while maintaining social distancing; and the interactive display standing blankly next to it was covered by a sign telling us it couldn't be touched (Figures 09-10).

Figure 10:
Detail of signage on *Millennium Clock* interactive panel. Image credit Rachel Simmonds.

The objects had not changed during lockdown, either in form or location, but we found ourselves relating to them in a new way. Objects

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

81

have always, in a sense, been quarantined in museums, destined, for their own good, to be separated from the world in which they originally 'lived'. Now we, too, had experienced a similar quarantine of sorts. Socially distanced from — and yet digitally connected to — both the people and the objects we had come to encounter, we were all subjected to the same regimes of social discipline.

In the bustling pre-lockdown museum, we'd paid little heed to the touch screens connected to some objects, since they tended to be monopolised by children and tourists. Now the dormancy of these supposedly interactive elements, made with the intention of 'shaping digital things for people's use,'[23] highlighted that, once they were shut down, things would not and could not go back to the old ways.

In fact, the shutting down of the touch screens meant, in many cases, that objects were made inaccessible, both physically and cognitively. In the 'Enquire' and 'Technology by Design' galleries, for example, great machines and contraptions lay silent and motionless (Figure 11). Cordons marked them as out as being out of bounds, not because the route within them would breach guidelines, but because the objects themselves could not be encountered without the medium of touch — the one sense forbidden in the time of social distancing.

For the time being, the museum was no longer a backdrop for the exhibition and interpretation of these objects, but had become a storehouse that denied, rather than facilitated, physical engagement with them. Ironically, the very thing making that engagement impossible was the touch screen technology that had been devised to make them accessible in the first place. As the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has noted, 'museums were supposed to be an objective archive of the past… but this does not mean the museum is simply a resting place,'[24] but in this context, a resting place is exactly what it had become.

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

82

Figure 11:
Explore Gallery cordoned off,
October 2020. Image credit Rachel
Simmonds.

Another striking change to the space was found in the wayfinding and safety measures the museum had been introduced to direct circulation and command social distancing. We were more than familiar by October 2020 with spatial graphics telling us to wait 2m apart, and to sanitise our hands before entering a building. In the context of a museum, however, these stickers and signs took on the quality of exhibits in their own right — their animal-print design referred and led to the stuffed menagerie at the eastern end of the gallery. They had become the latest acquisitions in a rolling collection. The museum itself has a policy of collecting the present, acquiring objects that reflect 'major shifts in Scotland during the 21st Century, or change our understandings of the past, can tell inspiring stories, now and in the future.'[25] Now, perhaps, inadvertently, COVID-19 and its material cultures were forming just the latest chapter in the national story that the museum had been established a century and a half ago to narrate.

A potential future for the Museum
By reviewing the evolution of the Grand Gallery of the National Museum of Scotland, we have attempted to illustrate how its conceptualisation has altered several times over, just as museums themselves have repeatedly reinscribed the ever-changing nature of public and private encounters with objects in space. This process of reconceptualisation has been particularly abrupt in the pandemic during 2020-21.

Over two centuries, the Grand Gallery has been reconceived as an imperial court,

an edifying encyclopaedia, a city park or square, and a digitised Wunderkammer, each manifestation framing the public sphere in new ways: as loyal subjects, as the masses in need of improvement, as citizens, and as prosumers. In 2020, the public sphere has been reframed again — firstly, as a place of isolation, danger, and regulation; secondly, as a place of silence and retreat; and thirdly, as the mere physical shadow of another public sphere, accessible only through digital devices.

The interior architecture of the Grand Gallery has remained more or less consistent since it was built: the sunlight that streams through its glass roof casts shadow across the space in the same pattern as it did in the 1870s; but this radical reconceptualisation has been achieved through the rearrangement of objects and patterns of circulation.

Now in 2021, with COVID-19, these objects are reinventing themselves again, their digital presences not only haunting other interiors, but wreaking change upon the physical originals themselves, or, at least, the ways in which we (no longer) encounter them. As visitors we have no choice but to engage with the collections in new ways, either by a more prescriptive route and form of physical engagement, or by observing them through new lenses visually and through memory. This reengagement with the museum interior has been fascinating to consider when recalling the two visits and their very different experiences. It has invited us to re-collect on many different levels.

[ij]

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

84

It is likely that with a gradual return to a less distant society, the Grand Gallery will once more become the focus of the building. Just as public squares and parks are becoming more inhabited as lockdown restrictions ease, so these important indoor public spaces will follow suit. But while exterior spaces have always been defined by forces outside human control, such as natural and seasonal changes, interior public spaces are not used to such annual alterations. COVID-19 has changed this sense of invulnerability.

In some respects, contrary to Colin Sorensen's comments around moving and heard images becoming the ally of the new museology, it is, in fact, technology on a more virtual platform that will continue our engagement with museums. It will be interesting to see how, in coming years, the museum uses this interior in its digital engagement. Already it is the most recognisable and used image on the website. In the past 150 years it has become an exhibit in its own right. As we reconceptualise the museum interior for the future, we cannot suggest it be preserved, since it has already changed; but rather, that its importance in the triangular relationship between people, object, and place is not to be ignored. The Grand Gallery is the heart of the museum in many ways; long may it continue beating.

In a newspaper article published at the end of 2020, Director of the National Museums of Scotland, Professor Christopher Breward, proposed that the museum be rethought with regard to how it engages the public of the future with the objects of the past.[26] How this will impact on the interior of the Grand Gallery in particular is yet to be seen. What is clear is that the future of one of the most photographed spaces in Edinburgh will depend on evolving its interior of display, vista, and engagement for new audiences, wherever and whomever they might be.

vol.18, no.01
2021

(extra)ordinary
interiors

research
paper

edward hollis
rachel simmonds

pre- and post-lockdown encounters
with the grand gallery of the
national museum of scotland

85

acknowledgements

authors' biographies

In 1999, *Edward Hollis* began lecturing in Interior Architecture at Napier University, Edinburgh. In 2004 he moved to Edinburgh College of Art, The University of Edinburgh, where he teaches the MA in Interior Architectural and Spatial Design. He is Professor of Interior Design and also Deputy Dean of Research across the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Hollis's monographs, *The Secret Lives of Buildings* and *The Memory Palace* connect time, folk tale, and building. He also engages with heritage activism; with experimental reoccupations of modernist ruins; with the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust; and, since 2018, with Asansol, a coal-mining town in West Bengal.

Rachel Simmonds is a qualified Architect who joined Edinburgh College of Art (ECA) as a part time tutor in interior design in 2008, becoming a lecturer in 2016. She is Programme Director for MA Interior, Architectural and Spatial Design at ECA and teaches final year undergraduate and postgraduate courses there.

Her research work has a focus on the links between Scottish and Scandinavian modernist architecture and design. Her architectural and interior design experience has also influenced her research investigations into the design of architectural and design exhibitions, as well as around historic and future places of creative working and learning.

[ij] vol.18, no.01   (extra)ordinary   research   edward hollis   pre- and post-lockdown encounters   86
      2021   interiors   paper   rachel simmonds   with the grand gallery of the
                                                                     national museum of scotland

notes

01 Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating* (London: Penguin Random House, 2014), 43.

02 Remy Zaugg, *The Art Museum of My Dreams or a Place for the Work and the Human Being,* edited by H Sachs and E Schmidt, translated by Liz Libbrecht (Basel: Sternberg Press 2014), 48.

03 Jennifer Barratt, *Museums and the Public Sphere* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 164.

04 Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere,* 32.

05 Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior* (London: Reaktion 2008).

06 Charles Rice, *Interior Urbanism: Architecture, John Portman and Downtown America* (London: Bloomsbury 2016).

07 Mark Pimlott, *The Public Interior as Idea and Project* (Amsterdam: Prinsenbeek: Jap Sam 2015).

08 Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere,* 1-2.

09 Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere,* 3.

10 Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere,* 3.

11 Nick Merriman, 'Visiting Museums as a Cultural Phenomenon' in *New Museology*, edited by Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, Limited, 1997), 149.

12 Nick Merriman, 'Visiting Museums as a Cultural Phenomenon', 150.

13 Quoted by Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere,* 9.

14 Barbara Stafford, Frances Terpak, and Isotta Poggi, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001).

15 Stafford, Terpak and Poggi, *Devices of Wonder*, 158.

16 Zaugg, *The Art Museum of My Dreams.*

17 Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977).

18 Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).

19 Colin Sorensen, 'Theme Parks and Time Machines' in *New Museology*, edited by Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, Limited, 1997), 66.

20 Colin Sorensen, 'Theme Parks and Time Machines,' 70-71.

21 'History of the National Museums of Scotland,' National Museums of Scotland, accessed January 14, 2021, https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/stories/scottish-history-and-archaeology/history-of-the-national-museum-of-scotland/

22 Colin Sorensen, 'Theme Parks and Time Machines,' 70-73.

23 Jonas Lowgren, 'Interaction Design Brief Intro' in *Encyclopaedia of Human-Computer Interaction* (Interaction Design Foundation, 2014), https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/book/the-encyclopedia-of-human-computer-interaction-2nd-ed/interaction-design-brief-intro

24 Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating* (London: Penguin Random House, 2014), 43.

25 'Collecting the Future,' National Museums of Scotland, accessed January 14, 2021, https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/films/collecting-the-present/

26 Brian Ferguson, 'New Director signals major rethink for National Museum to retell the story of Scotland's past and future,' *Scotsman*, 29 December 2020, accessed January 14, 2021, https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/new-director-signals-major-rethink-national-museum-retell-story-scotlands-past-and-future-3071070