Displaying Spaces

*Spatial Design, Experience, and Authenticity in Museums*

Märit Simonsson

Department of Culture and Media Studies
Umeå 2014
PAPERS IN MUSEOLOGY 10

Responsible publisher under Swedish law: the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities
This work is protected by the Swedish Copyright Legislation (Act 1960:729)
ISBN: 978-91-7601-141-6
ISSN: 1103-0100
Cover by: Märit Simonsson and Print & Media
Electronic version available on http://umu.diva-portal.org/
Printed by: Print & Media, Umeå University 2014
ABSTRACT

My dissertation aims to analyse how spatial design affects experiences and meaning making in museums. The overarching question is what the spatial elements and forms within museums communicate to those who visit them. This issue is specifically explored here in five museums in Rome, Italy. Museo dell’Ara Pacis is a modern white building housing the Augustan altar Ara Pacis. Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is a 17th century palace containing a large private collection of contemporaneous art. Next is Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, which is a part of the National Roman Museum and contains antique artefacts, such as mosaics and frescoes. The former power plant Centrale Montemartini is now an exhibition space displaying antique sculptures. Finally, MAXXI, which was inaugurated in 2010, displays contemporary Italian art and architecture. The method used for analysing these museums was based on observations of the museum spaces. The observations followed a method plan that consisted of visiting the museum spaces on several occasions and describing the spaces and my own experiences of them with a focus on spatial aspects, such as layout and the disposition of exhibitions in terms of material and volume, as well as light and colours. Also, included in the observations were conversations with first-time visitors, one in each of the five museums, about their experiences of the visit. Their observations are discussed in relation to my own descriptions and experiences that, in turn, are analysed in dialogue with theoretical perspectives. The theoretical framework consists of an assembly of approaches from diverse academic disciplines. The most essential of these are museological aspects on museum experiences, authenticity and spatial matters and theories within architecture and art that can be applied to the analysis of spatial experiences and to discussions on art history and art spaces. Multimodality, semiotics and hermeneutics are applied in relation to the analysis of spatial elements and symbolic meanings as well as to authentic experiences and understanding of history. Furthermore, phenomenological approaches to the body as the medium through which we perceive the world is central in this study and is assumed to be a fundamental precondition for spatial experiences in museums.

The selected museums are treated and analysed individually in each of their chapters, and the results reveal that although they are radically different from each other in terms of their contents and display concepts, they have corresponding factors in common. In the final chapter, the five museums are further discussed in relation to perspectives and theories on spatial design in museums in a broader sense and the conclusions, therefore, are drawn on a more general level. The discussions include aspects on authentic experiences of both historical and contemporary museum elements as well as on the issue of balance and imbalance in relation to museum spaces. The conclusion of the analysis is that museum spaces are inseparable from their contents. Space and exhibition elements influence each other and meaning is formed in their relationship. When imbalanced, museum spaces might evoke sensa-
tions of confusion and frustration. When balanced, on the other hand, they can create an atmosphere that evokes sensations of excitement, comfort, and curiosity and their settings can stimulate the motivation to understand the exhibition context or encourage visitors to imagine themselves situated in another time and place. Different kinds of sensations are evoked within us when we are present in a museum, but it is not always obvious to us that spatial design is what causes them. The impact that museum space has on our experiences and meaning making is thus more considerable than we might acknowledge.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although writing a dissertation is solitary work in many respects, it is also work that demands a solid social support system, both professionally and privately, in order to be accomplished. Practical aid and advice from more experienced colleagues gets one far but I have found that it is equally important to be surrounded by people who encourage one to work as by people who encourage one to rest. The following acknowledgements are dedicated to those who have inspired me to do both.

To my supervisors Richard Pettersson and Kerstin Smeds, I am very grateful to you for believing in my research project and for supporting me throughout this process. Thank you to the Department of Culture and Media Studies at Umeå University and the Swedish Institute in Rome for providing me with space and time to explore, reflect, and produce.

Thank you to my fellow museologists and doctoral students in Umeå and to Robert Bhatt and Ann-Catrine Eriksson for moral support. Many thanks to Kristi Burman, who encouraged me to follow my instincts and engage in studies of spatial meaning in the first place. Thank you to Sofia, Anna, Elin, Karin H. and Karin A. for ten years of devoted friendship.

My warmest thank you to my parents Annakarin and Olle for all the love and support. Many thanks and big hugs to my brothers Per and Olov and their families. Patrik, thank you for being my rock.

Umeå, November 2014

Märit Simonsson
# CONTENTS

| ABSTRACT | i |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | iii |
| CONTENTS | v |

## I: INTRODUCTION
- Aim and research questions 8
- *The Roman context* 8
- Method 10
- Observation method 11
- Theory 18
  - Phenomenological approaches to space 18
  - (Inter)subjectivity, meaning making, and authenticity 23
  - To experience space 27
  - Communication in museums 29
  - Atmospheric elements in space 33
- Approaches to museum space 35
- Disposition 40

## II: MUSEO DELL’ARA PACIS
- Background 41
- Museum context 43
- The main hall 43
- The altar 47
- The meaning of light 51
- A whiter shade of pale 54
- The classical legacy 59
- Unspoken importance 60
- Conclusion 63

## III: PALAZZO DORIA PAMPHILJ
- Background 65
- Museum context 67
- Layout of the palace spaces 67
- The apartments 69
- The galleries 73
- A room for a pope 76
- The Aldobrandini room 79
- “Being there” 82
- Conclusion 83
INTRODUCTION

Throughout our lives we enter a large number of different spaces. Some of them are merely functional and are used in our everyday routines and are not designed to require our attention to any significant degree. Some are parts of our homes and are furnished according to our own liking, making them comfortable and familiar. Moreover, there are spaces that are created not so much for daily functions as to move us away from our habituated spheres and give us an experience beyond the ordinary. Museums are such spaces.

Museum spaces are more than just containers for exhibition settings and objects on display. Layout, design and atmosphere are some of the most significant factors in the overall experience of a museum visit. Spatial design, in museums and elsewhere, is a communicative element that gives a space’s contents additional meaning. The composition of spatial components creates an atmospheric environment in relation to the individual who visits a space. Furthermore, in the case of museums, where exhibition practice is central, the meaning of the spatial relations are complemented by further elements to create the exhibition setting, which adds other modes and thereby create new meanings. All of the elements of an exhibition, including the exhibition space, are interdependent and the relationships between them are what generate the concept of museum displays with their characteristic multimodality and three-dimensionality.

In museums, spatial design is interesting because of the extra dimension it brings to the exhibition as a three-dimensional medium and the meaning it conveys in combination with the exhibition modes. However, it is an issue that is easily overlooked because museum spaces are often assessed based on their contents rather than the effect their designs have on visitors. This study attempts to address the issue of how spatial design functions as an exhibition element and how it represents a significant part of the experience and meaning making.

Unless a space reminds us of its existence through, for example, inadequacy, it does not particularly evoke any curiosity or concern. If reshaped, redecorated and refurnished, on the other hand, the space’s atmosphere and character changes, and this naturally causes a reaction from its inhabitants. The spaces of our everyday routines do not seem to be extensively considered as environments for communicating meaning; they are there for us to use. Why should museum spaces be any
different than other spaces? In some regards, they are not. They generally consist of walls, ceilings, and floors of a more or less noteworthy design, much like the halls or rooms we encounter in our daily lives. Museum spaces are also often used for containing some sort of matter and, like any other space, they have an effect on the visitors who enters them, whether the visitors are aware of it or not. Museum spaces, however, are different from other spaces because museums are different from other kinds of institutions.

In her book *Museum* (2009), Anne Eriksen, professor of cultural history at the University of Oslo, uses the term *genre* in relation to museums.¹ She borrows this word from literary studies where it is defined as a category based on certain conventions and systems that makes it identifiable, but still open for some variation of contents. She claims that museums can be seen as a genre by considering that they generally contain signs and symbols that function as genre markers. The main markers that separate museums from other institutions are the combined practices of collecting, preserving, researching, and displaying objects, as well as keeping their doors open for the public to use the museum for education and amusement. Museum buildings can also be genre markers, although the architecture of museums is in no sense uniform. Still, although varying in style, there is something about museum buildings that often make them seem to say, “this is a museum.”² A marker can be a flag or a poster by the entrance, promoting a coming exhibition. The welcoming vestibule with a ticket counter and a museum shop might give an indication, just like large exhibition halls filled with cases or artwork. In order to identify these kinds of genre markers, Eriksen stresses that one needs *genre competence*. Museum visitors have certain knowledge, a competence that gives them the ability to recognize the genre markers and to understand the codes that the museum communicates.³ Eriksen states that genre competence brings with it knowledge about, for instance, proper behaviour in museums. Do not run in the exhibition halls, do not bring food to those areas and do not touch the objects on display – these behavioural principles are often learned through observing other visitors in museums or by being corrected by museum guards when misbehaving. Genre competence can also include ideas of what one should see in a museum, what to think about it and how to experience it. These kinds of competences and expectations are all included in the idea of what museum visits are.⁴ In other words, museums are places with their own principles and practices. Yet, museums are not the only places that require genre competence to be recognized and other buildings, venues, and institutions have markers that indicate their inclusion in a certain genre. Shopping centers, for example, are often recognized by their storefronts and signs above the entrances and buildings of worship can be distinguished by their architecture or by symbols displayed on their façades.

² Ibid., 15-16.
³ Ibid., 15 ff.
Museums are places that, in a sense, represent the society in which they are located and yet are simultaneously separated from that very society. The philosopher Michel Foucault developed the concept of *heterotopia* in his “Of Other Spaces” (1967).\(^5\) In his text, Foucault first describes how utopias might exist as perfected equivalences to society, but they are unreal and with no connection to actual spaces. He then continues:

There also exist, and this is probably true of all cultures and all civilizations, real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which constitute a sort of counter-arrangement, of effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable. In contrast to the utopias, these places which are absolutely *other* with respect to all the arrangements that they reflect and of which they speak might be described as heterotopias.\(^6\)

Thus, heterotopias represent a kind of parallel existence by mirroring the reality in which we live but with their own rules and norms. Holiday resorts, cemeteries and brothels are examples of heterotopias because they are separate spaces that allow their visitors to experience situations that are not encountered in the everyday life.\(^7\) The spaces Foucault refers to can be locations as well as conceptual spaces such as states of the physical body, unusual situations, or ceremonial rites.

Foucault presents several different categories within the heterotopia concept. In one of these categories, which represent time, he discusses museums, archives, and libraries. He defines them as places where “all times, all eras, forms and styles” have been assembled and accumulated and still they are places that are “outside time, inaccessible to the wear and tear of the years.”\(^8\) Foucault describes museums as heterotopias from a temporal perspective, but it is plausible to develop the discussion further by applying spatial aspects on the heterotopic museum. Considering Foucault’s definition of heterotopic spaces and Eriksen’s description of museums as places where certain rules are followed, it becomes apparent that museums are a world of their own to some degree.

As Foucault emphasizes, however, heterotopias are simultaneously a part of, and within our societies. A museum of cultural history can, for instance, mirror the social, historical, and cultural context of the local population and at the same time, by representing and reconstructing history in its exhibitions, create a space separate from its present society. Museums of natural history might have the same approach with regards to nature and art museums often display art that reflects society of the

---


\(^6\) Ibid., 352.

\(^7\) Ibid., 353-356.

\(^8\) Ibid., 355.
present or of certain historical periods. These accumulated times, as Foucault describes them, are enclosed within the museum building, within the spaces that house them and display them. The spaces need to be entered to be accessible to us and once there, we can start experiencing other spaces and other times.

The museum as concept does, therefore, become a world of its own, so to speak, or rather a world within a world. Yet, when Foucault refers to museums as heterotopias of accumulated time, would that then mean that museums of contemporary art, which are displaying the newest of the new, cannot in fact be regarded as heterotopias? If we choose to adhere to this specific temporal perspective, it might be difficult to include such contemporarily oriented art museums. However, when considering Foucault’s descriptions of heterotopias in total, it seems as if museum spaces in general correspond very well to this idea of spaces that are without and within society simultaneously. Spatially, museums of contemporary art are at one and the same time as contrary and as parallel to society, and therefore as heterotopic, as for instance museums of cultural history.

In his book *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Things* (2010) Bjørnar Olsen, professor of archaeology at the University of Tromsø, examines the subject of things and he emphasizes material objects as valuable physical entities with their own innate significance. He discusses the maintained integrity of things as they change environment, using a Neolithic pot as an example. “Even when put on display in a faraway museum it is still a pot,” Olsen argues, “not only holding in reserve its affordances and ‘pot properties’ for eventual (if unlikely) future actualization, but also persistently offering them for direct perception.” Yet, even though the properties of the pot as such do not change and a pot remains a pot even inside the walls of a museum, it has been suggested that something seems to happen with objects when they are taken from their original environment and put into a museum. The question is whether the objects actually do change or whether this perceived alteration is instead a matter of context.

Museums allow visitors to step outside their everyday lives and experience something unusual, such as a Neolithic pot or an artwork by an avant-garde artist. Even though these objects would be materially the same inside or outside a museum, as Olsen suggests, when placed inside a museum they will be seen in another light, literally and figuratively. The artist Marcel Duchamp approached a similar theme in the 1910s when he began working with the concept of “ready-mades”, i.e. ordinary manufactured objects that he chose to represent art. His most famous ready-mades were a urinal, a bottle rack, and a bicycle wheel. Some of these were not publicly exhibited initially and were soon lost, but new versions have since been displayed in

---

10 Ibid., 156.
art museums world-wide. By re-evaluating everyday items like these, Duchamp wanted to question the long-standing presumption of art as a matter of aesthetic expression as well as problematize the artist’s role as a creator and a craftsman. Thereby, he became one of the initiators of what would later develop into more conceptual art forms throughout the 20th century.¹²

Andy Warhol was another artist who would also use ready-mades when creating some of his art. The artwork Brillo Box, for example, consisted of a number of manufactured wooden boxes for steel wool pads that were arranged according to Warhol’s design and displayed in a gallery in New York in 1964. Although taken out of their context and detached from their original function the boxes themselves were materially the same, but now assembled for an artist and transferred from one spatial setting to another. It would be expected, then, to draw the conclusion that the collection of boxes became an artwork because its creator was an artist with a conceptual agenda, as was suggested by Duchamp. However, this also says something about where these boxes were placed – in an exhibition space. Not only does the artist’s signature affect our appreciation of art, but our genre competence of exhibition spaces certainly contributes to this perception of objects as artworks.

Galleries and museums, art spaces and spaces of cultural history all communicate to us that what is exhibited is artefacts that have been placed there because they have qualities that make them interesting from an aesthetic, historical, cultural, or scientific perspective.¹³ The artefact has been deemed valuable enough for the public to see. Placing ready-mades such as Brillo boxes in an art museum space, then, does not change the objects per se as much as how they are perceived by visitors in that specific environment.¹⁴ This is something we learn about museums; it is a part of our genre competence. Museum spaces are heterotopias where time is accumulated and also where the matter of placement in the heterotopic spatial context that the museum represents is vital. Something seems to happen in a museum space that is at the same time symbolic and tangible. Not only is it the idea of museums as keepers of valuable objects and exiting stories, as houses of treasures, that affects our experiences but it is also the actual spatial elements, the design and layout, colours and light, that create an atmosphere that surrounds the visitors as they move through the spaces of the museum.

In museological research, much focus has been on museum objects, collections, and strategies of preservation as well as existential discussions on the meaning of museums. Moreover, exhibition analysis and technique, museum education, and visitors’ relations to museums and exhibitions have been examined. These are all highly relevant subjects within museological research because they concentrate on

¹³ Cf. Art and Authenticity, 12; see also Pearce, 23.
fundamental aspects of museums’ *raison d’être*, such as collections, exhibitions, and visitors. Furthermore, there are studies concerning museum architecture, both from contemporary and historical perspectives, some focusing on exhibition rooms, but mostly they are without perspectives on spatial perception and the spaces’ contribution to meaning making and experiences. Instead, these studies are often focused on design history and the technical aspects of exhibition production within museum spaces. Exhibition analyses generally tend to concentrate on modes such as objects, texts, dispositions, and context while visitor studies often regard space in terms of visitors’ movements in exhibition in order to find interesting patterns to analyse further.

All of the mentioned categories of studies concern space to some extent – they relate to museum space as a place that enables experience and meaning making thanks to its contents, namely the exhibition – but few focus specifically on the spatial factors that contribute to experience and meaning making in the moment. The intention here is to contribute with a study that not only takes museum space into consideration, but that keeps space and spatial design at the centre of attention and acknowledges spatial elements as essential for museum experiences to take place.

Conducting a study about museum space requires observations, preferably of museums within various categories, and I have selected five museums located in Rome for this purpose. The first museum is Museo dell’Ara Pacis, which is centred on one specific object, the antique peace altar Ara Pacis. The altar is displayed in a modern white building inaugurated in 2006 and designed by the American architect Richard Meier. The second is Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, which is the residence of the princely family Doria Pamphilj, but the apartments and the galleries are open to the public. The palace is largely characterized by a 17th and 18th century palace design and it contains a large private collection of art belonging to the family as well as its original settings and furniture. The third is Palazzo Massimo alle Terme or Palazzo Massimo, as it will be referred to henceforth. The building was erected in the 1880s and the museum has been a part of the National Roman Museum since the 1980s. Palazzo Massimo contains antique sculptures, jewelry, mosaics, and frescoes mainly excavated in the Roman area in the 1870s. The museum Centrale Montemartini is a former power plant inaugurated in 1912 that now displays antique sculptures previously stored in the magazines of Musei Capitolini. Finally, MAXXI was opened in 2010 and was designed by British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid and it treats contemporary Italian art and architecture.

These five museums represent a variety of museum categories, functions, and profiles, and their spaces have different designs and characteristics. They are well suitable to discuss and analyse in relation to a theoretical framework concerning experience and meaning making. Even though they are diverse, these museums can all be regarded as both art museums and museums of cultural history. MAXXI is the only exception because it is a museum that specifically focuses on contemporary art and architecture. However, considering the art-architecture combination, MAXXI is also a museum that crosses borders of categories. Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is also
referred to as Galleria Doria Pamphilj and it is, in that sense, an art museum that focuses on the Doria Pamphilj art collection, but its settings also imply an emphasis on cultural history. Palazzo Massimo and Centrale Montemartini display objects that are both cultural historical artefacts and artworks. Museo dell’Ara Pacis houses an object that clearly has the nature of a cultural historical artefact, but which in the present day is considered to be more of an artwork.

The exhibitions in the five museums, then, all contain artworks of some form and the objects in all of the museums are displayed and arranged in manners that are used in art museums, as if the intention is for them to evoke specifically aesthetic experiences within the viewer. Each of the different museum spaces described in this study contribute to such experiences in their own ways by creating relationships between the specific objects on display and the spatial designs and by framing the exhibitions with diverse meanings and results. The museums are studied with their own conditions, features, and functions taken into consideration. Also, they are comparable to other museums in the Western world within the same, or similar, categories. This makes the five museums worthy of a study completely focused on each one of their histories, architectures, and objects. Nevertheless, the museums are used here rather as case studies where their designs are observed, described, and analysed for the purpose of emphasizing certain characteristic properties and of discussing museum space on a more general level.

The results of these case studies in combination with theoretical approaches lead to various conclusions that, at the very least, initiate a discussion on the subject of the meaning of spatial design in museums. It is thus my attempt to examine how the spaces in specific museums can affect experiences and meaning making. It is also important to stress that the intention of this study is not necessarily to present specific methods for how museum spaces should or should not be designed in order to convey a specific atmosphere or message. The intention is rather to clarify the role that spatial design plays in museums and what effect it might have on visitors’ experiences and meaning making. This study is not focusing on how the spaces are intended to be perceived as much as on how they are perceived. That is not to say that the producer of the message, which in this case would be, for instance, a designer, curator, or architect, plays an insignificant role in this context. On the contrary, the producer is of great importance, because that person is the creator of the museum setting and its intended meaning. However, with a few exceptions, the main focus here is on perception and what the message conveys, how the spatial design is interpreted and experienced, and what it means for the receiver. Still, just as any museum visitor might do when exploring and contemplating an exhibition, I do occasionally take the liberty to speculate on the designers’ intentions in the descriptions and analyses of the museum spaces.
Aim and research questions

The aim of my dissertation is to analyse how spatial design in museums affects experiences and meaning making. Five museum spaces are examined through observations and individual experiences in dialogue with relevant theories with the intention of discussing the influences spatial elements have on exhibition experiences and meaning making.

What is communicated through spatial design in the five museums? What does space convey in relation to the contents of an exhibition? How can spatial design contribute to the experience of authenticity in museums? The themes of these questions are fundamental to this study but should be considered as matters for discussion and analysis rather than questions demanding definite answers. In fact, these questions, and my study in general, do not follow such a positivistic approach to the analysis of museum spaces and do not seek to provide conclusive solutions or formulas. A variety of aspects of museum spaces are deliberated here in order to show the complexity of their effects on experiences and meaning making. Subsequently, certain issues concerning spatial design in museums are distinguished as a result of these discussions.

The Roman context

Italy is considered to be one of the origins for the development of the museum concept. The practice of collecting and displaying artefacts dates as far back as to the Roman antiquity and during mainly the 16th century, Italian Princely families’ collections and chambers of curiosities would function as early versions of private museums. During the same century, the art gallery Uffizi was opened in Florence.\(^{15}\) Moreover, the long history of Rome has provided the city with a large treasure of cultural artefacts that are not only displayed in museums, but are a natural part of the city.\(^{16}\) The entire city of Rome might, in a sense, be considered an open-air museum. The five museums selected for this study all encapsulate Roman history from antiquity until today, through content, artefacts, and architecture. Although the museums’ approaches to Rome’s past differ, the city is what unites them.

The five museums presented above are not unique; similar museums can be found all over the Western world. One example is the Acropolis Museum in Athens, which contains a large number of ancient Greek objects mainly found around the area of the Acropolis. It houses parts of the Parthenon frieze, which is the central focus of the museum, just as the altar Ara Pacis is the central focus of Museo dell’Ara Pacis. Parallels can also be drawn between the spatial design of the two, both consisting of large windows, white shades and stone materials.

---


Palazzo Doria Pamphilj represents a museum category consisting of historic houses that have functioned, and is partially still functioning, as homes. They have been musealized because of their cultural and/or historical value and are often restored to resemble their original state. Palazzo Doria Pamphilj resembles many other palaces in Rome, some of which are still residences and yet partly containing public spaces, but also similar museums globally. Among these are Drottningholm Palace in Stockholm, built at the end of the 17th century and the home of the Swedish royal family; Amalienborg Palace, built in the 18th century in Copenhagen, also a royal residence; and the Prince’s Palace in Monaco, consisting of a number of buildings erected from the 13th to the 20th century and where the Prince of Monaco resides.

The Museum of London contains an exhibition displaying reconstructions of the kind of Roman houses that were located in England during the times of the Roman Empire. Spaces have been decorated and furnished accordingly with mosaics and frescoes covering the floors and walls in a similar manner as the museum spaces in Palazzo Massimo.

Centrale Montemartini is a museum that juxtaposes artefacts and spaces in an unconventional way. It belongs, therefore, to a certain category that includes, for example, Tate Modern in London, which is a former power station just like Centrale Montemartini but with none of the machines left. Musée D’Orsay in Paris is a somewhat rearranged Art Nouveau railway station now functioning as an art museum. Also, although it is not essentially focusing on art, the Red Dot Design Museum in Essen most closely resembles Centrale Montemartini. Being housed in a former coalmine industry building, the Red Dot Design Museum also contains original industrial interiors and machinery combined with exhibition installations.

MAXXI can be compared to the Groninger Museum in Groningen because of the latter’s unconventional character not only in its exteriors, but also its interiors. The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is another example of an unconventional museum building that, just like MAXXI, is well known for its architectural design and attracts visitors for that particular reason. Although these three art museums have many differences when it comes to, for instance, layout, and colour setting, they all represent the avant-garde of art museum designs.

The additional museums mentioned above are just a few examples comparable to the museums I have chosen to study and this shows that the latter can be considered to be samples of museums with similar themes and purposes. In other words, the five museums described here are not meant to be seen as exclusively Roman, but rather as an assortment representing a variety of museum types. In the comparisons above, it is specifically the concepts, designs, and functions that are corresponding rather than specific themes or objects as such. Consequently, what is characteristic for the five museums is the story of Rome as told from a Roman perspective through objects and information on location, while the manner in which the story is told, through spatial design, architecture, and disposition of exhibitions, can be compared to museums all over the world.
While each of the selected museums treats certain specified themes, they also represent histories and stories that are not always noticeably connected to the exhibitions and/or museum objects. All of these representations are included in the Roman context and chronology in different layers. The history of Museo dell’Ara Pacis is not only associated with antiquity, but it is also a part of the Fascist era because the 1930s was when the altar was finally excavated and the original museum was built. Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is not merely a part of the history of palace architecture and function. It also represents the prominence of the Doria Pamphilj family and to the culture of Roman princely families in general. Palazzo Massimo was originally a palace but it also has a history of being a Jesuit college that includes it in a specifically Roman religious context. Centrale Montemartini is a museum for classical art but it is also a representation of the industrial era of Rome. Although the industrial elements inside the building make this connection explicit, it is not obvious that Centrale Montemartini was the first power plant in the city and that it provided the Romans with their first electricity and that it thereby has made its mark on the history of Rome. MAXXI contains contemporary art and architecture design and thereby also represents the Roman vanguard at large. Because Hadid’s characteristic style is particularly manifested in her design of the museum, her role as an architect is emphasized in the chapter treating MAXXI, more so than any other architect in any other chapter of this study. Although Meier, the architect of Museo dell’Ara Pacis, also made an impact on the Roman cityscape with his distinctive museum design, his building follows certain regulations and principles of architecture that Hadid does not seem to have implemented in her design of MAXXI. The museum, built outside the city walls, is unconventional in contrast to the classical architecture within the walls. The various museums located in Rome contain artefacts of different eras that are displayed in buildings and spaces from different times in the city’s long and eventful history. The many temporal and spatial dimensions thus makes Rome a place that offers a wide range of possibilities for research within the museological field.

Method

Spatial studies in general is a diverse research field that includes methods such as mapping spatial relations from a geometric and topological perspective, studying peoples’ movements when moving through spaces or, as in the case of this study, observing and describing one’s own perceptions of a spatial setting. Exhibition analysis, which is often applied in museum contexts, is more focused on displays and their design and contents. It might include analytical approaches to texts, images, objects, and settings using different theoretical approaches such as narrativity, semiotics, and discourse analysis, but it is by no means limited in its methodological potentials. My study places itself within the field of exhibition analysis in the sense that it treats museum contents as entities that are concerned with subjects such as
experience, perception, and meaning making. However, because my study has a specifically spatial focus, the method that has been used here resembles that of an exhibition analysis, but the elements which were studied differ. Furthermore, the various aspects of spatial studies complement the methodological framework with their emphasis specifically on spatial relations.

I have used an observational method and my study material consists of notes, photographs, floor plans, and audio recordings as a supplement to the actual observations. 17 The museum observations were performed between September 2011 and April 2012. Through detailed descriptions of the spaces and my experiences in relation to spatial design, I attempt to concretize the theories on space perception and meaning that are introduced in this study. The descriptions are made from a perceptual perspective, which means that they are based on my impressions from being present in the spaces. Floor plans and photographs are used as illustrations, but it should be stressed that neither floor plans nor photographs can replace the sensation of being present in museum spaces. Although the colours, light, layout, and volume depicted in the photographs give an indication of what the spaces are like, they do not always sufficiently reproduce details such as nuances of colour or light, of spaciousness or disposition. Therefore, the photographs should be regarded as an addition to the written descriptions. Moreover, for copyright reasons the amount and qualities of the photographs vary throughout the chapters. The chapter treating Palazzo Doria Pamphilj specifically contains fewer images than the other chapters because of copyright regulations and a no photography-policy in the museum.

The observations and analyses of the spaces are described in dialogue with theories introduced below as a comparing and corresponding discussion between my experiences and theoretical perspectives on spatial and communicative aspects in the observed spaces. This procedure of observing and describing a certain subject matter, and then analysing it by relating to relevant theories within the specific area of research, is an approach that resembles methodologies used within the fields of, for example, literary studies, art history, ethnology, and studies of architecture. Still, in the context of this study it is a method that is relatively rare, especially considering the focus is on spatial design in museums more than on the exhibitions or objects. As a result, my methodological approach combined with theoretical aspects provides a composition of viewpoints through which spatial experiences as such can be discussed and reflected upon.

**Observation method**

In her article “The Grande Galerie de l’Evolution” (2005), Fabienne Galangau-Quérat, associate professor of museology, states,

17 Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University.
[...] space can be creative when it enables the visitor to get a dynamic and new understanding of the exhibits and contents, or when it becomes a part or a formal meaningful element which can integrate exhibits, giving them sense. In other words, space can be creative when there is an holistic integration between the space, exhibits and visitors, so that none of these elements can play an autonomous part without the help of the others. More clearly, in such a spatial context, the elements can no longer exist separately.

Galangau-Quérat’s article specifically refers to the gallery of evolution in the National Museum of Natural History in Paris, where she also works, but her conclusion can be applied to essentially any museum and exhibition space. All the elements and components of a museum space and its contents, including oneself and other visitors in the space, are reliant on each other to create a specific experience. If separated or combined with other elements, the experience and meaning become something different. Discovering what this meaning can be requires presence in the actual space. Therefore, in order to describe and analyse each of the museum spaces in this study, I formed a method plan consisting of six steps. The plan was used in each of the museums to make them comparable with the aim of systematizing and structuring the visits. The six steps consist of:

1. Entering the space and perceiving it while moving through it.
2. Describing the experiences in an audio recorder.
3. Describing the spatial design with a focus on certain themes.
4. Revisiting the space five times with varied intervals and at different hours of the day. On every visit, steps 1, 2 and 3 were repeated.
5. During one of the visits, conversing with a first-time visitor about her or his experiences.
6. Analysing my own descriptions and reflections, as well as the comments of the first-time visitors, in relation to theoretical perspectives.

The themes mentioned in step 3 consist of specific factors that affect the experiences of a space. The most central themes are layout and form, disposition of exhibitions, material and mass, volume and proportions, and light and colours. These are formulated in order to systematize the observations otherwise the perceptions would most likely have been too unfocused and distracted for me to be able to collect concrete, cohesive, and meaningful impressions in each of the museum spaces. Moreover, the observation scheme is formed in an attempt to identify the essential atmospheres and qualities of each of the museum spaces. Experiencing the spaces in different lights during each of the five visits would give varying results because museum spaces might change from one visit to the next. Still, this observation scheme also shows what does not vary with changing conditions. While certain spatial factors appear to

vary with every visit, some do not, and the sum of these elements – those that change and those that remain constant – is what I have chosen to consider as the core essence of the spaces. However, the spatial conditions are not the only things that change from visit to visit; there are also external factors such as the weather or the traffic on the way to the museum. The condition of the visitors of a space, for example, if they are of a certain mood or state of health at the moment, is also important to consider. As museologist Peter van Mensch points out in his article “Catching the Space Between the Objects” (2012), a seemingly simple question such as whether we have had our coffee before a visit or not can have an impact on the results of our museum experiences.\(^\text{19}\) Thus, visiting every museum space on five occasions at different time intervals and during different external and internal conditions gives a general enough impression of the different conditions in which the spaces can be experienced. It also provides familiarity with the spaces and this enables the recognition of the differences between the dynamic and more permanent elements of the spaces.

An important point is that exhibition space and its content cannot be separated from each other in terms of perception; they are unconditionally adjoined. This is evident in the descriptions and analysis of each of the museums treated here, where elements such as light and colour or volume and proportions might intertwine and create an effect that is not strictly bound to one factor or the other, but rather to the combination of the two. As philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre emphasizes in *The Production of Space* (1974), rooms cannot be considered “empty ‘mediums’, in the sense of containers distinct from their contents.”\(^\text{20}\) Lefebvre argues that the rooms of a house can be closed off by walls but cannot be detached from the domestic context of the home, claiming they are thereby “distinguishable yet not separable.”\(^\text{21}\) The same can be said of the relation between space and its contents. The themes in focus in this work should, therefore, not be considered as exclusive or strictly separate, but rather as complementing each other. The character and atmosphere of the space is indisputably the result of the combinations of a number of elements.

The spatial layouts and forms of the rooms in each museum are described mainly to give an indication of the floor plan of the museum. This also gives an understanding of the possible routes that one might follow in the museum. The descriptions of the disposition of exhibitions explain the arrangement of displays and how the settings are disposed in the spaces. However, the objects as such have been studied and described to various extents in each museum. For example, the main hall of Museo dell’Ara Pacis only contains one object that, due to its position in the

---


\(^{21}\) Ibid.
museum, has been more thoroughly examined than the exhibition objects in the other museums, which contain a number of artefacts and artworks.

The descriptions of material and mass focus on architectural components and occasionally on the artefacts and their frames and cases depending on the experienced effect their material has on the spaces. Mass represents the thickness of architectural elements, such as walls or columns, and the perceived massiveness of the materials, for instance, heavy wood or thick textiles. Volume refers to the perception of the spatiality of the room, while proportion refers to how the experience of the volume evokes a feeling of being small, of being enclosed or free to move around, or of the space as being overwhelming. These factors might have an effect on the perception of the atmosphere in the museum.

As for light, I describe both natural and artificial light, how they are directed, their intensity and flow, and the relations between light and darkness. Because the observations have taken place at different times of the day and during various weather conditions, the natural light has changed from visit to visit and in turn, so has the light’s effect on the exhibition spaces. I also focus on colours as a part of the composition of the museum space and exhibition design. The colouration of the settings, walls, floors, surrounding environments, and objects affects experience and meaning making on many different levels. Because colours are contingent on light, colours too might vary in saturation and tone depending on the conditions of the natural and artificial light and thus their effect in the space might also change.\footnote{Col. Color: Communication in Architectural Space, eds. Gerhard Meerwein, Bettina Rodeck & Frank H. Mahnke (1998), 1st Eng. ed. (Basel, Boston & Berlin: Birkhäuser Verlag AG 2007), 18.}

As shown above, factors such as sound, smell, and temperature are largely left out of my observations. Museums sometimes use acoustics and smell in exhibitions in order to create effects and interesting perspectives. Many of our senses are simultaneously active during a museum visit. Our senses are not isolated entities but rather, they cooperate; even though we might perceive something visually because we are specifically using our eyes, the other senses are still constantly receptive to stimuli and add information to what the eyes see.\footnote{Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sense and Non-Sense [Sens et non-sens] (1948), Eng. transl. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1964), 15, 49-50.} Sound, smell, and temperature-related sensations are a significant part of physical perception and it is often difficult to distinguish exactly which sense that is active at a certain moment. Still, in order to make the descriptions the five museum spaces comprehensible it proved necessary at an early stage to focus on specific senses and vision and tactility appeared to be the most appropriate when it comes to spatial studies.\footnote{Cf. Susanna Millar, Space and Sense (Hove & New York: Psychology Press/Taylor & Francis Group 2008), 2, 27 ff.} Although the other senses have unavoidably affected the experiences, the sensations of seeing and feeling space have been the most distinguishable by choice.

Naturally, the analyses of the museum spaces differ as a result of their individual characteristic designs. However, as seen above, I have used the same method for all of the museums in an attempt to examine the spaces from similar perspec-
tives. I have chosen not to include audio tours in the observations for two reasons. First, not all of the museums offer audio tours. Even though most of them do, they were not used so as to maintain equivalent observations in all of the spaces. Second, and more importantly, this study is concerned with what spatial design communicates and how space conveys meaning and I have chosen to focus on these factors in as direct a manner as possible. It might be argued that audio guides should not take anything away from the spatial experience of a museum visit, and their use is not opposed here. However, because the kind of spatial experience that is analysed here is mainly based on the sensations of vision and tactility, those factors are also prioritized. The issue of information, provided through written texts and labels, is touched upon in several cases and as it is shown later a lack of it can become a problem during a museum visit, a problem that could be resolved if one had chosen to take an audio tour. Still, when information is set aside, the spatial design of a specific museum can convey meanings that are even more distinguishable and might do so directly through its spatial features, setting, and atmosphere.

A certain space already has a specific atmosphere, but we also bring perceptions and feelings with us into the spatial experience when visiting the space. In his book *Human Space* (1963) philosopher Otto Friedrich Bollnow describes being in a space as a reciprocal experience:

> […] the character of the space surrounding the individual has an effect on his mood. So we have a reciprocal influence: the psychological state of the person determines the character of his surrounding space, and conversely the space then affects his psychological state. Every concrete space in which we find ourselves, whether interior or exterior space, as such already has a particular character of mood, has its human qualities, so to speak, and these again, among other things, as the simplest determinants, condition the experiences of narrowness and width of a particular space.  

Spaces, and most certainly museum spaces, set the mood for visitors – but one does not enter a museum as a blank slate. Some sort of anticipation is almost unavoidably present, whether it is of a positive or negative nature. Also, the mood that one is in at the moment plays a part. This would inevitably have affected the results of each of my museum visits and thereby also affected my descriptions and analyses. I am aware that the museum visits are not described from a neutral standpoint, because this would be an impossible task. Rather, they are the results of the impressions made at a specific time and place. As noted above, I have visited each museum on five occasions, not with the intention to fully decrease the effect of my personal mood, but in order to maximize the possibility of general conclusions of the analysis of the spaces. This also means that with each visit came further preconceptions that in turn would reduce the possibility to perceive the museum spaces in the same way

a first-time visitor would. My experiences were also already affected by theories and analyses. For that reason, speaking to someone who did not have the theoretical and spatial perspective beforehand was one of the activities apart from my own observations, and this brought other aspects into the analysis. Part of the method was, then, as seen in step five, to talk to one first-time visitor per museum. The intention was to let these visitors, or reference persons, reflect on their experiences from another standpoint than my own when perceiving the space for the first time. Their comments should be seen as supplements to my analyses of the spaces in relation to theorists and philosophers.26

The reference persons participating in the study tended to focus on areas that they found particularly appealing or problematic. In her book *Tinget, rumnet, besökaren* (2010), Eva Insulander, researcher and lecturer of didactics at Stockholm University, analyses personal meaning making by examining visitors’ own interests and focus.27 She uses a qualitative method in which she gives museum visitors a task: they are supposed to document their individual experiences during their visits. Insulander shows that museum visitors generally find certain objects, topics, or sections of the displays interesting – whether in a positive or negative sense – and tend to focus specifically on these during their reports.28 In my conversations with first-time visitors, it was evident that particular perspectives caught their eyes and these were central during our talks. Also, they all spontaneously mentioned spatial factors in one way or another. This showed that museum visitors focus on different aspects of spatial elements during their visits and, more importantly, that space is extensively considered by all of them, although not always consciously.29

In her dissertation *Rummet & människans rörelser* (1996), architect Inger Bergström examines how spatial elements and shapes affect human behaviour.30 Her study is partially based on individuals’ reactions to architectural forms. She claims that movement patterns are closely related to spatial design and layout and factors such as volume and form can be used in order to create a certain spatial atmosphere that she calls the “spatial choreographic effect.”31 For another part of her study, Bergström uses a method in which she describes her own spatial perceptions and experiences of a monastery. While walking through the spaces, she observes what she is experiencing and then reformulates her impressions in written text, describing first her feelings and movements in the encounter with the spaces and then analysing these in relation to the spatial forms and layouts. The method I use is similar to Bergström’s in the sense that I also lean on my own observations and descriptions as

26 The reference persons have been given fictious names.
28 Ibid., 53, 260 ff.
29 The reports of the reference persons’ impressions were recorded and then edited from transcriptions. However, their thoughts on the visit on the whole are all accounted for in the descriptions.
31 Ibid., 93. My translation.
the basis for my analysis. Such a methodological approach might suggest that the evaluations could become highly subjective. Even though I do not believe that it is necessary to try to erase all subjective perspectives, it is still important to emphasize the principles of intersubjectivity as a point of departure here. This study does not try to fulfil the impossible task of achieving full objectivity, but rather it examines aspects on spatial experience in museums that appear to be common for most human beings. Bergström claims that our movements and experiences in relation to space and architecture are similar to each other because we have certain features, behaviours, and characteristics in common. She even argues that this is, as she describes it, “species induced.” Although it might be premature to generalize and thereby reduce human behaviour to a species-related matter, it is still clear that many of our instincts and reflexes are congenital. Additionally, we learn from our experiences how to relate to our environment through physical interactivity with other human beings. Thus, the assumption of this study is that human behaviour can be seen as being both induced by instincts and based on experiences. Like Bergström, I would also argue that people are similar enough to make intersubjectivity a plausible argument for drawing conclusions based on my own analysed experiences.

I am attempting to describe what happens during my museum visits by analysing the sensations that occur as a reaction to the spatial design. I do so by observing what my own body senses. It is relevant to ask the question of what feelings and sensations really mean in relation to my methodological approach and to the subject of spatial experience. This is an analysis of how designs and settings contribute to the atmosphere of a space, and the atmosphere of a space, per definition, affects our impressions. Spaces might contain atmospheric characteristics that evoke emotions such as gloom or cheerfulness, but my aim is not primarily to examine the kinds of feelings spatial design evokes as much as how and why they are evoked. To become emotional about an experience is not the same as observing that an emotion occurs as a reaction to an experience. Should a feeling of gloom appear, for example, I do not extensively describe the emotion gloominess – unless it is of importance to the analysis – but rather consider the spatial properties that induced that particular feeling. Moreover, most descriptions in this study focus on other kinds of sensations than those associated with instinctive emotional responses and effects, like gloom or cheerfulness. Instead, the observations are more concerned with physical perceptions and impressions of the senses, such as the sensation of warmth from a red colour, harshness from a coarse stone wall or freshness and airiness from a bright open space. Consequently, the term feeling, which can mean both an emotion and feeling in relation to the physical senses, is used mainly as an indicator of impressions. To feel is rarely related to an emotional experience here, but is rather an indicator of an inner reaction that is less emotional and more sensational. Thus, the perspective that is applied here is concentrated on the senses’ reactions to the interaction between the museum space and the human body.

Theory

The theoretical framework of this study can be seen as a theoretical collage. It is assembled from a variety of disciplines apart from museology, including semiotics and multimodality, art and architecture theory, hermeneutics, and phenomenology. The theories present different aspects of spatial experience in relation to exhibition perception from a museological perspective. Applying the collage metaphor, the theories and philosophies might appear to consider disparate themes and disciplines, but the collaging itself can be seen as an attempt to use them in such a manner that they together create a dynamic whole. Olsen uses the word eclecticism to describe the varied assembly of theoretical approaches that he applies in his study of the meaning of objects. He claims that his choice of using eclecticism as a theoretical approach is based on the conclusion that the complexity of objects as such cannot be explained by only one theoretical or philosophical approach.33 The same can be said of spaces and, therefore, a study that examines museum spaces specifically and the experiential and meaning making aspects of spaces requires an eclectic theoretical collage suitable for that exact subject matter. The interdisciplinary framework that is presented below is made up of particularly significant key issues, such as experiences of spatiality and spatial design or visual communication and physicality, and seek to describe the bodily presence in a space and the body’s reactions when confronted with various materials. An essential presumption in this collage is the principle of intersubjectivity as a basis for communication and phenomenological perspectives on the body as the source of experiences. The latter theme is the first to be treated below because it describes the foundation which the issues of experience and meaning making are built upon. Before developing further theoretical perspectives on aspects such as sensations of atmosphere and communications of meaning, then, we begin with the core substance of every human’s individual being: the body.

Phenomenological approaches to space

In his Phenomenology of Perception (1945), philosopher and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty states, “In order to perceive things, we need to live them.”34 Although it might be challenging to establish what exactly it is that phenomenology represents, this quotation seems to summarize its essence. As Jan Bengtsson, professor of philosophy of education at the University of Gothenburg, states in his book Sammanflätningar (1988), phenomenology sees no reason to question the existence of the world.35 Instead, it engages in the issues of how we as human beings relate to the world, or more precisely the Lebenswelt or lifeworld, the world as we perceive

33 Olsen, 14.
it. Methodologically, it is a philosophy that is more concerned with description than with analysis and explanation.36

How phenomenology has been used by philosophers and theorists as an approach to spatial studies has varied throughout its relatively short history. One of the more original phenomenological studies of spatiality was presented by philosopher Gaston Bachelard in his book *The Poetics of Space* (1958).37 Here, Bachelard treats the concept of the house or, more accurately, the first home of our early childhood, using poetry, memories, and dreams as an approach to explain the meaning of our personal relations to the house. It is an exploration of corners, furniture, distances, and spatial distinctions as well as of memories and dreams of the home with poetry as the methodological instrument to put imagination into words. However, although Bachelard is a source of inspiration in this study, his poetic approach to space is not always logically compatible with the methods and perspectives adapted here. The following discussion will, therefore, mainly concern Merleau-Ponty and his phenomenological perspectives on the body’s experiences of the environment, which are some of the fundamental points of departure in this study.

According to Merleau-Ponty, it is the fact that we have bodies that allows us to have access to the world.38 This idea had been elaborated upon in a phenomenological context even before Merleau-Ponty. For instance, his predecessor Edmund Husserl and contemporary fellow philosopher Martin Heidegger had established certain fundamental positions, such as an interest in the world as it appears to us and a desire to return to the essence of things.39 Without going too far into detail on Husserl’s and Heidegger’s work, it can be established that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, as well as Husserl in his later work, are engaged with our presence in the world in one way or another. Merleau-Ponty further engaged specifically in the bodily interaction with the world and developed the problematizing of the subject-object dichotomy that Heidegger had also been concerned with.40 Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the body as a part of the subject differs from the philosopher René Descartes’ idea of the two as separate. Descartes’ distinction between the mental and the physical – “res cogitas” versus “res extensa” – meant separating the body and the consciousness into two separate functions.41 Merleau-Ponty criticizes this bilateral division between the subject, or consciousness, and the world that Descartes, and later also Kant, advocated.42 Instead, “rather than a mind and a body, man is a mind

---

40 Olsen, 67.
41 Bengtsson, 71; Olsen, 64.
42 Merleau-Ponty (2002), x.
“with a body,” Merleau-Ponty states. It thereby becomes apparent that he has a completely different approach to this issue, being concerned with, in Olsen’s words, the matters of “I can” and “I do” before considering Descartes’ “I think.”

Descartes did not trust the senses, because he did not believe they could provide him with correct knowledge about the world. This perspective is based on the idea that the senses and feelings of the body are generally unreliable while the mind is clear. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, recognizes knowledge of the world as first and foremost mediated through all of our senses. He argues:

> The world is there before any possible analysis of mine, and it would be artificial to make it the outcome of a series of syntheses which link, in the first place sensations, then aspects of the object corresponding to different perspectives, when both are nothing but products of analysis, with no sort of prior reality.

For Merleau-Ponty it is obvious that for a conscious reflection to happen at all there has to be a physical sensation from which to gather impressions, otherwise there is nothing to reflect upon. He establishes this further by stating, “The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions.” He uses Saint Augustine’s expression “the inner man” to illustrate, and oppose, the idea of an autonomous consciousness as the possessor of truth. In fact, Merleau-Ponty claims, “there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself.”

This perspective clarifies Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the body as the source of not only impressions, experiences, and sensations, but also of the act of thinking, reflecting, and conscious meaning making. It reveals an interconnection between body, mind and world that can be described as a relationship where consciousness is entwined in the body in the same way as the body is incorporated in the world.

Bengtsson argues that Descartes’ perspective on the body as object, on the one hand, and the consciousness as subject, on the other hand, as being completely separate entities is not supportable. This is because it would mean that we as humans, or rather as bodies, would only perceive each other as just bodies, i.e. as objects or things and not as subjects such as ourselves. Bengtsson, however, claims that if we would in fact not recognize other human beings as subjects, as minds with

---

43 Merleau-Ponty (2004), 56.
44 Olsen, 78.
45 Jonas Frykman, Berörd: Plats, kropp och ting i fenomenologisk kulturanalys (Stockholm: Carlssons 2012), 76.
46 Merleau-Ponty (2002), x-xi.
47 Ibid., x, 170.
48 Ibid., xi-xii.
49 Ibid., xii.
50 Frykman, 102.
bodies, we would not be able to interact with and relate to others in the way we do.\textsuperscript{51} This would suggest that Descartes’ idea of the world as completely objective to the subjective mind is not sustainable. The fact that we do relate to others and acknowledge them not just as objects, but as individuals with their own subjective perspectives on life, opens up the possibility for intersubjective experiences, which will be discussed further below, and could also be extended to an elaboration on our involvement in the world at large.

According to Olsen, one of phenomenology’s most important insights was that “we relate to the world not (only) as thinking subjects but also as bodily objects – our ‘being-in’ this world is a concrete existence of involvement that unites us with the world.”\textsuperscript{52} Merleau-Ponty develops this perspective further in his deliberations on how to define the body. By giving emphasis to the individual as a subject \textit{with} a body, he indicates that the body can be both subject and object at the same time. To illustrate this, he uses an example where the left hand touches the right hand; as the left hand moves it remains the subject while the other hand is the object. When the left hand grabs the right one, however, the right can sense the left one and suddenly the right hand, in a sense, becomes the subject and the left becomes the object.\textsuperscript{53} Thus, Merleau-Ponty deconstructs the dichotomy of subject-object by showing not only that we as subjects are entangled in the world, but that we can be both objects and subjects. His definition of subject is \textit{one’s own lived body}, as Bengtsson describes it, but one’s own body can also appear as an object to itself.\textsuperscript{54} Interpreting Merleau-Ponty, this insinuates that in addition to being subjects-objects to ourselves and in relation to other humans, we can also be objects in the material world.\textsuperscript{55} In Merleau-Ponty’s words, a human is a being who “can only get to the truth of things because its body is, as it were, embedded in those things.”\textsuperscript{56} This suggests that the body can be something of a thing among other things, or perhaps matter among other matter.\textsuperscript{57} In his descriptions of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, Olsen examines the philosopher’s perspectives on what this relationship between body and world consists of and how it is formed. “According to Merleau-Ponty, the mutual ‘presentness’ of people and things is grounded in our common being as tangible,” Olsen states.\textsuperscript{58} Merleau-Ponty, then, considers the physical material of the body to be one of the most central factors in our experiential detection of our environment, and our environment’s detection of us. He explains that a relationship between the self and the surrounding world is possible only because we can feel our bodies from

\textsuperscript{51} Bengtsson, 72; cf. Husserl, 110-111.
\textsuperscript{52} Olsen, 67.
\textsuperscript{54} Bengtsson, 71.
\textsuperscript{55} Merleau-Ponty (1968), 133-134; Olsen, 67.
\textsuperscript{56} Merleau-Ponty (2004), 56.
\textsuperscript{57} Cf. Olsen, 67.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 131.
within and from without. We can touch our left hand with the right and feel the left hand as an object while simultaneously sensing both of them from within. A hand that “takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part,” Merleau-Ponty suggests.\(^{59}\) He continues, “It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication.”\(^{60}\) Accordingly, the bodily material, the flesh, is the link between the world and the consciousness. It is a link without which the ability to fully be embedded in, and to fully relate to, the external environment would be lost, or as Merleau-Ponty himself stresses, “far from my body’s being for me no more than a fragment of space, there would be no space at all for me if I had no body.”\(^{61}\) Thus, the body is the material entity that connects us to the world, being both subject and object to ourselves and to other humans. The assumption here is that mind and body are one and that subject and object can be perceived as one and the same and this places this study within the field of spatial analyses inspired by phenomenological approaches to experience.

I am aware that I occasionally distinguish mind from body and sensation from thought in my text. This might be perceived as contradictory because one of the aims of this work is to challenge these dichotomous interruptions. Still, explaining a phenomenon without addressing it with its own terminology proves difficult when one is in the initial stage of identifying perspectives for analysing a subject – in this case, the role that spatial design plays in a museum experience – and finding a language in which to do it. The vocabulary in these discussions is used simply because I have found no other, even though the intention is to argue for a conjunction of the oppositions that such dichotomies represent and to try to clarify how a deconstruction of the separation of mind and body might open doors for other approaches to spatial experiences. I will also continue to use the words body and mind in order to explain physical experiences in relation to reflection and meaning making and to make the descriptions of perceptions and analyses comprehensible. It is crucial to emphasize that even if there might be distinctions in language, the interdependent nature of consciousness and body is a fundamental aspect of this study. Nevertheless, there is complexity in tackling the issue of body and mind as combined instead of submitting to the dichotomy of subject and object, because the dichotomy is an established perspective on human nature and has been so for a long time. Describing the experience of a museum space easily becomes a matter of a perception of the mind, on the one hand, and a sensation of the body, on the other. However, it is assumed here that a museum experience, as any other experience, is not divided into pure thought and pure physical sensation. On the contrary, thought and sensation are at all times active, interconnected and cooperating. Visiting a

\(^{59}\) Merleau-Ponty (1968), 133.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 135.
\(^{61}\) Merleau-Ponty (2002), 117.
museum space involves thinking and analysing, but the first experience of the space is a perception of the body that, in its correlation with the mind, makes it possible for us to make meaning out of the perceived.

Merleau-Ponty often concerns himself with the relationship between space and body in his work. These specific discussions mainly focus on the concept of space; on spatiality as volume, as space to move, and as the distance between objects rather than the spatial properties of a physical room. He engages in issues of experiencing direction, distances, movement, and the body’s expansion in space, which in short can be described as a study in human space that focuses on the functions of the body in space, such as retinal perceptions of distances, walking, and comprehending positions. Because this study concerns tangible space and spatial design, the two attentions differ somewhat, although they do intertwine on certain levels. Merleau-Ponty’s writings on space are slightly less used here than his aspects on experience and presence. This is due to the fact that the aspects that he considers in relation to spatial perception are further from the subject matters considered in the chapters of this study than the theories he largely presents. Nevertheless, the phenomenological perspectives discussed above are to be considered as the very core of the theoretical collage that is presented here.

(Inter)subjectivity, meaning making, and authenticity

My perspectives on spatial perception are founded on the assumption that interactions between bodily experiences and external physical elements function as a communicational, haptic, and sensational relationship in which meaning is produced. However, what kind of meaning these perceptions induce for the individual depend not only on cultural differences, but also on subjective differences that are based, for example, on emotional aspects and social backgrounds. Certain social contexts shape individuals and, therefore, their experiences vary from person to person. For instance, having grown up in a bright and open house on a beach, in a skyscraper in a major city, or a small cottage in the woods might affect your idea of what is a home-like and safe environment as well as what you find appealing when it comes to architecture, spatial design, light, and colour settings. Still, human beings communicate with each other verbally and through body language and behaviour and these factors are constantly at play during communicational acts. We converse about and with our environment and, in so doing, we gain understanding of the intersubjective world we live in.

The term (inter)subjectivity is used here as a definition of how we as human beings are simultaneously subjects – with individual opinions and perspectives – and social beings whose thoughts and behaviours are influenced by others in the shared community that we as humans constantly produce and reproduce. We are always both independent and dependent at the same time whether we are consciously aware of it or not. As established above, Merleau-Ponty is particularly concerned with the
body as the source for our ability to be in the world and to perceive our environments. This is not only evident in our subjective experiences, but it is also essential for our capacity to function with, and understand, other humans. As human beings we are built in similar ways and, therefore, we believe that we should function and act in similar ways and thus also deal with the world similarly. Thereby, one can say that our bodies co-operate and that our natural mode of interaction and communication with other human beings and the environment is through our bodies. Following such a line of thought, there are perspectives within phenomenology that accept intersubjectivity as a collectively created phenomenon and as the result of human communication.

In *Truth and Method* (1960) the philosopher of hermeneutics Hans-Georg Gadamer uses the term *horizon* when describing our individual views on the world. Our horizons are based on our opinions, experiences, knowledge, and understanding of both our immediate environments and the world at large. “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point,” as Gadamer describes it. Yet, instead of being restrictive, horizons are essential because they enable us to see beyond what is closest to us. “A person who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him,” Gadamer stresses, indicating that a lack of horizon makes a person limited and perhaps even narrow-minded. Looking beyond what is nearest means that we can acquire understanding of what is more distant and, as Gadamer puts it, “see it better within a larger whole and in truer proportions.” The horizon enables us to imagine and to understand other human beings and the world in general. Communication between two people occurs when one’s horizon is fused with another’s and the two individuals find a certain connection. Consequently, we find common ground in a “higher universality” that enables us to communicate through this fusion of horizons. In this study, the concept of fusing horizons becomes relevant in relation to the first-time visitors’ comments on the museum spaces in relation to my own experiences. The matter of having, or not having, the same impressions of a space become particularly apparent as our horizons fuse. Do we experience the spaces similarly or do the meanings we make out of them completely differ, and what do the results of such a comparison reveal about the space and its design? Moreover, fusion of horizons occurs between museum visitors and exhibition designers and it then becomes a matter of how visitors’ perceive the message or meaning that the designer has intended to convey through the exhibition arrangement.

---

64 Ibid., 269.
65 Ibid., 269.
66 Ibid., 272.
67 Ibid.
Do intention and interpretation correspond as the horizons fuse? This approach to communication shall be examined further shortly. However, not only is the fusing of individuals’ horizons relevant here, but Gadamer’s view on understanding history is also applicable to museum experiences in this case, because four out of the five selected museums display mainly historical objects and three of these displays are set within historical spaces. With Gadamer’s development of the concept of historical horizons, which are a part of the kind of horizon described above, he presents an approach to historical understanding that is based on an idea of a continuous past and this can be seen as related to tradition and to the fusion of tradition with present interpretations. In relation to museum experiences, this provides an interesting perspective on presence and perception in historical environments as well as on the roles that imagination, understanding, and interpretation play during a museum visit.

Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty maintain that communication in general is based on both subjective and intersubjective experiences. Individuals communicate and thus we understand a reality in time and space that we call objective and that belongs to us all. The division between individual and collective experiences is not absolute, according to Heidegger. Even our own individual experiences are inevitably affected by communication. In other words, certain phenomena and elements in our world are experienced in similar ways because we have obtained information about them beforehand, more or less consciously. Other people’s opinions affect the individual’s conception. As John Donne once said, “No man is an island.”

Experience and meaning making are both dependent on (inter)subjective positions. In museum spaces they are a result of reading messages and interpreting certain codes as well as of feeling and sensing the environment. Mark Johnson, knight professor of liberal arts and sciences and author of *The Meaning of the Body* (2007), stresses, echoing Merleau-Ponty, that the mind cannot function without the body because the body is the medium through which we experience the world. Johnson also opposes the body-mind dualism that he describes as having become the dominating perspective in Western philosophy. Challenging the hierarchies of mind and body, the former generally being considered the “higher” and the latter regarded as the “lower”, Johnson instead argues that the mind is fully embodied and that thought, meaning, feelings, and experiences are equally connected within every human being.

Here, I use a broad definition of experience and include everything our senses and minds detect and register. These experiences range from the first impressions,

---

69 Gadamer, 269 ff; cf. Warnke, 90-91
74 Ibid., 1 ff.
like when stepping into a room for the first time, to a comprehensive experience, such as a completed museum visit. Thus, experience is closely related to an immediate perception or sensation, but it can also be described as something that, as it evolves, becomes an experience, as is emphasized by philosopher John Dewey in his book *Art as Experience* (1934). Experience can be the initial sensation of something— that which happens before we have the time to reflect upon it—and it can be seen as a more or less constant flow of perceptions that are unconsciously significant for our ability to perceive the world. Meaning making is the next phase, in which the experience begins to make sense. Johnson emphasizes that meaning making is a process that occurs within the individual, when feelings and experiences become understandable, and this is a process that emerges in relations between elements of any kind. Johnson states, “Human meaning concerns the character and significance of a person’s interactions with their environments. The meaning of a specific aspect or dimension of some ongoing experience is that aspect’s connection to other parts of past, present, or future (possible) experiences.” Meaning making is constantly proceeding on a multitude of levels within the individual, more or less consciously—but once again, communication and interaction is central. As Johnson describes it, meaning is both “(1) grounded in our bodily interactions—in the qualities and structures of objective situations; and (2) always social, because it would not exist in its fullness without communicative interactions and shared language, which give us the means of exploring the meaning of things.” Again, through communication we can formulate an understanding for the intersubjective world we share.

In this study, the aspects of meaning making, experience, and bodily presence discussed above are set in relation to museum contexts and to authenticity as a part of the museum visit. Within academic disciplines such as history, archaeology, and museology authenticity might first and foremost be considered to be embedded within historical artefacts or environments. Historic authenticity can be discussed from several perspectives, like when displayed spaces and objects have been restored or preserved to resemble their original state and are experienced as they used to appear, or when displayed spaces and objects that have not been restored or preserved, which is very rare in museums, are experienced as they are now and showing the ravages of time. It can also be discussed what it means for authenticity when spaces and objects have been moved from their original location and set in a new environment, such as a museum. Authenticity as a property of objects is not treated here as extensively as experienced authenticity. The focus is, therefore, on authenticity as perceived by visitors in their meeting with certain elements in a museum.

---

76 Johnson, 265-268.
77 Ibid., 10.
78 Ibid., 266.
Experiences of authenticity can be evoked by compositions of settings, spatial designs, and atmospheres. However, authentic experiences are not only catalysed by displayed historical material, but also by contemporary spaces or artefacts, such as modern architecture and artworks that refer to other aspects than the past. Experiences of authenticity of the present are just as complex as historical authenticity, perhaps even more so, as will be seen in the analyses of this study.

Considering theoretical approaches like Gadamer’s historical understanding and Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the body as our instrument for perceiving the world, it becomes evident that experience and meaning making are also central when discussing issues of authenticity. We perceive and understand what is represented in museums not only from looking at objects, but from experiencing the elements such as various forms of information, positions, juxtapositions, and, certainly, spatial design. Without factors that place museum artefacts in a certain context, the authenticity embedded in the objects would not be communicated to us. If we regard authenticity as something that is experienced in relation to historical and contemporary elements and that depends on spatial context, the exhibition contents and design as well as the perceivers’ individual perspectives and preconceptions, become relevant when studying the effects of spatial design in museums.

To experience space

Experiences of architecture and space have been considered and examined by, for example, philosophers, art historians, and architects throughout the centuries. The Roman architect and engineer Vitruvius is one of the most influential within the field of architecture and one of the most well-known writers to address these subjects in written form. In his classic work The Ten Books on Architecture (ca 15 BC), which was written for Emperor Augustus, he explains – among many other topics – the mechanisms for constructing buildings and the relations between the human body and architecture. For instance, he claims that “in the human body there is a kind of symmetrical harmony between forearm, foot, palm, finger, and other small parts; and so it is with perfect buildings.” One might recall Leonardo da Vinci’s drawing of the Vitruvian man, which was based on descriptions in the third volume of Vitruvius’ ten books and thus one might understand the correlation between the proportions and symmetry of the human body and the classical order of architecture that Vitruvius identified. Since Vitruvius, this perspective on spatial and architectural elements as corresponding with the body has consistently recurred in the writings of architects, philosophers, and theorists who treat the subject of humans’ lived environments, a few of whom are presented below.

81 Ibid., 14.
82 Ibid., 72-75.
The architect and art historian Erik Lundberg thoroughly describes a history of architecture in *Arkitekturens formspråk* (1945) and the first of the ten volumes of this work has been of most use here. His perspectives on humans’ relations to architecture have proved beneficial, specifically in the examinations of spatial elements and bodily sensations in the museums spaces that are described in this study. Lundberg claims that in the encounter with other elements outside our own bodies – matter that is not a part of ourselves – we tend to relate to the structure of the other mass to some extent. We do this because we only have our own bodies to use for measurement and for sensing matter. This is a central part of our perception of space and architecture. Therefore, a large wall can be characterized as being massive or mighty, because it is a physical factor that, in comparison to the proportions of the human body, makes us feel small and inferior, as Lundberg stresses. Prior experiences also play a vital role in the encounters with other elements. As Merleau-Ponty argues, it is impossible for the receiving individual to perceive anything without some kind of previous experience to relate it to. In order to empathize with other materials, sizes, and textures, we associate these things with experiences we have had of similar substances. The more previous experiences we have to draw information from, the richer the experiences and comprehension of the new element become.

Lundberg also discusses experiences of material qualities in his work. In the case of specific material structures and mass, for example, he describes textiles as more or less smooth and soft, while wood is elastic and solid under pressure with tensile strength and with the capacity to support weight. Stone, on the other hand, has other characteristics because of its hardness, massiveness, fixedness, and total lack of elasticity, which also makes it break when struck hard. The architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen, author of *Experiencing Architecture* (1959), argues that we learn what different materials feel like based on tactile responses during our childhood. We also learn that shapes can be soft, hard, or sharp because of our previous experiences of having touched sharp edges and rounded forms. Moreover, we recognize the characteristics of material visually by associating the mere sight of, for example, textiles with the sensation of softness. This impression is often evoked by the texture of the surface of a specific material. In *The Eyes of the Skin* (2005), architect Juhani Pallasmaa emphasizes, “Vision reveals what the touch already knows. We

---

84 Ibid., 29-30.
85 Ibid., 30-31.
87 Lundberg, 31-32.
could think of the sense of touch as the unconscious of vision. Our eyes stroke distant surfaces, contours and edges, and the unconscious tactile sensation determines the agreeableness or unpleasantness of the experience.”

Consequently, the visual sense can recognize and thereby get an impression of structure and mass without touching the material, but the body and skin can also understand mass, structure, and spatial volume through touch without using sight. In general, however, vision and touch interact when we perceive and register spatial reference cues in addition to the properties of materials.

The descriptions and analyses of space in this study are all based on an in situ perspective and the spaces are described as they appear when one is present in the particular museum. Together with Lundberg, Rasmussen, and Pallasmaa, Bollnow contributes to this study with his aspects on spatial perception. Bollnow specifically studies space from a perceptual point of view and among other philosophies, he is concerned with phenomenology in his approach to spatial experience. In his book, he treats spatiality on a number of levels, from defined physical rooms to the spatiality of location, distance and existence, and he also touches upon subjects such as colour, form, and proportions and their effect on the experience of space. All of the perspectives on sensations of spatial elements and materials mentioned above thus contribute substantially to experience and meaning making in museums.

Communication in museums

In museums, the intended message of the exhibition designer is interpreted by an individual – but not without the influence of other human beings. Communication can, therefore, be a result of the meaning making that occurs as the message reaches the receiver, but it also involves a third component. This third component includes other receivers who engage in social and cultural communication with each other to create an intersubjective idea of the contents of the message. The approach to understanding spatial meaning in museums that is applied here is, in a semiotic sense, based on the assumption that communication takes place through (inter)subjective experiences and interpretations. A message is only communicated when interpreted by a receiver. The message is represented here by an exhibition theme – including the museum space as the framing of the display – and the receiver is represented by a visitor. Visitors “read” the exhibition based on their own individual experiences, interests, and opinions, i.e. based on the contents of their “horizons”. These personal perspectives are part of a culture and society where certain ways of communicating, common experiences, and interacting activities influence the individuals’ way of understanding their environment and, by extension, the world. We are raised to interconnect in certain ways and these can vary depending on society and culture.

---

91 Cf. Millar, 2, 27 ff.
92 Bollnow, passim.
The semioticians Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen discuss multimodality in their semiotic approach to communication. In their book *Multimodal Discourse* (2001), they conclude by summarizing their perspectives on multimodality:

[...] we have sketched a multimodal theory of communication which concentrates on two things: (1) the *semiotic resources* of communication, the modes and the media used, and (2) the communicative practices in which these resources are used. These communicative practices are seen as multi-layered and include, at the very least, discursive practices, production practices and interpretive practices, while they may also include design practices and/or distribution practices. We have stressed that each of these layers contributes to meaning.  

Multimodality can be interpreted as a system of different signs. Applying this to my museological perspective, one could claim that the three-dimensional characteristics of displays and exhibition spaces and their multimodal aspects permits an analysis partly based on semiotics. Kress’ and van Leeuwen’s aspects of communication fit my perspectives simply because they focus on diversity in communication modes. In *Multimodality* (2010), Kress describes communication from a semiotic perspective, stressing that “communication has happened when there has been an interpretation; communication is always multimodal. Because interpretation is central, so therefore is the interpreter; without interpretation there is no communication [...]”. Communication thereby happens when the receiver of a message has determined its meaning according to the person’s individual frame of reference. Accordingly, communication occurs within the recipient when the message has been received, considered, and interpreted.

There is, however, a certain intention behind the message. In a museum context, the message that is designed by curators or exhibition producers is generally in accordance with the policies and profile of the museum where the exhibition is displayed. Communication means that a sign is directed to one or several recipients with their expected interests in mind. This is in contrast to representation, which Kress defines as the individual interest of the producer, the maker of the sign. Whether the message is designed to please a wider audience or whether it is more of a demonstration of the producer’s point of view, the shaping of the message starts with an idea and finishes as a display of some sort. “The matter of modes arises here via the question of rhetoric and design: that is, the question of rhetoric goes to the initial conception of the exhibition and from there to the overall ‘shaping’ of the exhibition”, Kress stresses. This also means creating a certain atmosphere that in

---

95 Kress, 176.
96 Ibid., 71, 161.
97 Ibid., 177.
turn becomes part of the meaning that visitors include in their general interpretation of the exhibition. However, according to Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, professors within the field of communication – who examine visual culture and images in their book *Practices of Looking* (2009) – it is generally not very fruitful for us as receivers to try to examine the supposed intended message of the producer. “We usually have no way to know for certain what a producer, designer, or artist intended his or her image or structure to mean,” they stress. Moreover, the receiver of a message may not interpret it in the way the producer expected. This “misinterpretation” might depend on a number of factors and the two most important, as stated by Sturken and Cartwright, are the receiver’s previous individual and cultural experiences and references and the context in which the message is presented.

Meaning thus changes depending on who is doing the interpreting and where, when, and how the message is interpreted. In a study concerning perception in museum spaces, this is a crucial point. Museum visitors seldom know the anticipated reaction the producer wants to evoke, and even if they did, it would be highly unlikely that they would have the “correct” experience according to intention. Still, producers tend to have some knowledge of how to create messages that will be more or less understandable and satisfactory for the intended receivers at large. In advertising, for example, the producers know how to direct a message at a specific audience or consumer group so that the intended receivers either like and recognize the message, or dislike and reject it. However, even if the advertisement is disliked and rejected by some individuals, they might still recognize that it is directed towards them and that they belong to the group that the advertisement addresses. There is, therefore, a way of communicating that is built up by contextual codes and mutual understandings that are reproduced and consumed, more or less consciously.

I would claim that this ability to produce an intended message, on the one hand, and to interpret it, on the other, is, again, due to the nature of intersubjectivity. Producers, like any individuals, have their horizons and belong to specific cultural contexts that are embedded as codes in the messages that they form. The question is whether these codes coincide with the receivers’ frames of reference or not. If they do, the message might “hit the mark”, and if not, the message is likely to be interpreted differently than the producers intended. Messages are designed and coded based on discourses and common contexts to communicate to receivers as a group but cannot be expected to evoke the same reaction in every single individual in that group due to differences in individual views. Thus, it is likely that the message is collectively familiar and comprehensible enough to establish a kind of communication and to be understood by visitors on some level, based on basic intersubjective perspectives.

---

99 Ibid., 54-55.
100 Ibid., 50.
In her book *Double Exposures* (1996), Mieke Bal, professor at Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, discusses the relevance of narratology in museums and applies methods from literary studies to what she calls the “reading” of an exhibition. Bal claims that in order for an exhibition to have any effect at all, it is not enough that a sender (the exhibition producer) tells a story or shows something to a receiver (a visitor). Like Kress, she argues that it is only when the receiver responds to the exhibition message that communication has been successful. The receiver is equal to the sender, because the whole meaning of the exhibition is dependent on the receiver’s response, whether it is consistent with the intention of the sender or not. As Gadamer emphasizes when discussing meaning production in relation to text: “Not occasionally only, but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive, but always a productive attitude as well.” Consequently, as Sturken and Cartwright also stress, the message that the sender tries to deliver takes on another form and meaning when it is received and becomes a new creation on its own. Meaning making is never static. It is a productive process that is induced by the receiver.

Bal, like Kress, uses the term *rhetoric* in relation to museums. She describes it as a tool for the exhibition producer to, in a sense, direct visitors’ interpretations in a certain direction and at the same time convince them that a specific reading is the most adequate. According to Bal, there are discourses, strategies, and codes that are applied by the exhibition producer and that can suggest certain meanings to the visitors’ reading of the exhibition. Kress and van Leeuwen also stress that discourse is fundamental to meaning making because it is within social and cultural contexts that different types of communication are used as a common base for meaning. According to them, discourse is not restricted to language as speech or as writing, but it is created through various kinds of modes that interact with us as human beings in a certain cultural and social context. If one considers this approach to discourse as multimodal, then museums and exhibitions are multimodal in the sense that they use different media in order to convey a message, and they use strategies based on common knowledge and understanding in order to get a message across. It is important to stress that in a museum, individual interests motivate visitors to select certain areas or objects and to choose which parts to focus on according to what they find meaningful. Nevertheless, in a museum context, spatial coding can still be used for guiding visitors through an exhibition in order to communicate a certain message. Disposition facilitates the comprehension of the narrative of a display and

---

102 Ibid., 3-4.
103 Gadamer, 264.
104 Bal, 6-8.
105 Kress & van Leeuwen, 24-25.
it is thereby often crucial when creating an exhibition narrative that follows a certain theme or story. Once again, spatial codes and the interpretation of spatial layout and design might shift depending on visitors’ perspective, but they also enable the specific reading of the exhibition that is intended by its producer.\textsuperscript{107}

\textit{Atmospheric elements in space}

Merleau-Ponty claims that “anyone who has had to choose carpets for a flat will know that a particular mood emanates from each colour, making it sad or happy, depressing or fortifying.”\textsuperscript{108} Recognizing this kind of mood altering experience, whether it involves a carpet or any other furnishing or spatial component, it is apparent that colour affects us and the way we perceive our environment. The question is why and how this happens. Before discussing colours as carriers of meaning, however, it is important to stress that it is problematic to define specific colours as having certain meanings. It would be complicated to try to establish that one colour contains one specific message, symbol, or sign, because these kinds of definitions vary historically, culturally, and socially. Many factors contribute to how colours are perceived and which meanings they convey.

In his book \textit{The Language of Colour} (2011), van Leeuwen states, “It is important to emphasize that colours have meaning \textit{potentials} (or metaphor potentials) rather than specific meanings, and that these meaning potentials will only be narrowed down, made more specific, in specific cultural and situational contexts.”\textsuperscript{109} The meanings of different colours depend, then, on which context they are placed within. Blue might, for instance, be associated with a number of meanings depending on where and how it is used. Colour is thus a mode that indicates conditional meaning. On the other hand, this does not mean that colours can mean just anything. They often have cultural, historical, and social values that are more or less established. They also have an effect on the human body as indicators of warmth versus cold, light versus darkness, and so forth.\textsuperscript{110} Therefore, it is possible to speak about colours as well as light as having an effect on us without speaking in terms of symbols or specific messages. Colour and light evoke feelings that are not only based on certain meanings, but on experiences of what can be defined as \textit{sensational analogies}. These sensational analogies do not only involve colours and light, but also other visual factors, tactile sensations, and sounds.\textsuperscript{111} Bergström also claims that we tend to describe factors such as light and colours from the sensations they evoke in

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{108}Merleau-Ponty (2004), 60.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{110}Kress & van Leeuwen, 27.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
our bodies.\textsuperscript{112} Therefore, we can speak of, for instance, warm and cold colours and soft or hard light. Colours and their nuances are not only fixed in our categorizing and naming of them or their nature as mere visual perceptions; they also have other sensational effect.\textsuperscript{113}

Van Leeuwen uses the example of black and white when he describes different feelings in relation to colour. Black is often associated with darkness, mourning, nighttime, and death. However, in parts of Asia death is signified by white. Perceptions and meanings of colours are not fixed, but vary depending on a number of factors such as culture, context, history, and social discourse. Van Leeuwen emphasizes:

Without taking the context into account, the \textit{practices} in which these feelings and meanings are embedded and the normative discourses that surround them, colour remains, if not entirely open to any interpretation, nevertheless pretty subjective, pretty wide open to interpretation, and words are needed to guarantee sufficient intersubjectivity, sufficient sharing of meaning for colour to do the social work it is meant to do, at least in its early stages, when new meanings and new uses of colour are established – later such meanings might come to be understood without any need for explanation.\textsuperscript{114}

Consequently, colours can be symbolic to an individual as well as to a group. Nevertheless, because colours are so open for interpretation in their purest form, it takes other practices of communication related to the colour before an intersubjective understanding of a colour can be established within a society. Accordingly, colour is experienced on both intersubjective and subjective levels. As van Leeuwen stresses, the poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s book \textit{Theory of Colours} (1810) contributed to the field of colour theory by including the subjective aspect that involves emotional and affective experiences as well as meanings of colours and even though the book might be perceived as outdated, it is still significantly influential.\textsuperscript{115} Goethe’s perspectives on colours and their meanings, as they might appear and be interpreted by us, are referred to throughout this study along with van Leeuwen and other theorists and philosophers who treat colour.

Colour is inevitably dependent on light, or rather, colour \textit{is} light. Many studies that treat light in exhibitions are occupied with aspects such as lux, lumens, and watts. In this study, the technical perspectives on light are left aside and the focus is instead on light as a spatial element. In museums, light plays a significant role in visitors’ experience. It can be used as a communication code when, for example, highlighting certain texts and objects so as to facilitate visual perception. It can be

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112}Bergström, 82.
\item \textsuperscript{113}Lundberg, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{114}van Leeuwen, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{115}Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, \textit{Theory of Colours [Zur Farbenlehre]} (1810), 1\textsuperscript{st} Eng. edn. (1840), 1\textsuperscript{st} Dover edn. (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc. 2006); van Leeuwen, 22.
\end{itemize}
used to evoke feelings and associations in exhibitions in order to convey a message to visitors and put them in a certain mood, and it can even help them in their navigation through the spaces. Associations and analogies are also triggered by lighting and previous experiences are central when it comes to the perceptions of light as well as of colour. For example, bright colours and light resemble daylight, while dark tones and duller light can be related to the nighttime. This is often contextual and other factors in the exhibition add to the experiences of the light and provide clues to the intended messages and interpretations.

Museums are spaces of meaning and sensation on many different levels—tangible and intangible, concrete and symbolic—and the result is what we can call atmosphere. The subject of atmosphere might be hard to distinguish because of its abstractness. Here, atmosphere is defined as the character of a space and the sensations and experiences it induces. In museums, the creating of atmosphere is closely connected to the production of messages and the strategic planning of intentions and communication. An atmosphere sets the mood that visitors are to experience according to the producer’s intention. By using lighting, colouration, and settings as well as organizing the exhibitions and planning the layout, a certain atmosphere is created. The atmosphere might be intended to appear, for instance, gloomy, humorous, tense, or inspiring and yet, there is no “right” or “wrong” when it comes to individual experience and interpretation. Just as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty stress the consideration of human behaviour in relation to the environment in general, and just as Kress and van Leeuwen emphasize with regard to meaning making, intersubjectivity through communication is central when it comes to the production of atmosphere. Even though the intended reaction is not always evoked due to subjective motives, it can be assumed that museum visitors share certain human instincts and sensational responses that are affected similarly by atmospheric properties.

**Approaches to museum space**

Although spatial design in museums as a medium for experience and meaning making is rarely studied in museological research, there are a few who have examined aspects of museum space from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. Researchers, philosophers and theorists who treat subjects such as authenticity in museums, museum space as an arena for social enactments, and histories of art museum design and installations as well as the experiences that occur in cultural historical sites. These aspects all touch upon issues that are treated here and the following introduction of a few of these perspectives also describes how museum space has been treated in research during the last twenty years.

---


The relationship between spatial design and exhibition contents is one of the central themes in this study and it is also the main issue in the short article “Moving People, Moving Experiences: Novel Strategies in Museum Practice” (2000), which consists of a discussion on the subject of specifically modern and contemporary art museum architecture.\textsuperscript{118} Despite the briefness of the text, its author Nick Stanley, director of research at the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, manages to, in few words, draw attention to the often-debated matter of the extensively prominent role of architecture and spatial design in contemporary art museums. Stanley wants to highlight what he considers to be an increasing problem in art museums, namely the potential conflict between avant-garde spatial design and exhibitions such that architecture “interferes” with the experience of the art on display.\textsuperscript{119} In his article, Stanley presents problematic perspectives on museum architecture and space and these are discussed and partially opposed here. A debate based on conflicting perspectives on the role of museum architecture in relation to exhibitions and visitors initiates the final chapter of this study and develops into a more general analysis on the complexities, effects, and meanings of spatial design in museums.

An equally short but interesting article referred to in this study is “Reality as Illusion, the Historic Houses that Become Museums” (2004) written by Mónica Risnicoff de Gorgas, director of the National Museum of Jesuit Estancia Alta Gracia and Casa del Virrey Liniers in Córdoba.\textsuperscript{120} Risnicoff de Gorgas explores the museum category that she defines as house museums, i.e. buildings of certain cultural or historical value that have been musealized in order to preserve a kind of authentic atmosphere, as was discussed above in relation to Palazzo Doria Pamphilj. Except for being museums containing exhibitions of leisure and learning, house museums give the impression of being fixed spaces, frozen in time, where visitors can experience history by, in a sense, walking straight into the past. Risnicoff de Gorgas’ article is used primarily in analysing the two palaces in this study, both of which have the elements and characteristics of a house museum. However, Risnicoff de Gorgas also discusses the experience of authenticity in this kind of museums and also questions the supposed fixedness in time that they indicate.\textsuperscript{121} These aspects of museum space as a medium of authenticity as well as a representation of history are subjects that we will have reason to return to.

Although philosopher Hilde S. Hein does not specifically focus on spatiality and spatial design in her book The Museum in Transition (2000), she discusses the matter of authenticity and experience in museums, but from another perspective than that of Stanley and Risnicoff de Gorgas. Hein’s main concern is contemporary museums and their relations to objects and what she recognizes as a transition in muse-

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 42-48.
\textsuperscript{120} Mónica Risnicoff de Gorgas, “Reality as Illusion, the Historic Houses that Become Museums”, Museum Studies, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2004).
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 356-361.
ums’ identity and function, from object centred to story centred.\textsuperscript{122} She believes this will come to change, and is perhaps already changing, the definition of museums’ function and what museums essentially are.\textsuperscript{123} The issue of authenticity in museums can be described as that of experiences of the authentic, with all it may imply, and conversely as authentic experiences, which involve both Risnicoff de Gorgas’ and Hein’s perspectives on these matters.

The history of museums has been considered from different points of view in the museological field of research. Sociologist Tony Bennett discusses museum history from a political perspective, using mainly Foucault’s theories on power, in his book \textit{The Birth of the Museum} (1995).\textsuperscript{124} He describes how museum spaces in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century functioned as spaces for education, cultivation, and, to an extent, supervision. Museums were used in the attempt to civilize the lower classes and according to Bennett, this was achieved by making museum space more voluminous and open so that visitors could see and be seen by others. Museums’ spatial designs were thus a tool in a political and social agenda.\textsuperscript{125}

In \textit{Civilizing Rituals} (1995), Carol Duncan, professor emeritus of art history at Ramapo College in New Jersey, applies another perspective on the art museum specifically as a civilizing place.\textsuperscript{126} Her premise is that art museums are ritualistic spaces, meaning they have properties that induce certain behaviours that Duncan compares to ceremonial acts. Her definition of rituals is not specifically connected to religion; she uses it to illustrate the secular kind of ceremonial behaviour that take place within cultural and social environments without religious purposes. Duncan describes the museum as a stage setting that establishes the conditions for visitors’ enactments as they move from space to space. She stresses that a certain behaviour and level of attention is expected of visitors as they enter a museum.\textsuperscript{127} Thus, while Bennett’s approach to museums provides an insight into how spatial design might be used in order to strategically direct visitors for political reasons, Duncan examines visitors’ behaviour as encouraged by the museum environment itself. Even though Duncan’s rituals are not strictly related to spatial and architectural forms and elements, presence and movement in museum space is still central in the theoretical and practical understanding of the museum as concept and genre.

\textit{Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000} (2009) by Charlotte Klonk, art historian at the Humboldt-Universität in Berlin, treats art museum space from an historical perspective with a focus on the relation between exhibition, space, and visitor.\textsuperscript{128} Klonk’s study shows a rich variety in spatial design and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123} ibid., viii ff.
\item \textsuperscript{125} ibid., 51-55, 68-69.
\item \textsuperscript{127} ibid., 10.
\end{itemize}
installations over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. Her focus is on visitor experience and cultural values in relation to exhibition production and design. Klonk’s book offers an interesting perspective on the cultural history of exhibition design in galleries and art museum spaces.

In her book *The Power of Display* (1998), Mary Anne Staniszewski, associate professor of art history at City University of New York, treats similar subjects as Klonk, although with a specific focus on the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Staniszewski describes the history of MoMA and its exhibitions and installations from the opening of the museum in the late 1920s through to the 1990s. During the 1930s, a new space design emerged at MoMA, one that would later be referred to as the white cube. This term describes a spatial design distinguished as a white-washed cubic space which has become common in many museums due to its functional and aesthetic qualities. The white cube concept is one of the most recognizable museum space designs, specifically in contemporary art museums, and it will also be discussed on several occasions in this study.

The white art space design that developed in the 1930s was criticized by the Irish artist Brian O’Doherty in his essays compiled in *Inside the White Cube* (1976). O’Doherty describes what he finds to be problematic aspects of the white cube, namely that it, in his opinion, isolates the art from the outside world and detaches it from the spatial and temporal context in which it was created. More than just expressing mere critique, however, O’Doherty thoroughly examines and analyses the white cube concept and gallery design in general and he also discusses how the white cube design affects visitors’ perception of the artworks. He thereby moves within the realm of experience and meaning making in relation to museum spatiality and because I also touch upon the subject of the white cube, O’Doherty’s essays are relevant to this study. There is, then, reason to use diverse texts such as those written by Klonk, Staniszewski, and O’Doherty to become aware of the historical origin of the white cube design and of different historical and contemporary aspects of its function and meaning.

Helen Rees Leahy, senior lecturer and director of the Centre for Museology at the University of Manchester, treats museum space in relation to visitors’ body and movement in her book *Museum Bodies* (2012). She discusses the presence of the body as a factor to be considered in museum space, not only as the substantial element with which we move and perceive, but as a feature of the museum. She takes an historical approach to examining issues such as whose body is welcomed in

129 Klonk, 3.
131 Ibid., 62-66.
133 Ibid., 80.
museum space and whose is not as well as how the body should behave and why. Her focus is thus on politics and functions of bodies in museums from the 18th to the 21st century, with a certain focus on a British context. Even though Rees Leahy’s book largely revolves around museum politics and social concerns, she touches upon the relationship between space and body and its effects on bodily perception, both of which are aspects of experience that are discussed in this study. For example, like Klonk, Staniszewski, and O’Doherty above, Rees Leahy also comments on the design of the white cube in relation to visitors’ presence. Similarly to Duncan, Rees Leahy’s contribution to this study is an insight into historical views on bodies within museums and subject matters such as the functions of different exhibition spaces throughout history and the body’s place in those spatial contexts.

Sophia Psarra also specifically studies museum spaces and places as a medium for meaning making and experience. In her book Architecture and Narrative (2009), she studies how meaning is formed through architectural narratives in cultural institutions like museums and galleries as well as a variety of buildings and spaces of cultural significance. As an explorer of architecture and spatial design, Psarra examines the relations between concept and experience. One of the central questions she asks is, “how can we explore the relationship between conceptual structure and perceptual experience, the field of abstract relations and that of bodies experiencing space?” Motion and position are central in Psarra’s research, where she examines how factors such as axially, mirrors, and the organisation of objects and spaces affect visitors’ movability and perception of spatiality. According to Psarra, spaces and forms are “situated within manifold frameworks of relations where every element is understood in its relationship to other elements, in a way that a change in these relations sets the system in motion towards a set of different meanings.” She asserts that the perception of space is dynamic and can be transformed depending on where a visitor is situated and on the relations between not only the spatial elements, but also the contextual factors that frame spaces.

Psarra’s aim and central issues are very similar to the subject matter that is fundamental in my study. However, Psarra’s approach to spatiality in relation to movement differs somewhat from the spatial perspectives adapted here because she focuses on a kind of mapping of spatiality which is not limited by walls or ceilings. In my study, space is restricted to rooms and halls and their internal relations to their contents. Still, Psarra’s innovative and dynamic descriptions and analyses are a source of inspiration in the writing of this study, specifically in the process of finding a way to “write space”.

135 Rees Leahy, 3-4
137 Ibid., 2.
138 Ibid., 15.
Disposition

Having established the methodological approaches and the theoretical framework used here, the following five chapters will treat the Roman museums Museo dell’Ara Pacis, Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, Palazzo Massimo, Centrale Montemartini, and MAXXI, in that order. Each of the chapters begins with an historical background followed by a short description of the museums’ location and urban context. Each museum’s design and layout is then described from a spatial perspective and this is followed by an analysis and conclusion. In the finishing chapter, I will return to the analyses of the museums and, with the museums as the theme throughout the final discussions, consider the conclusions that can be drawn in search for more general effects that spatial design can have on experience and meaning making in museums. Thus, while the following chapters present the observed spaces in a somewhat descriptive manner, the final chapter consists of a more elaborated theoretical deliberation and analysis.
CHAPTER II

MUSEO DELL’ARA PACIS

Background

Museo dell’Ara Pacis is located on Piazza Augusto Imperatore on the eastern side of the river Tiber. It was designed by the American architect Richard Meier, whose designs are closely related to the rationalist style and consist mainly of white surfaces and straight lines. This is also manifested in the distinctive white shades and modernist structure of Museo dell’Ara Pacis. Thus, the building differs from the otherwise characteristic historical architecture of central Rome. The museum is centred on one single object, the peace altar Ara Pacis, that was erected in the year 13 BC and inaugurated in 9 BC as a dedication to the Roman Emperor Augustus to celebrate his return from a three year absence in Spain and Gaul.\textsuperscript{139} The altar contains a mensa, an altar table used by priests and the Vestal virgins for sacrificial rites.\textsuperscript{140} The mensa is set within a roofless decorated enclosure. Here, the whole construction will be referred to as the altar or Ara Pacis. The altar is almost quadrangular and its width measures approximately 11.5 meters on the back and front and 10.5 meters on the sides and it is about 7.5 meters high. Ara Pacis was originally placed on the plain area Campus Martius, half-way to the Pantheon south of where the museum is located today. The first stage of excavation took place in the 16th century when pieces of the altar were found under a palace that had been built over the altar’s former site. The remaining parts were rediscovered in 1859 when the palace was to be renovated. However, the excavation project was not completed due to the difficulties of working in the ground underneath a four-story building. Yet, the discussions on the matter continued and in 1937 the decision to continue the excavations was made. The remaining parts of the altar were finally excavated and negotiations were initiated to bring back the parts that had been scattered.\textsuperscript{141} The promoter


\textsuperscript{140} Orietta Rossini, \textit{Ara Pacis} (2006), new edn. (Milan: Electa 2009), 22; Andersen, 21-22.

\textsuperscript{141} Rossini, 14-17; Andersen, 4-5.
behind the project was Benito Mussolini, whose ambition was to restore Rome to its
days of glory with certain focus on the Augustinian era. By demolishing buildings
and designing new ones to replace them, he rearranged certain areas of the city. One
of them was Piazza Augusto Imperatore, where the Mausoleum of Augustus is lo-
cated. This piazza was chosen as the new site for Ara Pacis and its pavilion. In this
process, Mussolini restructured an already existing place and put his mark on it with
new Fascist architecture while also creating a new space dedicated to Augustus.142
In that sense, he accumulated the past, the present and the future in one single pia-
 zza.

The project of creating the pavilion for Ara Pacis was assigned to the Italian
architect Vittorio Morpurgo, who designed a rectangular building with large win-
dows so that the public could see the altar from outside. Morpurgo’s pavilion was
built in only three months and was therefore not considered adequate and it was
soon evident that the deficient construction, as well as the altar, was starting to dete-
rriorate because of factors such as humidity, air pollution, and shifting temperature.
Still, the building was kept intact until the 1990s when the project of replacing it
was initiated with Meier as the selected architect. The design of the pavilion of 1938
most certainly had an effect on Meier, but perhaps not as much from a creative as-
pect as from the restrictions and directions from town authorities. Among these were
keeping the altar visible from outside and maintaining the natural light source by
using large windows.143 The new museum building has been celebrated but also
criticized, partially due to its visual appearance that makes it radically different from
its surroundings.144 Yet, the construction project endured and Museo dell’Ara Pacis
was inaugurated on Rome’s birthday, April 21, in 2006.

Figure 1: Museo dell’Ara Pacis floor plan.

143 Rossini, 113, 120.
144 For further reading on the criticism of Meier and the new Museo dell’Ara Pacis design, see Ann Thomas Wilkins, “Augustus, Mussolini, and the Parallel Imagery of Empire”, Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy, eds. Claudia Lazzaro & Roger J. Crum (New York: Cornell University 2005), 64.
**Museum context**

The location on which Museo dell’Ara Pacis is placed is a historically significant site in the Roman cityscape and it is closely intertwined with the history of Ara Pacis and the museum that houses it. As mentioned, Piazza Augusto Imperatore and Museo dell’Ara Pacis can still be associated with Mussolini’s agenda for a new urban structure. Fascism is inevitably present in this place, both architecturally and historically.145

Although the piazza itself is not a considerably crowded or trafficked site, it is apparent that Museo dell’Ara Pacis is a well-visited building, not only by tourists and museum audiences but also by youths and students relaxing by the fountain on the steps at the entrance. The museum draws attention to itself and is easily accessed due to its central location in Rome and its distinguishable architecture. Museo dell’Ara Pacis is a modern museum designed according to the signature style of Meier. Although it differs somewhat from other Roman museums because of its design, it is not completely unique. It bears resemblances to the new Acropolis Museum in Athens, which also consists of mainly white spaces with large windows. They both contain antique artefacts and they each focus on one certain object: the Ara Pacis and the Parthenon frieze, both of which have their own dedicated spaces in the museums. Still, the two museums also exhibit other artefacts in additional rooms. Aside from the main exhibition hall, Museo dell’Ara Pacis contains an auditorium that is incorporated in the northern section of the building and there are spaces for temporary exhibition placed beneath the main hall. There is also a book shop placed in the entrance section. Because the Ara Pacis is the core of this specific museum, the mentioned spaces are left aside here in favour of the main hall where the object that has given the museum its name is placed.146

**The main hall**

The Museo dell’Ara Pacis building is 120 meters long altogether. The mid-section of the building, which contains the main exhibition hall, is approximately 45-50 meters long and 20 meters wide.147 Because these measurements describe the exterior architectural expansion, the main hall, excluding the very first section of the space, naturally appears somewhat smaller, about 15 meters wide and about twice as long. The first section of the main hall functions as an information area partially sealed off by a wall, but when entering the space there is still a full view of the altar straight ahead, because the wall is set to the right as seen from the entrance, thus marking a division between the information area and the main hall (fig. 2). When

---

145 Cf. Thomas Wilkins, 64.

146 Dates of observations at Museo dell’Ara Pacis: September 27 2011; October 5 2011; January 17 2012; January 25 2012; February 1 2012. Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University.

incorporating this first space into the main hall and considering them as a whole, the spatial expansion extends about 10-15 meters, making the whole space 40-45 meters long from entrance to back wall.\textsuperscript{148} Although it is not possible to actually see the layout of the space, it is quite easy to comprehend because it can be deduced from spatial cues.\textsuperscript{149} In comparison to the distances between the altar and the windows, to the sides, the distance between the entrance and the altar is extensive enough to indicate that the spatial layout is rectangular.

![Image](image_url)

Fig. 2: The altar as seen from the entrance.

The width of the altar leaves a passage space of only about 2 meters between it and the windows. Therefore, the altar appears to be larger than it actually is, giving the impression of extending to the sides and filling up the space. Even though the hall is quite voluminous, the sensation of spaciousness is mainly due to the flanking windows, the perceived height of the ceiling, and the rectangular shape of the space, leaving a distance of 20-25 meters between the entrance and the altar. Adding to the volume are the square openings in two rows in the ceiling that are reminiscent of open coffers enclosed within crossbeams. Natural light passes through dimmed

\textsuperscript{148} Richard Meier: Il Museo dell’Ara Pacis, 67-68.
\textsuperscript{149} Cf. Merleau-Ponty (1964), 50.
windows inside the coffers and supplements spotlights set in the ceiling. The ceiling is approximately 10-11 meters high when measured from the bottom surfaces of the crossbeams, yet the window coffers open the space upwards and create a sensation of airiness. The window walls to the west and east are divided into rectangular horizontally positioned glass sections framed by mullions (fig. 8 and 9). The city is visible through the windows; to the east is Piazza Augusto Imperatore with its buildings, trees, and the cypresses surrounding the Mausoleum of Augustus. To the west, the view shows traffic and pedestrians on the street Lungotevere, with the river Tiber beyond it and buildings on the other side of the river.

Having entered the main hall in the museum, there are nine sculptured portraits on pedestals standing in a row to the left of the entrance (fig. 2 and 7). They depict historical individuals associated with Emperor Augustus in one way or another. The pedestals are high enough to display the busts at eye level. Except for the decorations on Ara Pacis, these portrait sculptures are the only human faces presented in relation to the history of the altar in the hall. Because this museum space in general is focused on a specific monument and its historical and aesthetic properties, the history of contemporaneous people is mostly left aside. However, the faces of the sculptures bring something of a human presence into the space and they create an associational connection between themselves, the visitors, and the altar. Recognizing the human features in the portraits and then realizing the relation in time and space between them and the altar also enables visitors to somewhat comprehend the social context of the altar during the Augustan age two thousand years ago.

Behind the portrait sculptures stands a separate wall, approximately 6-7 meters high, which is built of rectangular stone boulders (fig. 2). The travertine is rough in contrast to the fineness of the sculptured portraits. The wall connects the interiors with the exteriors of the building; it functions as a supporting wall of the roof over the doorway outside and passes through the entrance hall into the museum where it extends into the space and serves as a background surface for the sculptures. It is the only element in the space that is not smooth or ornamented and therefore it creates a somewhat dramatic effect by bringing the unrefined matter of nature into the space. It creates a textural contrast against the decorative altar and sculptures, on the one hand, and the linear strictness of the space, on the other. The wall thereby represents a coarseness that is not seen anywhere else in this space, but it is a controlled coarseness with regular irregularities. Still, its presence adds a sense of an otherwise rare dynamic to the spatial setting.

To the right, as seen from the entrance, is an information area consisting of an information board on the southern wall with texts in English and Italian about the history of the Ara Pacis and showing a map over Campus Martius (fig. 3). In the middle of the area there is a landscape model on a table that also shows the Campus and the positions of Ara Pacis, the Pantheon, and the Mausoleum of Augustus as they would have been located in the first century (fig. 10). Beside the model stands a glass board displaying a family tree including Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Nero (fig. 3). The family tree is quite difficult to visually perceive at times be-
cause the surface is transparent and the text disappears to the eye depending on from which angle it is read. Also, the light is not as sufficient as might be required in this area during daytime. Considering this, the information area does not give the impression of being of that much importance here.

There is one other informational component in the main hall in the shape of a white model of Ara Pacis that is set behind the altar (fig. 8). The model is about 60-70 centimetres high and approximately 90-100 centimetres wide. The model’s function is to inform visitors about the decorations of the altar. Furthermore, in a smaller room adjacent to the hall that is accessed through a doorway at the very back of the space, visitors can find a computer showing a digitally animated version of the altar decorated with various colours. The decorations and, specifically, the previous colour scheme of Ara Pacis will be returned to throughout this chapter.

The large exhibition hall of Museo dell’Ara Pacis is a space in which the whole structure is based on lines (fig. 2, 5, and 6). Different types of lines in spatial design and architecture evoke various sensations. They might appear unsettling or calming depending on whether they are straight or crimped, wavy or erratic.\footnote{Lundberg, 26-27; Wölfflin, 16, 23-24.} In this case, all of the lines are straight and runs both horizontally and vertically. The horizontal lines that run between the rectangular boulders of the travertine walls, the coffers in the ceiling, and the mullions of the windows lead towards the altar, that is centred in front of what could be considered a sort of spatial vanishing point. All of these horizontal and vertical lines that run back and forth in the different surfaces of the hall
contrast with the graceful and dynamic reliefs of the altar: the fine details of the ornaments become more apparent and noticeable when their organic and dynamic shapes meet the straight linearity of the space. Even though the pale nuances of the altar match the various shades of white in the hall, the altar does not seem to melt into the surroundings and disappear into the background. Rather, the ornamentation separates the altar’s surfaces from the rest of the space and it becomes a curious element in the otherwise strict structures of the spatial design. The only architectural components that are not characterized by cubic shapes are four cylindrical columns. The massive columns are 1.20 meters in diameter and are placed symmetrically; two at the frontal part of the space, in front of the altar, and two at the back of the space. Their rounded shapes stand out in a space of regular lines and straight angles.

**The altar**

While the space is mainly characterized by straight lines and cubic shapes and is somewhat plain in its architectural design, the altar appears to be soft due to the ornaments that adorn its surfaces. The ornaments consist of reliefs with scenes related to the functional and historical contexts of the altar as well as decorative vegetal adornments that symbolize peace and fortune. The motifs are displayed on panels separated by a meander frieze: the vegetal relief runs along the whole lower part of the altar and the six different scenes are depicted on the upper panels (fig. 4 and 6). Large parts of the vegetal decorations have been reconstructed in plaster. The scenes on the upper reliefs, as seen from the entrance, are the she-wolf nursing Romulus and Remus on the eastern side of the altar and the myth of Aeneas sacrificing to the domestic deities known as Penates on the western side. As seen from the back facing the altar the motifs are the goddess Roma to the left, the most incomplete relief on the altar, and Tellus, the best-preserved panel, to the right. On the sides of the altar facing the windows the upper friezes show a crammed procession divided into two parts, one on each side of the altar. The missing parts of the reliefs have been reconstructed with drawings showing the contours of the original motifs, drawn directly on the background material as an extension of the existing marble fragments.

As Eriksen stresses, our genre competence teaches us that museum objects are not to be touched and also where we are allowed to walk and not. It is not obvious that Ara Pacis can be entered at first sight and even when it starts to become clear, a certain hesitation still lingers due to the knowledge that corrections often follow an attempt to touch a museum object. Nevertheless, the steps leading to the

---

152 Andersen, 44-47.
153 Attally Conlin, 4.
154 Eriksen, 16-17.
entrance of the altar do give an impression of being inviting because of the open doorway in the midst of the altar’s front. It has an attracting effect and appears to be leading to another room inside, a room that is hiding something that cannot yet be seen. The ropes set on the steps to mark a limitation of entry are put to the side and a museum guard is generally walking back and forth inside the altar, which indicates that the altar is not too fragile after all. Hence, entrance is approved, even if it might not be obvious at first. The guard moving about inside the altar shows that there is a possibility to stroll through the passages around the mensa. This perception suggests that the whole museum space consists of layers: the building as a case housing the altar, and the altar as a case housing the mensa. This might be associated with a Russian Matryoshka doll with its layers of shells and contents. It is a space inside a space with the most holy object, the mensa, at the core.

When entering the altar, its restricted interior spaciousness indicates that the holy rites that took place here were most likely performed by one or very few people at a time. The steps, which are rather low, could have been adapted to animals that might have been lead into the Ara Pacis to be sacrificed on the mensa. The passages inside are probably no more than one meter wide and, therefore, only a few of the museum’s visitors are allowed inside at the same time. The guard patrolling inside the altar keeps the circulation going and thus the visit does not take too long. The inside is decorated with reliefs with motifs such as festoons, vegetation, and animals, but due to their arrangement rather high up on the walls and on the mensa, approximately 2-3 meters up, they are difficult to study properly because the narrow passages do
not allow one to step back and see the decorations from a distance (fig. 4). There is also the risk of having neck pains in such a situation. In other words, although a visit to the inside of the altar gives an extra dimension to the aesthetic experience and the sensation of history, the altar is not designed to be entered by museum visitors of the 21st century and as a result, one should not expect comfort in that sense. Nevertheless, the inside of the altar has its own atmosphere apart from the hall outside. Even though the passages are narrow and the spaces are restricted, they allow one to tread the same path through the altar and to see the same decorative ornaments as the participants in the ceremonies performed two thousand years ago, even if they do not provide further insight into the sacrificial rites conducted here. Those specific practices appear to be unspoken of in the museum.

Having exited the altar, one has now reached the back of the main hall. Here is the white model of Ara Pacis standing to the side, and straight ahead is a feature wall, approximately 5-6 meters high and 8-10 meters wide. The wall is somewhat similar to the coarse wall described above; they have the same colour and both consist of horizontally laid, rectangular travertine boulders. This feature wall, however, is smooth (fig. 5). It is thereby more similar to the wall that is positioned as a separating element between the information area and the main hall. These two smooth walls are of a brighter beige colour than the rough wall behind the portrait sculptures. The feature wall is placed approximately 8-9 meters from the altar, leaving an open space between the two, and indicates the end of the main hall, although it is not the end of the building. If one chooses to pass the altar to the left when moving from the entrance to the back of the hall, the passage leads to a doorway that in turn leads to the northern section of the building. From there, visitors can access the auditorium and spaces for temporary exhibitions on the lower floor as well as the space containing a computer with illustrations depicting the polychromic altar. The feature wall does not actually, then, symbolize the end of the tour, but it functions as the backdrop of the main hall and the altar specifically. Consequently, all of the three travertine walls in the space function as markers of spatial sections as well as adding a touch of beige to the whiteness. Moreover, they consist of a traditional building material in the Roman area and thereby add another bit of the history of the city to the museum.

Most of the material in the museum hall consists of travertine. Except for the wall behind the busts, which is quite coarse and harsh, most of the travertine and stone surfaces are smooth. The altar even reflects in the polished floor, and this gives the space a sense of cleanliness. In contrast to this smoothness, as in the case with the lines, the reliefs on the Ara Pacis emerge out of the surfaces and make the altar seem somewhat vibrant in comparison. Visually, the vegetal and narrative ornamentations become more perceptible as an organic and almost inconsistent element in the space. The museum hall is voluminous, bright, and airy and evokes a sensation of coolness. His makes it easy to move about in the space and also to breathe, but whether this depends on the air ventilation and a slight cool temperature or the spatiality and the windows is difficult to determine.
Bergström claims that all spaces provide a given tempo, which is dependent on the layout of the space. When we visit a space, we use movement and sensation to orient ourselves and to comprehend the spatial relations. In order to do this as effectively as possible we adapt our tempo to the volume of the space. For example, a wide room takes longer to explore and for that reason we tend to slow down when entering it. In the hall of Museo dell’Ara Pacis this is certainly the case, although it is not only because of the spatial volume. The altar is a central element when considering speed reduction, because it takes up a large area of the space and decreases the flow. Also, the museum hall is not labyrinthine; the disposition is obvious and information and illustrations are not extensively spread in the space but are restricted to specific areas. Thus, the altar is clearly the one artefact of importance in this space. There is simply no hurry and one can move slowly without missing anything.

Fig. 5: The ornamented corner of Ara Pacis and a section of the travertine feature wall.

155 Bergström, 92.
The meaning of light

Originally, the Ara Pacis was located outdoors on the fields of Campus Martius. This is also manifested through the spaciousness of the hall, because it gives the impression of the altar as standing out in the open. The space is not enclosing: even though the passages on both sides of the altar are quite narrow, the large windows make the space open to the sides and offer a panorama-like view of the streets outside. Even when the space is crowded by visitors, it still appears voluminous because of the effects of the transparency of the windows.

Light also plays an important part in the experience of volume. The large panoramic windows and the smaller windows in the ceiling function as light sources and they are placed strategically to create a certain atmosphere. Rasmussen emphasizes that, “Light is of decisive importance in experiencing architecture. The same room can be made to give very different spatial impressions by the simple expedient of changing the size and location of its openings. Moving a window from the middle of a wall to a corner will utterly transform the entire character of the room.” In the hall of Museo dell’Ara Pacis, the placement of the windows and smaller light sources affects the space in the sense that both the natural and artificial light hits the surfaces of both the space and the altar from different angles. They create interesting shapes and accentuate details that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. The light tends to make the space seem close to weightless and buoyant despite the heaviness of the architectural material. This, however, might vary depending on the weather and the time of the day, because the temperature and colour of light changes according to these factors. When the sunlight shines through the windows, the rays of light fall in diagonal contours on the western or eastern side of the altar depending on whether it is in the morning or in the afternoon. The formations that the light creates enhance the impression of Ara Pacis as being a great artwork in addition to being an historical monument devoted to ceremonial practices. The attention is thereby drawn to the patterns created by the sunlight as much as to the ornaments on the altar. The aesthetic qualities of Ara Pacis become even more perceivable than the narrative motifs and the altar’s functional form.

Bergström uses words such as rhythmic, interactive, concentrated, direct, and indirect in her description of the light in one of the main study objects of her observational studies, a theatre hall. The rays of sunlight falling diagonally on Ara Pacis can certainly be described as direct and rhythmic as well as concentrated. Because the sunlight naturally comes from either the eastern or western side of the hall, it is asymmetrical when considering spatial emphasis. As Bergström stresses, sharp contrasts between darkness and light create an activating effect. The morning light shining on the altar from the east plays upon the reliefs in stripes of light and darkness and make the details of the figures and ornaments more distinguished.

156 Rasmussen, 187.
157 Bergström, 45.
158 Ibid.
creating movement, dynamism and, most certainly, a dramatic and active impression (fig. 6). In turn, this affects the perception of the scenery of the altar and the experience of the spatiality. The strong morning light evokes sensations of warmth and energy in contrast to the otherwise airy, cool, and calm space. At noon, the sun shines through a small window in the ceiling by the upper corner of the rough travertine wall behind the portrait sculptures by the entrance. The rays of light fall on the wall in diagonal thick lines and emphasize the busts, that otherwise could possibly be over-looked. Here, the light has a practical function as natural spotlights illuminating the object. Moreover, the light draws attention to the sculptures in order to give the impression of these portrayed individuals as being of some importance in the history of Ara Pacis. However, what their roles actually were in this history is not as easily detected and this is an issue related to a general problem with inadequate information, as will be discussed further below.

In the afternoon, the light, now coming from the west, is soft and not as distinct as the morning light. Yet, the rays of sunlight create the same patterns on the altar until later in the afternoon when they become even softer and less noticeable and then finally fade away. In the evening, the hall is surprisingly dark because the artificial light seems to be at the same luminosity as during the daytime (fig. 7). It does not appear to be adjusted to compensate for the darkness outside to any great extent, even though the light has been designed to accentuate the reliefs even during the
dark hours. Lacking natural light, though, the space turns grey and it appears shadowy and hollow. The persons portrayed in the procession motifs on the altar look pale and almost ghostlike. Also, the visual stillness of the space becomes even more noticeable due to the almost transparent light grey shade that creates the gloomy atmosphere. This effect might be due to the pale bluish artificial light that resembles moonlight. At the back of the altar, on the other hand, the light is not as pale as in the front, but warmer and yellower, although not quite resembling the light that shines on the travertine feature wall on sunny days.

When it is raining outside, the space turns rather dusky because of the weather. Even though it is not completely dark, as it can be when heavy rain falls in Rome, the drops on the windows and the wetness on the pavement make the hall turn grey and dull. Just as in the evening, the spotlights in the ceiling are not sufficient to brighten the altar and the space when the sun is not shining. The rain softly hitting the windows in the coffered ceiling increases the impression of the light being dull and grey. However, the even flow of dim light, which is absent on sunny days, makes it easier to see the details on the altar and this is also the case during late evenings. The reliefs emerge and become more comprehensible instead of, as in the case of sunny days, being somewhat veiled behind distinct rays of sunlight and contrasting shades. On the other hand, the altar is not as imposing as it can be when the sun is shining.

Fig. 7: Museo dell’Ara Pacis at dusk.

159 Rossini, 121.
because it then gives the impression of being more of a striking artwork as a whole instead of, as in a flow of even light, an object consisting of a number of different ornaments.

Museo dell’Ara Pacis is constructed in such a way that weather and natural light have a large impact on the appearance of the altar and the space that houses it. This can be perceived as an indication of the altar’s original outdoor location. The altar can be seen in different weathers as well as in all the different lights of the day, just as it could two thousand years ago when it was standing on Campus Martius. The effects of natural sunlight can also be seen as a reference to the major sundial, the *Horologium Augusti*, that was placed next to Ara Pacis on the Campus (fig. 10). It consisted of an approximately 30 meter high obelisk from Heliopolis that cast its shadow over a vast plane overlaid with travertine, showing the correct time of the day.\textsuperscript{160} The passing of time is present in the museum space as an indicator of the altar’s history while also allowing the otherwise static space to change character. Because the hall is dedicated to one object only, an object that can hardly be removed from it and that will presumably remain unaccompanied by other artefacts, the impression of the totality of space and contents is that of stillness, solidity, and pureness. Light and weather are the two main factors that allow dynamism and variation in the space. The large windows to the east and west are, therefore, not only enabling the altar to be viewed from the outside, but are also, together with the smaller windows in the ceiling, bringing some variety to the appearance of the altar and the exhibition space.

\textit{A whiter shade of pale}

Light changes our perceptions depending on factors such as its intensity, colour, and direction in space as well as our position in relation to the light and the properties of the surface that it illuminates. Concisely, “lighting is merely one element of a complex structure,” as Merleau-Ponty asserts.\textsuperscript{161} Even if the focus has previously been on light and the following subject will be colour, it is important to stress that the two cannot actually be perceived as separate entities, considering colour is light. The intensity and nuance of the light itself affects the tone of the colour.\textsuperscript{162}

The colour setting in the main hall in Museo dell’Ara Pacis is characterized by nuances of mainly white, but just as the light changes throughout the day, so do the colours and shades. As mentioned in relation to light, the main hall looks grey instead of clear white or beige as the sun sets, but during daytime, the warm yellow rays of sunlight make the colours appear distinctly white or softly beige. The colours of the space and of the altar are characterized by shades of white, beige, grey, rusty red, and brown, all against the plain white basis of the ceiling, the four columns, and

\textsuperscript{160} Rossini, 6-12.
\textsuperscript{161} Merleau-Ponty (2002), 363.
\textsuperscript{162} Cf. Merleau-Ponty (1964), 50-51; see also Goethe, xvii.
the solid walls. The cream-coloured floor neutralizes the whole theme of mélange whiteness. The altar show traces of terracotta brown and rust red tans as well as light grey and white, and these contrast against the more fixed and even colours of the spatial elements that, together with the altar’s ornamentation, gives the impression of Ara Pacis as being the dynamic factor in the otherwise static spatial design. Still, the tones of the altar and the space are restricted to a rather small variety of shades of whiteness without any extensive deviations from that conformity.

Because colours have the potential to express meaning but do not contain meaning as such, they can be filled with meaning depending on the context in which they are set. As van Leeuwen emphasizes, “The meaning potential of lightness, for instance, is just that, ‘lightness’. In religious paintings this might become ‘divine light’, in interior decoration it might come to mean ‘peacefulness’ and ‘tranquillity’.” Consequently, the bright tones in the Museo dell’Ara Pacis hall need to be analysed from the perspective of their specific setting. Here, the example of lightness as peacefulness and tranquillity is applicable to this space. A “divine light” is not far from being a possible interpretation either, because the lightness of the space gives an impression of the altar as a sacred object. Divine light in this case does not have direct associations with the function and meaning of the altar, but it is rather a part of the meaning conveyed through the brightness of the space. The altar is sacred in the sense of being a unique artefact that apparently is of such value that it needs its own museum, and a museum that in turn emphasizes its sacredness.

![Fig. 8: Layers of whiteness in Museo dell’Ara Pacis. Students study the back of the altar. Behind them stands a model which illustrates and explains its ornamentations.](image)

163 van Leeuwen, 58-59.
Kress and van Leeuwen claim that colour has “meaning potential because of its cultural history.”

In this case, the use of white represents not only divinity, but another connotation to antiquity. Research has revealed that antiquity was not as white as has been the common belief, but was rather quite colourful. The sculptures that have been excavated and the architecture that remains from that time might be white today but they were in fact painted in many colours. However, the idea of the white antiquity still remains as a concept, not only because old ideas die hard, but also because this principle is often reproduced in museums exhibiting antique sculptures.

The exhibition catalogue Vita lögner was published when the exposition with the same title, meaning “white lies”, was shown at Medelhavsmuseet in Stockholm during the autumn of 2010. It treated the subject matter of polychrome antiquity and displayed both original sculptures that used to be painted as well as replicas of sculptures fully decorated with paint. The book contains the article “Den vita retoriken” by archaeologist Barbro Santillo Frizell, in which she explores the misconception of the white antiquity. According to her, there are a few reasons why this false impression is still widely spread among the general public. One reason, Santillo Frizell argues, has its roots in the Renaissance when the marble sculpture the Laocoön Group, most likely created between the years 170-50 BC, was excavated in Rome in 1506. There were no remains of its previous colouring; it was completely white. The sculpture was immensely influential on the contemporary artists such as Michelangelo, who made his own version of the white statue. Therefore, in turn, Renaissance artist made a great impact on art history, causing white marble to represent classical art and architecture even until this day. Also, this would become theorized through Johann Winckelmann in the 18th century, who described classical art with an air of admiration for its ideal beauty, grandeur, and grace. These reviews would establish an idea of the higher values of antiquity throughout the 18th and mid-19th century.

However, Vinzenz Brinkmann, professor and director of Liebieghaus Antikensammlung in Frankfurt, argues that an interest in the colouration of antiquity increased among artists in the 19th century due to several excavations in Greece and Italy during which sculptures with remnants of colour were found. Although there were attempts to spread information to the public by, for example, displaying painted plaster figures, the time was not right for larger and more elaborate studies on the polychrome antiquity. Even though scholars, researchers, and artists were fully

164 Kress & van Leeuwen, 59; see also Color: Communication in Architectural Space, 28-29.
165 Rasmussen, 215.
167 Ibid., 32.
168 Alex Potts, Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History (New Haven & London: Yale University Press 1994), 15-16; Santillo Frizell, 32; see also Palmqvist, 70.
aware of the polychromic art and architecture of antiquity for a long time, this knowledge was not successfully communicated to the general public. Moreover, during the 20th century, and especially after the Second World War, a certain purist attitude arose among the post-war generation that acknowledged there were examples of colour in antique artefacts in theory, but this was not further explored. The white and pure version of antiquity would be adopted, for example, by the fascists, who would use white in architecture, arenas, and decorations of public spaces, believing it to be a symbol for the great Roman Empire as well as a celebration of the whiteness of the Aryans.

In the present day, Santillo Frizell claims, popular culture reproduces the purist conception of white antiquity as highly valued through movies and TV series set in the Roman Empire. These often indicate either that the art and architecture were all white or that colourful environments belonged to the middle- and lower classes while the environments of upper class citizens were white and clean. Santillo Frizell also comments on how museums tend to reproduce the misconception of white antiquity. For instance, the Acropolis Museum in Athens was opened a few years after Museo dell’Ara Pacis and just like the latter, the Acropolis Museum contains white antique artefacts displayed in white spaces. Santillo Frizell argues that the two museum settings enable aesthetic experiences rather than emphasizing educational aspects. With these myths of whiteness having been so well established, it is difficult to imagine antique sculptures and buildings in colour and Ara Pacis is no exception. Although the altar was in fact multi-coloured initially, the paint has either fallen off or, as Santillo Frizell claims, been rubbed off by the fascists as they excavated the altar, because they preferred the white underneath the colour.

In Museo dell’Ara Pacis, there have been efforts to try to show what the altar looked like originally. L’Ara Pacis a colori is an occasional event that takes place at nighttime in the museum on sporadic dates. The front and back of the altar are then coloured through light projections that suggest what it might have looked like originally. This event is not a consistent part of the everyday practices in the museum and therefore it is experienced by only a quite small number of visitors in comparison to the number of general visitors. Moreover, the event is not always open to, or known by the public. Just as Santillo Frizell emphasizes in her article, this kind of event might encourage further academic research within the fields such as classical studies and cultures of antiquity as well as leading to developments of how similar techniques can be used as pedagogic tools within museum practice. That would certainly be a positive effect considering the only information about Ara Pacis’ polychromic past that is consistently available at the moment is shown through the

170 Brinkmann, 11-13; Santillo Frizell, 32.
171 Santillo Frizell, 40; Brinkmann, 13.
172 Santillo Frizell, 31-32.
173 Ibid., 31.
174 Ibid., 46.
computer animation. The computer is placed in another room than the altar, a room that not all visitors realize is accessible to them. Some might not even notice that there is a doorway at the back of the main hall leading to this additional space. In other words, it is not guaranteed that this knowledge is communicated to all who enter the museum.

The altar is white and as far as many visitors are concerned, it might as well always have been. The museum reproduces the idea of the white antiquity by not providing visitors with information about colouration directly in relation to the altar. If the museum would have been more focused on Ara Pacis’ later history, such as the final excavations during the 1930s, when the remnants of colour were either removed or had already faded, the choice to not inform visitors about original poly-chromatic decorations to any great extent might have been more logical. The altar would then be shown with the colour setting it had at that specific moment in time, which was white. However, the Augustan age is central in the museum and during that time, the altar was painted. Even though the whiteness could be regarded as representing Ara Pacis’ appearance during the later excavations, the whiteness of this antique artefact is considered to represent antiquity in the museum context. The whiteness of the hall plays upon this misconception. It consecrates not only the Ara Pacis as an object but also antiquity as a “golden age” when it comes to art and architecture and as a time of high culture in general.175 The whiteness suggests a conception of antiquity as a representation of ethereal purity and an indication of the idealization of classic artists and intellectuals, an idea that is closely related to the perspectives of Winckelmann in the 18th century.176

All of these concepts are represented in the design of Museo dell’Ara Pacis, even in its architectural form. The pilasters and the symmetry of the rectangular floor plan connoting classic architecture and the travertine referring to Roman building traditions are not only complementing the appearance of Ara Pacis and creating a spatial uniformity for aesthetic reasons. They are there as an indicator of the conception of the superiority of the structural designs of antiquity, designs and styles that have survived for millennia and have been manifested in Western architecture throughout history. In a sense, the design of Museo dell’Ara Pacis is part of a tradition and it represents conservation, composure, and consistency. The Roman everyday life that takes place outside the museum and is seen through the windows can be perceived as functioning as a representation of the movement surrounding the Ara Pacis also in its original location, thereby also referring to the altar’s history. The dynamism then becomes a part of the scenery of the space as well as a scenery of history. Consistency is not only present in the architectural design and elements, but also in the building’s surrounding environment as represented by the presence of the river Tiber and the continuous movements of Rome’s inhabitants.

175 Cf. Santillo Frizell, 31.
176 Cf. Ibid., 32.
The classical legacy

The layout of the main hall suggests similarities to the typical rectangular floor plans of classical temples that were characterized by distinct symmetry. As Psarra stresses, “Reinforced by custom and cultural understanding the impact of sameness and difference on our perception is such that we do not need to move extensively to grasp a classical building.”\textsuperscript{177} Thus, the perception of the geometric sameness of a building or space enables the feeling of having comprehended its layout visually before exploring it further.\textsuperscript{178} In *Houses, Villas, and Palaces in the Roman World* (1975) Alexander G. McKay, professor emeritus of classics, describes architecture from the age of the Etruscans to 300-400 AD.\textsuperscript{179} He states that Etruscan, Italic, and Roman architects were interested in creating panoramic views through spatial relations and these allowed them to enjoy the axially through which they could see the spaces beyond the one they were situated in, whether it was the next room or a garden outside the house.\textsuperscript{180} Parallels can be drawn between the spatial design in Museo dell’Ara Pacis and the ancient panoramic Roman architecture that McKay describes, because they both have abstract and fluctuating limits between the indoors and outdoors. The windows letting in natural light evoke a feeling of an outdoor environment in a similar way as in an atrium. Because of the rectangular layout of Museo dell’Ara Pacis, the spatial form of the museum somewhat resembles a pre-Christian basilica with a stretched axis. The cultural interpretation of the spatially centralized order of the design as related to temple buildings is close at hand when entering the

\textsuperscript{177} Psarra (2009), 62.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 61-62.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 34.
museum. It adds yet another associative suggestion to visitors. What the relationship between space and altar is communicating is quite apparent. Not only do the spatial elements strategically lead the eye toward the central position of the altar, but the altar itself, in its form, characteristics, and sheer size, leaves visitors with no doubt as to the supremacy of Ara Pacis.

The four cylindrical columns are not decorated; they are straight, smooth, plain white, and seem to be whitewashed. They have a supporting function but they also add another layer of cultural history to the space in an architectural stylistic sense. Moreover, they give an impression of stability, by referring to antiquity and the constant presence of classical architecture. The architectural characteristics of antiquity are, and have been, a recurring factor in Roman architecture. In Museo dell’Ara Pacis, the historical presence indicates an indestructible continuity and a stability that is substantiated by the repetitive straight lines of the space. Therefore, the space is not just intense and heavy, in the sense of being voluminous and consisting of hard materials and large surfaces, but also in the sense of setting a stage for the two-thousand-year-old altar by illustrating and emphasizing its sacredness and historical significance.

Unspoken importance

The windows play a significant part in the experience of the main hall in Museo dell’Ara Pacis. They seem to blur the borders between inside and outside, thereby indicating the altar’s original context and its physical, cultural, and historical relations to the Mausoleum of Augustus, Piazza Augusto Imperatore, and the city of Rome. On the other hand, the windows can also be seen as actually emphasizing the limits between the city and the Ara Pacis. The space is silent and still within the windows, making it something of a white and cool oasis. In contrast to this, the city outside is dynamic and colourful. This effect defines the sanctity of the object: it is protected within a pure, static, and white environment while the outside is transient and stressful, perhaps even profane and unclean. This can be compared to Santillo Frizell’s observation of how antiquity is represented in popular culture, where colour can be a marker of social class, indicating a division between colour and white that, in turn, suggests a separation between what is superior and what is, if not low, then at least lower.181 Whiteness, then, draws a line between the mundane and that which is holy.

This is also observed by first-time visitor Eric, a 25-year-old student of history from Sweden.182 Upon entering Museo dell’Ara Pacis, his first impression is that he finds it bright, shiny, and open – in contrast to the environment outside the museum – and he refers to the large glass surfaces of the windows and the wide floor

181 Santillo Frizell, 31-32.
182 Date of visit: October 28 2011. Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University. The conversation with Eric was held in Swedish.
surface. After having perceived the space for a short while, Eric’s first instinct is to move to the information area because he wants to get an idea of what the museum is all about. He wonders whether the museum is now situated on the same location as it was from the beginning and he soon finds out that it is not and that the altar has in fact been moved from its original site.

Eric starts to move about the space and even if he has read some of the information, he is not sure what the object is or what its function has been and as a consequence he does not know what to make of it. He says he regrets not having read more thoroughly, but he seems to believe the emperors, presented in the family tree illustrated on the glass screen in the information area, had something to do with the altar and that one or some of them lived at the time when the altar was erected. It becomes clear here that there is a lack of adequate and relevant information in the museum, a fact that has been criticized before. For example, there apparently is no description of the practices of the rites performed during the sacrificial ceremonies in Ara Pacis and, as mentioned, there is no permanently accessible information about the colouration of the altar inside the main hall. The information provided generally concerns the history of the altar and an analysis of its decorations. However, the historical background that is presented can be somewhat confusing rather than informational. Even if there are texts and models, the information can be complicated to grasp.

Eric finds it is hard to miss that those who were involved with the museum planning were trying to show that the altar is something very important, because it is the only artefact, and a very large one, placed in the middle of the room. Still, he thinks that if you do not know that much about it, it is difficult to understand why this is the case. He gets the impression that the spatial design and the altar are related in some way and he describes them as well conformed. He also mentions the correlation between the stone material and the colours, but he also feels that there is a big difference between the shape of the space and that of the object.

Initially, Eric mentioned the large glass surfaces, but he did not observe what was outside the windows at first. Because he was focused on the altar he did not think about the window’s transparency. However, when he considers it, he reflects on what can be viewed through the windows: people walking on the street along the river and what he perceives as a park, or at least an assemblage of trees, on the opposite side. Once again, information is lacking because it does not thoroughly explain that what is hidden behind the group of cypresses, which is what Eric sees, is the Mausoleum of Augustus. When Eric moves back to the information area to find out more about the altar, he studies the model depicting Campus Martius and notices the plains of the area (fig. 10). He also reads the information about it and it clarifies that it was a place for activities such as military exercise and parades. Eric relates the spaciousness and openness of the museum hall to the original site of the altar on the open plain.

---

183 Santillo Frizzell, 31.
Fig. 10: Model depicting Campus Martius with the Mausoleum of Augustus at the far end, Pantheon in the foreground and the Horologium and Ara Pacis in the middle.

Eric consistently comes back to mentioning the brightness and the volume of the space, which were also his first impressions. The position of Ara Pacis, the spatial disposition, and the design of the main hall give him the impression that the altar is central and valuable. However, he feels that the information text is not enough to explain what it is that makes the altar relevant and momentous. Therefore, his conclusion is that there is something important, something more behind the story of the altar, that he does not know about.

The effects that the spatial design of Museo dell’Ara Pacis have on how the altar is perceived are truly significant. Having already considered the central placement of the object in the space, the shades of white as a symbol of classical qualities, and sacredness along with the panoramic scenery outside the vast windows as an indicator of the altar’s origin, Eric’s impression of the altar as important is in no way surprising. His confusion, however, could be perceived as more interesting, but as has been discussed above, much about Museo dell’Ara Pacis is left unsaid. The conclusion can then be drawn that this is a museum that, although having an information area, is not mainly for learning about the altar’s history but for providing visitors with an aesthetic experience. The history is there in the information area, in books that are sold in the museum shop, and in the altar itself – even the architecture of the museum gives clues about the altar’s past through its location and design. Still, the information seems to be too abstract, too sparse, or too confusing to be truly engaging.
What is engaging, though, is the appearance of Ara Pacis. Being a monument of solidity, serenity, and beauty it is treated accordingly and it is set in a space that emphasizes its rare qualities as a cultural and historical artefact turned artwork. What Eric seems to experience is a kind of imbalance that emerges as he discovers that the physical and visual experience of the museum space and the object is not sufficiently supplemented with information about what is displayed. This is not to say that information, as a provider of cognitive and intellectual stimulation, is in any way imperative in relation to sensations of the body. Considering Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological conception of the body and mind as absolutely intertwined, this imbalance affects not just the mind but the whole body, because the mind is in and with the body. Moreover, our bodies, as perceptive beings, are not restricted to a consciousness, but are consisting of experienced meanings, as stressed by Merleau-Ponty.184 Accordingly, it is not merely that the intellect is not satisfied that causes the imbalance here, but rather the fact that an element of the museum experience does not live up to expectations and thereby the whole being is affected.

Being left with inadequate written information, Eric bases his experience on his perceptions derived from his physical senses and from that he draws conclusions through, for instance, associations and spatial codes. As a student of history, not being provided with a satisfactory account of the altar’s historical context seems to frustrate him and it would probably frustrate any museum visitor to come to a museum and be provided with too much of one element and too little of another. Had the museum lacked in spatial design but instead been filled with texts and labels, frustration would most likely have occurred as well because visitors could feel that they might as well have read a book. Again, the sensation of imbalance during a museum visit can be felt as a lack of any component, not necessarily a lack of intellectual stimulation. What Eric’s comments show, however, is that he actually does understand something about Ara Pacis, namely that it was, and perhaps still is, an important and valuable object and his conclusion is based on his perceptions of the spatial design and the altar’s position within the museum space.

**Conclusion**

Museo dell’Ara Pacis is a museum that gives much to its visitors in terms of historical and aesthetic experiences. However, while the aesthetic qualities of the altar are in no way hidden – on the contrary, they are enhanced by the spatial design – the history of the altar is not as easily detected. Even if one should not underestimate the intelligence of museum visitors, and certainly not think that they are not familiar with the themes with which a particular museum of their interest is concerned, it cannot be expected that everyone is fully aware of, for example, the richness of colour that characterized antique artefacts. Especially not when considering Western museums’ general tendency to reproduce the idea of white antiquity without prob-

184 Merleau-Ponty (2002), 177; Merleau-Ponty (2004), 56.
lematizing this anomaly.\textsuperscript{185} Something is lost in the communication and representation of history when there are deficiencies in providing the audience with as much historical information as possible, which I believe museum visitors are expecting to receive. The whiteness of Ara Pacis is accentuated by the almost pristine building in which it is set. If the computer showing animations with suggestions on what the altar looked like in colour was placed inside the actual museum hall, and not in an adjacent room, perhaps it would be considered to interfere with the experience of the altar. However, the information area could easily be complemented with such an illustration. Just as the sensation of an open-air environment evoked by the spatial design is validated by the model and the map in the information area, allowing visitors to make connections between the altar’s original location and the airiness of the museum space, so too could the illustrative animations supplement the experience of the altar, particularly if both the animated and the physical versions of the altar could be visually perceived simultaneously in the same space.

In Museo dell’Ara Pacis, the altar is what validates the museum’s existence and, therefore, it would perhaps be even more important to be explicit when describing the actual appearance of the altar as it was. Nevertheless, we always see settings and objects as they \textit{are} and not as they \textit{were}. Thus, the immediate experience of the altar as it appears here and now, in all its whiteness, becomes authentic to the perceiver. Still, the history of the altar is inscribed in its decorations and in its material as well as in the surrounding environment outside the windows, all of which suggest the connections to Emperor Augustus and to the Fascist era. The history is emphasized by the whiteness of the museum hall, with the columns and the travertine walls as well as the portrait sculptures that might not be easily associated with the altar’s history, but which still sets it in some sort of social context through their presence. The question is which context exactly that is and it is that particular inquiry that leaves Eric with the impression of the altar as being very important although he does not know why. The story behind the altar is somewhat transcended by the aesthetic qualities of Ara Pacis, which is, in turn, accentuated by the sophisticated and suggestive spatial design of the museum space.

\textsuperscript{185} Cf. Santillo Frizell, 31.
CHAPTER III

PALAZZO DORIA PAMPHILJ

**Background**

Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is located on Via del Corso in the centre of Rome and the history of the palace dates back to the 15th century. The original palace building was quite small, but it expanded in stages throughout the centuries and it went through extensive enlargements and renovations during the 17th century. In 1601, the palace came into the ownership of Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, who passed it on to his relative Olimpia Aldobrandini, who was married to Camillo Pamphilj. In 1760, the Pamphilj family line merged into the Doria Pamphilj family branch, which took over the palace and is still its owner. The Doria Pamphilj family is a princely Roman family whose ancestry dates back to, at least, the first part of the 17th century, when marriages took place between members of the Doria and Pamphilj families.

Among the more prominent family members have been several cardinals and individuals with high positions within politics and the army. The most well-known is probably Giovanni Battista Pamphilj, who became pope in 1644 under the name Innocentius X. In 1650, the Spanish artist Diego Velázquez painted a portrait of the pope, a painting that became renowned and which is one of the most famous paintings on display in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj (fig. 15). The year after the portrait was created, Pope Innocentius X officially initiated what would become the family’s art collection. Artworks were obtained by purchases and through marriages between princely families. The collection consists of paintings and sculptures, antique as well as contemporaneous, and it contains artworks by Italian artists such as Filippo Lippi, Caravaggio, and Gian Lorenzo Bernini as well as art by Flemish artists like Hans Memling and father and son Pieter and Jan Brueghel.

---

188 Safarik, 4.
189 Ibid., 4-5.
The collection is displayed in the apartments which were renovated during the 1730s in order to house the quantity of artworks, to create an appropriate setting to suit the highly regarded collection, and to modernize the interior and furnishing. Today, the exhibition in the palace is arranged similarly to the original 17th and 18th century settings. The collecting of art ceased in the mid-19th century and during this time, the restructuring of the apartments was finished. The access to the spaces of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj had until then been restricted to the family, close friends, cardinals, and members of other princely families and were not open to the general public. During the last rearrangements in the 19th century the private areas of the palace were divided from what would become the more publically accessible apartments. Since then, some of the apartments have been opened successively, while some have been inaccessible from time to time due to renovations. The final decision to open the now accessible apartments to the general public came from Princess Orietta Pogson Doria Pamphilj in 1997.

Fig. 11: Palazzo Doria Pamphilj floor plan.

190 Safarik, 5; Magnusson, 487.
191 Safarik, 5.
Museum context

Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is one of many palaces in Italy that are open to the public. It can be defined as what Risnicoff de Gorgas calls a house museum, considering that it is a historical home that has been musealized. The palace’s location on one of the main streets in central Rome, Via del Corso, makes it accessible and easy to find. However, it is not until one has entered the courtyard that it is fully apparent that it is a palace. The façade facing Via del Corso does not give that information away, because it is interspersed among other buildings, some of them also palaces or other prominent buildings. Inside the outer walls, though, it becomes apparent and the picturesque façades and arcades, enclosing a quadratic little garden of trees, bushes, and a fountain, suggest that this is a building of certain dignity.

Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is not the only building in the area that is hiding an interesting history behind its walls. The building neighbouring the palace to the north, for instance, used to house the Collegio Romano from the end of the 16th century and for the next three hundred years. Collegio Romano, which is now called Pontificia Università Gregoriana, is a Roman-Catholic university created by the founder of the Jesuits, Ignazio of Loyola, in the 1550s. Moreover, a number of historic palaces are located in the areas surrounding Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, including Palazzo Colonna and Palazzo Venezia, both of which have functioned as residences and that are now open to the public as art galleries and museums. The assembly of palaces and historic buildings shows that Rome is a city that contains many layers of history and that majestic palaces and houses of the past are still present, right on the modern shopping streets. Stepping into the courtyard of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj and leaving the busy street behind means going from liveliness to tranquility. It also means, in a sense, going from one perception of time into another, a transition that one should expect to occur quite often during a visit to Rome.

Layout of the palace spaces

Before analysing the palace spaces individually, a short description of the layout of the rooms and galleries is presented here in order to clarify the disposition of the palace spaces. After having entered the gates of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj and walked past the courtyard, some steps lead up into the apartments and the first room, the Poussin room. Standing at the entrance to the first space it is possible to see several rooms in a row straight ahead. The doorways of the following spaces are disposed in a linear form and at the end, it is possible to see as far as to the end of the first gal-

---

192 Risnicoff de Gorgas, 356.
193 As mentioned in the previous chapter, Via del Corso used to be called Via Flaminia, which is the street where Ara Pacis was originally placed. Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is thus located on the same street, only a few blocks south of where the altar used to stand.
194 Dates of observations in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj: January 9 2012; January 13 2012; January 16 2012; January 28 2012; February 20 2012. Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University.
lery (fig. 11). This linearity has a leading effect, guiding visitors through the spatial disposition and making the layout comprehensible. It also prepares visitors for what is to come and shows them that there are yet many large and imposing spaces to be entered. An estimation of the distance between the entrance and the end of the first gallery indicates a promenade of approximately 70-80 meters. The Poussin room alone expands more than 15 meters from the entrance to the other side of the space. To the right of the Poussin room is a few private rooms that can only be viewed and not entered. They are delimited by waist-high glass screens but they are also demarcated by differing from the public halls in terms of furnishing, since the private rooms are partially modernized.

After the Poussin room comes the Velvet room, which is a bit smaller than the first space, and this is followed by the Ballroom with an adjoining smaller ballroom. The large Ballroom appears to be voluminous with extensive open surfaces, which indicates its function. Still, because the space is conjoined by a smaller ballroom, with only a narrow supporting wall separating the two spaces, it gives the impression that the larger Ballroom extends into the smaller one, making the large Ballroom seem more open and spacious than it actually is. In one of the corners is a booth with a fence, in which a harp and a life-size mannequin holding a violin are placed. These objects do not belong to the collections, but instead represent an orchestra as an illustration of the function of the Ballroom. To the left of the smaller ballroom is an ante-chamber followed by the family’s private chapel. The chapel is richly decorated and contains the customary items used in Catholic masses and ceremonies. When returning from there back to the little ballroom, the next room in line is a small chamber that contains a museum shop. This is the last room before entering the galleries.

The galleries consist of four wings shaped as a square according to the composition of the building and the position of the courtyard, which is framed by the gallery wings. The displays in the first, third, and fourth galleries all follow the same concept: paintings hanging close together in an almost salon-like fitting. At the end of the first gallery, there is a small room to the left devoted to the famous portrait of Pope Innocentius X painted by Velázquez. This room contains only two artefacts; the painting and a marble bust depicting the same pope, made by Bernini in the mid-17th century. The painting, however, is the main focus of the room. It is hung on the left wall as seen from the entrance and because of its position it is not visible from the galleries, although the sculpture is. From here, the route continues into the second gallery, the Gallery of Mirrors, which evokes sensations of openness and airiness. While the walls of the first, third, and fourth galleries are mainly covered by closely fit paintings, the Gallery of Mirrors does not contain any paintings at all, but instead contains sculptures and mirrors with golden frames. In every corner of the quadrat of galleries are one or several adjoining rooms. Some of these rooms

contain permanent art exhibitions while some are used for temporary displays. The latter are sometimes closed when exhibitions are changed. In the corner of the third and the fourth gallery is the Aldobrandini room and beyond it, the Primitives room. This chapter will mainly focus on specific spaces in the palace, namely the Poussin room and the Velvet room in the apartments as well as the four galleries, the small room displaying Velázquez’ portrait of Innocentius X and the Aldobrandini room.

**The apartments**

The considerable volume of the Poussin room does not go unnoticed. It is one of the largest spaces on the whole floor, with a high ceiling, extending far in all directions (fig. 12). It is an impressive space with a ceiling height of approximately 8-10 meters and a width of about 8 meters, which induces both a feeling of openness and of vulnerability. In his book *Space and Place* (1977), professor of geography Yi-Fu Tuan emphasizes that volume is generally considered to symbolize openness and freedom in the Western world because it “suggests the future and invites action.” However, he also stresses that spaciousness can be perceived as threatening because openness simultaneously indicates exposition. Being situated in a voluminous space might evoke feelings of being vulnerable because of the lack of elements to hide behind or given routes to follow within the space. This is also Bollnow’s conclusion in his discussion on spatial factors which create a feeling of hominess, meaning the safety and comfort that one associates with the home. He claims that voluminous spaces can give the impression of being hostile or unfavourable, while a smaller space might be more comfortable, given that it is proportionally fitting for the person who is to dwell in the actual space. The Poussin room certainly evokes sensations of both freedom and vulnerability due to its open surfaces and large proportions.

The private and inaccessible spaces, that are adjacent to the Poussin room, are more proportionate to the human body in comparison to the public rooms, in the sense that they are not only smaller but they are also furnished. According to Bollnow, furniture brings a certain kind of warmth and hominess to a space, provided that the furniture appears comfortable and that is neither filling the space to the brim nor placed too sparsely in the space. Although the apartments do have chairs and console tables standing along the walls, the arrangement and style of the furniture, and the fact that many of the chairs have plastic covered seats, indicate that they are on display and not for use. The furniture in the inaccessible rooms, on the other hand, suggests a daily use for social purposes and even though some of the rooms are a bit overcrowded by furniture, they convey a comfortable and homelike

---

196 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press 1977), 54.
197 Ibid.
198 Bollnow, 144.
199 Ibid.
atmosphere. The private rooms are furnished with chairs, sofas, clocks, books, and other objects associated with living-room furnishing and decoration of the entire 20th century, but in an 18th century spatial setting. One of the most modern items in the room is a white wireless phone from the 1990s, a relatively modern phone that once again gives the impression that the rooms are still in use on occasion.

Fig. 12: The Poussin room.

The apartments have several different kinds of electric light sources. The lamps hanging from the ceiling are mainly imitations of simple crystal chandeliers but made of another material, probably plastic, set with electric lights in the shape of candles (fig. 12). There is also light coming from the cavetto vaults in the ceilings in the apartments and from spotlights directed towards the paintings in the galleries. Moreover, some natural light comes in from the large windows. These kinds of plastic chandeliers are also used in other palaces in the Roman area and appear to have the function of simply replacing previous light sources. Standing at the entrance in the Poussin room, the lamps in all of the spaces within the field of view attract the gaze and direct it straight ahead through all of the spaces to the end of the first gallery. There is, therefore, not only a straight line of doorframes, but also of light, mainly plastic chandeliers, that guides visitors through the row of spaces. As Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, light can have the effect of leading the gaze and accentuating specific objects or areas. “When some detail in a landscape, which I have been unable to distinguish alone, is pointed out to me, there is someone who has already seen it, who already knows where to stand and where to look in order to

200 Cf. McCarter & Pallasmaa, 152.
see it. The lighting directs my gaze and causes me to see the object,” he asserts. In Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, it appears as if the lamps are intended to indicate which route visitors’ are to follow, not only in order to find their way, but also to experience the disposition of spaces and the arrangement of the art from a specific perspective. The plastic lamps have presumably replaced crystal chandeliers with candles. The effects of light are described in *The Flame of a Candle* (1961), in which Bachelard uses his characteristic poetic language to approach themes such as the properties and characteristics of flames. While the flame is a “living substance”, as Bachelard describes it, the electric light is tame. “The flame of a lamp, thanks to man’s ingenuity, is now disciplined. It is given over completely to its task, both simple and lofty, as a giver of light,” Bachelard states. Keeping living flames in a musealized palace would truly be risky and the controlled electric light proves to be a sufficient substitute, although its rigid qualities do not nearly resemble the dancing of a tiny flame and the effect it has on its surroundings. One can only imagine what the colours of the walls and the motifs of the artworks and ceiling paintings might have looked like if illuminated by the flickering flames of candles as they once were rather than the fixed lights of electric bulbs. Still, the attempt to provide the spaces with light by using plastic chandeliers of contemporaneous design instead of more modern armatures at least gives visitors an idea of where the original chandeliers were placed and what they might have looked like.

The walls in the Poussin room are covered in cerise textiles on which large paintings are displayed, showing motifs of landscapes with mountains and forests. The paintings hang close to each other, fitting together like a jigsaw puzzle. They resemble the exhibition style of the salons and museum galleries in the 18th and 19th century, using the whole wall surfaces, from floor to ceiling, for exposing artworks. Here, however, the spaces in-between the paintings are wider than in a typical salon and this allows for the cerise textile to come through and bring warmth and intimacy to the voluminous space. The cerise colour, which appears closer to red than to pink at times, seems also to bear resemblances to the properties of the colour red, i.e. that of foregrounding rather than receding and of seemingly staying close rather than being distant. The ceiling in the Poussin room is grey and golden, as in the next three rooms, while the colours of the paintings are generally quite dark. All the picture frames are golden, in this hall as in all the spaces in the palace. Even though the following spaces are a little bit smaller than the first room, they are still imposing because of their richly decorated interiors.

The Velvet room is rectangular, its long sides extending approximately 10 meters to the sides, as seen from the entrance, and with short sides that are about

---

203 Ibid., 10.
204 Klonk, 24; O’Doherty, 15-16.
205 van Leeuwen, 64, 80.
half as wide. The ceiling height is about 6-8 meters. The walls in the Velvet room are covered in red velvet and golden embroideries and the ceiling is ornamented with paintings, as in most of the spaces in the palace. There are a few paintings hanging on the walls in the Velvet room as well, with touches of red colour in each of them, reflecting the redness of the space. They are not as numerous or as large as in the Poussin room, where the walls are not patterned and are thus well suited for displaying paintings. In the Velvet room, however, the wall textiles and embroideries function as ornamentation in themselves. The drapes by the windows and doorways are also red and golden and so are the chairs along the walls. The softness of the space is not only due to the textile material but also to the warmth of the deep red colour layered with the warm golden yellow reflecting the light.

According to van Leeuwen, the colour red belongs to the warm end of the temperature gradation, as opposed to blue which is generally considered cold. Moreover, red is associated with “energy, salience, foregrounding,” van Leeuwen claims.206 The nuances of red and cerise that are seen in the first two rooms of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj are certainly warm, but they do not give any particular sensation of being energetic. This could have to do with the properties of red, which Goethe describes as giving the impression of “gravity and dignity, and at the same time of grace and attractiveness.”207 In other words, aside from energy, red can also represent stability and nobility and this can be associated with magnificence depending on the context and nuance of the colour. In Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, the colours of the Velvet room and the Poussin room are easily associated with a majestic history and the social position of the princely family itself. Still, the lack of energetic properties of the reddish walls in the two rooms might also be due to the calmness enhanced by the volumes of the spaces. Furthermore, colour depends on material. According to Merleau-Ponty, the colour of an object is affected by the texture or structure of the same object.208 This is due to the fact that materials and textures such as soft, shiny, or rough surfaces reflect or absorb light to different extents and thereby affect the experience of colour.209 In relation to the Poussin room and the Velvet room, the soft silk and velvet covering the walls add softness to the spaces and the light is absorbed into the fabrics and makes their colours appear warm. Even if velvet seems to absorb light even more than silk, which has a certain shiny quality, the cerise colour seems to attenuate any effect of glossiness. The sensations of calmness and comfort are evoked because of these specific combinations of soft materials and warm colours; a different combination would have given other impressions. “A colour is never merely a colour, but the colour of a certain object,” as Merleau-Ponty emphasizes.210

206 van Leeuwen, 64.
207 Goethe, 172-173.
209 Lundberg, 60; van Leeuwen, 37.
The galleries

In Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, the vast surfaces leave much room for observing and being observed. The materials of the rooms, the textiles such as silk and velvet on the walls and in the curtains as well as chair cushions, seem to soften the apartments and to moderate any sensation of bareness or unfriendliness. The galleries, being rather narrow in size, provide more intimate atmospheres but they also give a colder impression than the previous spaces. The walls and panels in the galleries seem to be either stone or concrete while the floors are of stone bricks arranged in a fishbone pattern. The materials are different from the apartment rooms in that there is an absence of drapes and fabric. In their book *Learning from Museums* (2000), John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, Sea Grant professors in free-choice learning at Oregon State University, exemplify how soft and hard materials can affect the museum experience:

Textures and patterns, like colors, can evoke an emotional response. Rooms with smooth textures seem ‘cold,’ while rough textures such as those created by shag rugs, plush fabrics, and uneven wall surfaces contribute to a sense of ‘warmth’ in interior spaces. The power of this effect can be experienced by walking from the stark white walls and smooth marble floors of an art museum’s galleries into the carpeted, wallpapered, plushly furnished interior of the donors’ lounge; the galleries are cold, the lounge warm.211

The interiors of a museum space, then, create an atmosphere in a very concrete manner because the haptic associations one gets from simply looking at a certain material evoke the sensation of touch as well as of sight.212 In Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, the impressions that the characteristics of the materials give in the different spaces are palpable. As Falk and Dierking suggest, this effect is evident when one moves directly from one space to another, as in this case, from the apartments to the galleries and then from the galleries into the Aldobrandini room. However, the “colder” atmosphere in the galleries, in contrast to the apartments, does not suggest that the galleries are necessarily static or austere. The richly detailed paintings on the ceilings and on the window frames and panels, depicting organic ornaments and in some cases also mythical figures, bring a touch of warmth to the galleries. All of these fixed paintings add extra decoration and dynamics to the spaces in general, but as we shall see below, they might also induce an impression of excess. Although the wall surfaces are not decorated, the paintings are closely fitted together, which means that there are no completely bare walls in the palace. The Aldobrandini room with its grey-white stone surfaces, however, is plainer and barer than any of the others and this gives it a chilling impression.213

---

212 Lundberg, 31.
213 Cf. Bollnow, 144.
The first, third, and fourth galleries are quite narrow, approximately 3-4 meters wide, but with high ceilings, an architectural design that is similar to other contemporary palace galleries in Rome (fig. 13). As opposed to the apartment rooms, the corridor-like spatiality of the galleries seems to evoke an instinct to pick up the pace. As mentioned in the previous chapter, different spatial layouts initiate various tempos and according to Bergström, speed depends on factors such as our estimation of how long it takes to explore a specific space. Thus, the natural impulse in small and narrow spaces is to keep heading forward because their contents are usually not that time consuming.\textsuperscript{214} Also, corridors often function simply as passageways from one point to another and this is something we are familiar with in our everyday use of architecture. It feels natural for us to keep going until we reach the end. However, this effect can be problematic in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj because the first, third, and fourth galleries are the spaces where a large portion of the family’s art collection is displayed. These three galleries are narrower than the Gallery of Mirrors, and they contain furniture placed along the walls that reduces the spaciousness even more. Therefore, it can be difficult to stop and view the paintings on the walls in these galleries. This is due both to this tendency to increase the tempo and because the narrowness does not give enough room for one to step back and get an overview of the artwork. Also, the feeling of being in the way of other visitors can make a contemplation of the art a bit stressful.

\textsuperscript{214} Bergström, 92.
In the morning when the sun is in the north-east, it shines through the windows of the Gallery of Mirrors. During the late afternoon when the sunlight does not reach the windows, all of the spaces become a bit darker. As mentioned above, colours vary depending on the character and sufficiency of the light.²¹⁵ In Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, the plastic chandeliers replace the daylight as light sources and yet, the spaces do not maintain the same shades of colour. The soft yellow electric light produced by the chandeliers brings a certain sense of cosiness to the now darker spaces, especially in the red and golden Velvet room. The light in the first few apartment rooms is warm while the light in the galleries, which comes from the same kind of lamps, is whiter and thereby seems to be a bit colder. This difference in temperature is probably due to the difference in colours in the rooms and galleries and how the light reflects against the hard materials. In the Gallery of Mirrors, the light plays off the mirrors while the sun is in the east. When it is cloudy or raining, the hall becomes quite dull and the lights in the ceilings and under the mirrors are turned on to keep the space bright and imposing.

In the Gallery of Mirrors, the experience is different than the other galleries regarding tempo. The opportunity to look out the windows and to stroll among the sculptures induces a sensation of ease and this is at least partially because of the impression of spaciousness that, as Bergström argues, slows the pace down.²¹⁶ Also, although the mirrors are somewhat darkened by age, they still create an illusion of width in the gallery (fig. 14). As Bollnow discusses Baroque architecture in his book, he mentions the use of mirrors as a method to create infinity in spaces. “In the bewildering sequence of intersections and viewpoints, solid space breaks up into perspectives leading into the infinite. This is aided by conscious play of illusions, for example in the extravagant use of reflective mirrors,” he stresses.²¹⁷ The focus on illusion and infinity that the Baroque era implemented was thereby meant to create surprising and indefinable effects in the space.²¹⁸ Even if the kinds of extravagant illusory effects often seen in Baroque spaces are not extensively used in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj in general, the spatiality in the Gallery of Mirrors seems to unfold as one passes through it, an impression evoked by both the mirrors and the windows. The windows might not offer more than a view of the wall of the neighbouring building, but in addition to being a source of daylight, the windows have the optical effect of opening up the space. As the light then hits the mirrors, they too become sources of daylight while they simultaneously reflect the additional space that the windows represent and this adds yet another dimension to the gallery. The gallery is one space, the windows show a second space outside, and the mirrors reflect both the gallery and what is outside the windows and thus create a third space.

²¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty (1964), 51.
²¹⁶ Bergström, 92.
²¹⁷ Bollnow, 85.
A room for a pope

Where the first gallery and the Gallery of Mirrors meet is the small Velázquez room containing the bust portraying Innocentius X and, more importantly, Velázquez’ painting from 1650. The reason for the special focus on this painting, considering there are other so called masterpieces in the palace that do not have their own spaces dedicated to them, is partially that, as mentioned, Innocentius X was born Giovanni Battista Pamphilj, the man who founded the family’s art collection. The portrait was initially placed in the Poussin room, at a time when the palace was referred to as the Palazzo al Collegio Romano due to a nearby Roman-Catholic university. The portrait was moved to its current room in the 19th century. In the painting, Innocentius X is dressed in red and white and seated in a red and golden armchair in front of a red drape, holding a letter in his left hand (fig. 15). His appearance was subject to scrutiny and ruthless comments by those contemporary to him and the portrait has been described as depicting a harsh and cunning man. However, the painting itself has been much admired and is considered by many to be one of the most esteemed from the 17th century. The 20th century audience might also recall the Irish artist Francis Bacon’s famous painting from the 1950s of Innocentius X, that was directly inspired by Velázquez’ portrait.

To give an artefact its own room or restricted area in a museum tends to give the impression that the object is culturally, historically, or economically valuable –

---

219 Safarik, 44.
220 Ibid.
even more so than the other objects on display. One example is the bust of Nefertiti that is displayed in a case set in an otherwise empty space in Neues Museum in Berlin. Another is the arrangement for the Mona Lisa in the Louvre, the setting of which resembles a modernized high altar or private chapel and which is separate from other artworks. In both of these cases, the spatial composition and design singles the object out and separates it from the rest, and also clears the space around it. The artefact appears to need its own space where it can be viewed without distraction from other elements and where many visitors can view it at the same time – for it is expected that many will want to see it.

In Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, the spatial conditions for the portrait of the pope are slightly different, but the same effect occurs. As mentioned, the Velázquez room is small, no more than a chamber of perhaps 2 x 3 meters and with the bust of the pope taking up part of the space it is safe to say it is a small area. The walls are covered with silk textiles of pastel green, which appears soothing, pleasant, and solid in this space. 

Nevertheless, the strong red colours in the painting bring energy and intensity to the room. Comparing these reds to the colours on the walls in the Poussin room and Velvet room, which do not convey much energy, the red colours in the portrait are brighter than the reds of the two apartment spaces. Furthermore, the portrait is painted with oil on canvas and that gives the colours certain nuances due to the substances of the paint and the material of the canvas. While the Poussin room and the Velvet room evoke sensations of calm in combination with the soft fabrics, the reds in Velázquez’ painting gives the impression of being intense and energetic because of their nuances, their material, and the colour context in which the painting is displayed. Although the green and the red match each other in harmony, the properties of this kind of bright red seem to have a protruding effect, as opposed to the lighter green surfaces that give the impression of staying fixed in the background. Merleau-Ponty argues that colours assume various qualities depending on factors such as their surroundings and their relations to other colours. The portrait of Innocentius X is thus emphasized as a result of the composition of energetic reds within the painting’s own colour scheme, but it is even more accentuated in relation to the calm nuance of the green walls.

The glances from the two versions of the pope contribute to the sensation of intensity; the bust is placed so that it faces the entrance, which means that one is already observed by Innocentius X as one walks through the doorway. Once inside, the man in the painted portrait also stares straight back at the one observing him. The visitor is observed by the same man from two different angles and his glances are not in any way pleasant or friendly. Still, the look of the pope in the portrait, a man who, as suggested, was apparently repulsive and spiteful, is one of the reasons for the painting’s fame and, as intimidating as it may seem, it is also perceived as

221 van Leeuwen, 56-57; Goethe, 173.
222 van Leeuwen, 64.
223 Merleau-Ponty (1968), 132.
intriguing. Due to the size of the space, the glares of the pope’s two pairs of eyes become even more intensified as the two versions of the pope come close to the visitor of the space and the sensation of exposure to this man’s dual presence contribute to the somewhat unwelcoming atmosphere. The choice of placing this work of art in a small treasury instead of among the other paintings in the palace make the experience of it more memorable, both because of the portraits qualities as such and because of the intimate meeting that occurs in the chamber.

Fig. 15: The portrait of Innocentius X by Diego Velázquez (1650).

224 Safarik, 44.
**The Aldobrandini room**

The Aldobrandini room differs from the other spaces in the palace because it is stripped of ornamentation and polychromic adornments. Its open surfaces, light greyness, and high ceiling bring a more static and plain atmosphere to it. A few thick black stripes on the floor in the shapes of large rectangles add some geometric elements to the space. The focus of the room is a marble centaur standing in the middle of the floor and is surrounded by smaller sculptures. The Aldobrandini room has one of the highest ceilings of all of the spaces in the palace, approximately more than 8 meters high, and the bright surfaces enhance the sensation of spaciousness. The light mainly comes from spotlights in the ceiling. Because the surfaces in the space are grey-white and are made of stone that somewhat reflect the light, they also add a certain brightness to the display. The light is even, which means that none of the artefacts in the room are shaded.

Carlos is a 28-year-old student of illustration and animation living in Spain but originally coming from Mexico. When entering Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, he initially finds it overwhelming because of the large paintings, the voluminous spaces, and the ornate furniture. He says it feels like stepping into another time period and he describes the contrasts between the dark colours and the light in the motifs of the artworks as the one thing that mainly catches his eye. It is thus the art that specifically interests him, but he also comments on the spaces, saying he likes that the rooms are different from each other. In the Ballroom, he finds the tapestry appealing and detailed in, as he describes it, a Baroque sense of style. The furniture and the ceiling paintings contribute to this impression and he enjoys the whole experience of being in the Ballroom because, he says, there is cohesion of style. As we enter the galleries, Carlos mentions that there is not a single space or area that does not have something to look at. Because of all the paintings in the galleries he quickly becomes tired of all the visual impressions and feels that he cannot appreciate it in the same way after a while. Carlos thinks the paintings are set a bit too close to each other and that there should be some more space between them. On the other hand, he finds that, considering the experience of the galleries as a whole, everything appears to be in its place, meaning there is a unity regarding style. Turning the corner to the Gallery of Mirrors, Carlos reacts to it in a positive way because of the sculptures and the natural light. He says it evokes a feeling of spaciousness, as if there is more space to breathe, and he believes it is because of the natural light, which is not as present in the other spaces.

Moving on to the Aldobrandini room, Carlos says that he finds it calm and relaxing. He mentions the light as one of the factors evoking these feelings and this can be associated with the meaning potential of peacefulness and tranquillity that

---

225 Cf. Bollnow, 218; see also Rasmussen, 218.
226 Date of visit: March 16 2012. Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University. The conversation with Carlos was held in English.
lightness carries. It can also be because of Carlos’ experiences of the other spaces that he appears to find to be too lavish. However, he also says he is impressed by the quantity and concentration of artworks in the other spaces and he mentions a perceived cohesion of design and spatial setting in the apartments. The Aldobrandini room might very well provide him with a relieving pause from the adjoining rooms and galleries with their compact and intense displays and decorations. Because the light is quite white, the Aldobrandini room becomes a bit cool and it can be experienced as being either fresh or cold. Here, Carlos’ impressions of the space differ from my own; while he senses refreshing coolness and peacefulness, I sense uninviting coldness and hardness.

As van Leeuwen emphasizes, colours tend to be charged with “normative discourses”, but they are not strictly bound to intersubjective interpretations and are rather open for subjective understandings. In this case, mine and Carlos’ visual and physical impressions of the character of the room seem to be similar; the simplicity and plainness in the Aldobrandini room as well as the intensity and richness in the apartments and galleries are perceived similarly by us both. Still, our interpretations of what the designs of these spaces communicate to us individually vary in terms of sensations of mood and comfort. As a consequence, perceptions correspond but interpretations differ. Bollnow asserts that our being in a place can give very different experiences depending on our connection to it. “We can feel lost or sheltered in space, in unity with it or unfamiliar with it. There are therefore forms of being in space, variations of the relationship with space,” he states. Because Bollnow refers to the individual’s varying experiences of places, it might also be assumed

Fig. 16: Detail of a section of a wall in the Aldobrandini room.

227 van Leeuwen, 58-59.
228 Ibid., 2.
229 Bollnow, 256.
that two persons’ differing experiences of the same space rely on differences in their previous relations with similar spaces. “Memories of pleasant or unpleasant kinds are linked with the individual spaces,” as Bollnow claims.\textsuperscript{230} Christopher Tilley, archaeologist and author of \textit{A Phenomenology of Landscape} (1994), stresses that spaces and places have different effects on us depending on the meanings we associate with them.\textsuperscript{231} He applies a phenomenological perspective to the meaning of landscapes and he argues, just like Merleau-Ponty, that spatial experiences are dependent on the body. Also, Tilley stresses that a certain place and a sense of cultural identity are closely connected.\textsuperscript{232} The memory of a place that has had an important impact on us can, then, affect encounters with other places in the future. Moreover, Bachelard claims that the first house of our childhood has imprinted reference points in us that we will continue to relate to, probably for the rest of our lives. Whether we remember our first home as pleasant or not, it is our first “universe”, as Bachelard describes it.\textsuperscript{233} Therefore, our earliest experiences form some of our opinions and feelings about spaces. Additionally, Merleau-Ponty argues that we pass judgment on objects around us based on our earlier experiences of the properties of the objects:

> The things of the world are not simply neutral \textit{objects} which stand before us for our contemplation. Each one of them symbolises or recalls a particular way of behaving, provoking in us reactions which are either favourable or unfavourable. This is why people’s tastes, character, and the attitude they adopt to the world and to particular things can be deciphered from the objects with which they choose to surround themselves, their preferences for certain colours or the places where they like to go for walks.\textsuperscript{234}

Considering this as applicable to spatial properties, a phenomenological approach would then maintain that spaces make imprints in our bodies, reminding us of which spatial forms we enjoy and which we do not, as well as filling different spatial designs with different meanings. These meanings can be related to comfort and discomfort or to events that have occurred in similar spaces. Carlos and I might have unconsciously based our opinions on our own previous experiences; we perceived the same spatial design but interpreted it in different ways. Thus, the appeal of museum spaces, and the meaning of them, seems to be a question of how previous experiences have affected our relations with similar spaces. Our intersubjective perceptions of the spaces are similar, but we simply feel differently about them and this can be ascribed to a matter of diverse prior experiences, opinions, and tastes.\textsuperscript{235}

\textsuperscript{230} Bollnow, 67.
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid., 15-16.
\textsuperscript{233} Bachelard (1994), 4-5, 15.
\textsuperscript{234} Merleau-Ponty (2004), 63.
\textsuperscript{235} Cf. Gadamer, 270.
“Being there”

While house museums can be described as a category of museums, palace museums could be defined almost as a sub-category of house museums. The kind of princely palace galleries and apartments that Palazzo Doria Pamphilj contains were mainly used for entertainment and official ceremonies and their settings were meant to represent the prominence of the family. According to Duncan, it was customary all over Europe by the 18th century to display rich collections of art and artefacts in extravagant and luxurious spaces. This had the function of emphasizing the owners’ wealth and status in society as upper-class citizens or as a ruling unit. Contemporaneous visitors of the palace would perceive and understand the family’s position and history by interpreting the interior settings and displays. Today, the intention with the galleries is not that different. The palace interior still seems to be meant to impress and draw attention to the residing princely family. The difference is that it is now open for anyone and not just specific prominent visitors. Such an arrangement allows the visitors of the museum to experience past architectural, cultural, and social contexts for the sake of pleasure.

What make the spaces imposing is not merely their volumes, but also the ornamentation of the cavetto vaulted ceilings, the artworks on the walls, the patterns on the floors, and the coloured drapes over the windows and doorways leading to adjacent rooms. It is impressive because it is a spatial context and a living environment that is not encountered on an everyday basis. Moving through Palazzo Doria Pamphilj evokes a feeling of moving through both space and time. Still, as Eriksen argues, “the most praised authenticity is often the most successful illusion.” In other words, things are not always what they seem. Risnicoff de Gorgas emphasizes that museum spaces, especially in house museums, are in fact stagings or representations of the past and that they are not as untouched as they might seem. Restorers, conservators, curators, and exhibition producers have been involved in the maintenance and arrangements, keeping the displays and spatial settings as close to the original appearance as possible.

House museums never represent a true historic reality even if they appear to, according to Risnicoff de Gorgas, and the modern-day context through which the arrangement is perceived is a major factor, because reinterpretations produce new meanings. Perception of historical places or objects, then, is always filtered through our contextual experience and comprehension of the world as it appears to us during our individual lifetime. Considering this, we fill Palazzo Doria Pamphilj with other meanings than those who visited it two or three hundred years ago. Still, the spatial design does provide us with information about the homes and the cultural

236 Duncan, 22.
237 Palmqvist, 91.
238 Eriksen, 97. My translation.
239 Risnicoff de Gorgas, 356-361; cf. Ehn, 43-44.
practices of princely families during the given period of time, enough for us to imagine and get an authentic experience of what it was like. Even though an experience of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj can only be an interpretation made with modern-day contextual perspectives at hand, the spaces are truly present and this cannot be denied when one walks through the palace.

Being present in the actual spaces through which people have moved for at least four hundred years, even though the spaces have been restored throughout history, enables the senses and thoughts to wander. Using one’s imagination seems to be the easiest method for time travelling. In that sense, it is especially effortless to time travel in the spaces of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj. Its detailed contemporaneous settings, restored to their original arrangement, inspire one to participate in a visit to a represented time and place in history. There does not seem to be any reason why one should not join in the fantasy because it might be the closest one can get to time traveling.

**Conclusion**

We seem to enjoy imagining how people of the past lived their lives. It is a part of our own history. Risnicoff de Gorgas emphasizes, in relation to the house museum as a museum category, that there is a certain “atmosphere’ which takes visitors back to other times” and that visitors cannot help wondering what the lives of the former residents were like, if they “at times felt the same joys and sorrows they themselves have felt,” as Risnicoff de Gorgas puts it.241 This reaction, she argues, is evoked by a combination of mental and emotional perception and “the presence and absence of the people who once lived in the house.”242 Accordingly, there is an atmosphere both of what has been and of what is and this is a product of the two different contexts that the settings, spaces, or objects are connected to: the one of their original environment and the one that is created in relation to the museum setting.243

Once a space or object has been moved into a museum environment, it gains different meanings. In the case of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, very little has been moved but instead the musealization process as such means change. Because the target audience is now different from that of the 17th, 18th, and 19th century upper class, visitors perceive the palace within a modern contextual framework and the objects and spaces are thereby given new meanings.244 Also, the fact that the palace is now considered a museum or art gallery activates our genre competence, which in turn makes us perceive the palace in a certain manner, as a museum, and behave according to the conventions that this competence suggests.245 Nonetheless, the

---

241 Risnicoff de Gorgas, 356.
242 Ibid.
243 Cf. Ibid., 360.
244 Cf. Duncan, 24-27.
245 Eriksen, 15-18.
The design of the palace remains more or less the same as in the past and is naturally not according to the fashions of an art museum of the present. Its atmosphere and setting are not designed to be experienced explicitly by museum visitors with genre competence and certainly not by visitors of the 21st century. The apartments and galleries were designed for the eyes of visitors, but of a contemporaneous and selected group of visitors and it can be assumed that the spaces and collections were in fact intended to be experienced in a certain manner according to the fashions and ideals of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. The family’s collection was most likely arranged with the purpose of impressing the viewers, which was common during these periods of time. The apartments and galleries, then, functioned as displaying spaces from an early stage in the Doria Pamphilj family’s ownership.

During the 20th century, art spaces became increasingly basic and unadorned and the reaction that Carlos had to the spaces in the palace during his visit also indicates that the perception of art and art exhibition spaces has adapted to the changes in spatial design throughout the years. To him, the spaces were overburdened by decoration – except for the Aldobrandini room, which is more similar to the kind of white art spaces that we often encounter today. As discussed above, subjective opinions and past experiences play important parts in how we perceive spaces. However, Carlos’ sense of relief when entering the Aldobrandini room can also be interpreted as confirming that art exhibitions are perceived differently depending on how they correspond with contemporary fashions. Once again, the perspectives of our present context, through which we observe and understand history, are applied to what is perceived and, therefore, this might also make us react, positively or negatively, to the unaccustomed. The unfamiliar spatial settings of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, in all their lavishness, can be seen as appealing examples of historical palace design or as unpleasantly abundant and tiresome. Still, whatever one’s personal impression is, when entering Palazzo Doria Pamphilj it is difficult to be anything other than overwhelmed by the sheer volumes of the spaces, the detailed decorations, and the large collection of artworks on display. Also, regardless of whether the museum presents an actual reality of the past or if it is all a modified truth, a sensation of having visited another time in history remains when leaving the Palazzo Doria Pamphilj.

246 Duncan, 22, 36; Rees Leahy (2012), 76-79; Klonk, 21-25; see also Palmqvist, 89-91.
CHAPTER IV

PALAZZO MASSIMO ALLE TERME

Background

Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, in its current form, was built in 1883-1887 by the architect Camillo Pistrucci for the Jesuit Massimiliano Massimo, from whom the palace got its name. The addition “alle Terme” is a defining suffix that associates the palace’s location near the ancient Terme di Diocleziano, the Baths of Diocletian, which also give name to Rome’s largest railway station, Stazione Termini, situated in the same area. The suffix is used to distinguish it from another Roman palace with a similar name, Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne. Yet, here Palazzo Massimo alle Terme will be referred to as Palazzo Massimo.

Palazzo Massimo is designed in a typical late 16th century style that makes it appear older than it actually is at a first glance at the façade. However, although the current palace is relatively young, the site on which it is located has a longer history of being a place fit for prominent houses. Long before Palazzo Massimo was built, the site was occupied by Villa Peretti Montalto, a villa that was owned by the cardinal Felice Peretti who became Pope Sixtus V in the late 16th century. At the time, the villa contained a rich private collection of ancient artworks and it apparently had a delightful garden. The villa was later owned by the Negroni family before it came into the possession of the noble Massimo family in 1789. During their ownership, the building was no longer housing its former furnishing, decorations, and artworks. When the construction of Stazione Termini began in 1860, the villa was deconstructed in stages. After Palazzo Massimo had been built at the same site some thirty years later, it housed a Jesuit college dedicated to Massimiliano Massimo. The college moved to the suburban district of E.U.R. in 1960, which left the building vacant. It was, however, neglected for about twenty years before Museo Nazionale Romano took over.

Museo Nazionale Romano was founded in 1889 and was housed in Terme di Diocleziano as well as in a building belonging to a Carthusian convent. Its collections consist mainly of artefacts found in Rome during archaeological excavations that started in the early 1870s, when the city was to be rearranged and urbanized after the unification of Italy and the selection of Rome as its capital. Because of the increasing discoveries of antique artefacts, the collections expanded and needed more space.\textsuperscript{249} In 1981 it was decided that Museo Nazionale Romano could use Palazzo Massimo for displaying its collections and by means of funds dedicated to preserving Roman archaeological findings, the palace was renovated by the architect Constantino Dardi throughout the 1980s. The ground floor opened to the public in 1995 and in 1998 the whole museum and its exhibitions were inaugurated.\textsuperscript{250}

Fig. 17: Palazzo Massimo floor plan, second floor.

\textsuperscript{249} Sapelli, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{250} Museo Nazionale Romano, 11; Sapelli, 4.
**Museum context**

Palazzo Massimo is located in one of the busier parts of Rome, midway between Stazione Termini to the south-east of the palace, and Piazza della Repubblica to the north-west. The railway station produces a constant flow of travellers, taxis, and buses going to and from the station in all directions. Many of them make their way to the piazza, which consists of a fountain in the midst of a large and regularly travelled roundabout. The piazza is semi-circular and is lined with curved porticoes housing well-attended shops and cafes. Facing the piazza stands the massive ancient bathhouse Terme di Diocleziano, which was built around the year 300 AD and was used as a bath until the 530s AD. It now houses a church and a basilica while parts of the building belong to Museo Nazionale Romano and functions as a museum. When including the bathhouse, Stazione Termini, and Piazza della Repubblica in the immediate surroundings of Palazzo Massimo, the Roman phenomenon of extreme differences in urban historical layers re-emerges. Yet, history aside, the museum’s contemporary location close to the mentioned sites is teeming with roads crossing each other. The palace towers among these busy streets, appearing as an oasis in the urban landscape.

Palazzo Massimo no longer has its original interiors or functions, but has been transformed and adapted to displaying its contents. It consists of six levels of which four are used as exposition halls. The underground floor contains collections of jewellery, the ground floor and first floor house mainly sculptures and friezes, and the second floor displays frescoes and mosaics. The second floor is the only part of the museum that will be analysed in this chapter. This is not because the design aspect of the spaces are more interesting here than anywhere else in the museum, but because the second floor displays ancient architectural elements and fragments of interior decoration that, when exhibited and arranged, add new spatial dimensions to the original architecture of the building. Of all the separate exhibition settings on the second floor, the room where the frescoes from Villa di Livia are displayed, which will be further introduced below, is perhaps the most interesting to analyse from a historical, aesthetic, and spatial perspective. Thus, although this chapter is concerned with the entire second floor of Palazzo Massimo, it will become apparent below that the Villa di Livia room is discussed somewhat more extensively than some of the other spaces.251

**Finding the way**

On the second floor of Palazzo Massimo there are basically no indications that the building was originally a palace. From the outside, it is quite apparent considering its imposing façade, but because the interior spaces have been renovated to suit the

---

251 Dates of observations in Palazzo Massimo: January 10, 2012; January 12, 2012; January 20, 2012; January 29, 2012; March 6, 2012. Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University.
exhibitions it now houses, the palace has essentially none of their former interior decorations left. Compared to Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, the two palaces do not have much more in common than the spatial layout. Just like Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, the floor plan of Palazzo Massimo includes a rectangle of wings containing the galleries with rooms connected to the outer sides of them and leaving a rectangular space in the middle for the palace’s courtyard (fig. 17). However, when starting the route through the museum by either the stairs or the elevators, which are positioned in different areas of the second floor, the spatial disposition shows no clear indications of direction. When arriving by elevator it is possible to go left, where there is a cluster of exhibition rooms, or right and begin the visit in either Gallery II, leading to the area where frescoes from Villa della Farnesina are displayed, or in Gallery I, a corridor of mosaics. Coming up the stairs, there is also the choice of going left, directly to Gallery I, which in turn leads to the other galleries, or going to the right, into the same cluster of rooms as when walking left when coming from the elevator. This indicates that there is a freedom of choice of route in the museum and this might be perceived as positive, but also frustrating as shall be discussed below.

Arriving by elevator, then, the space seen straight ahead contains frescoes displayed against a dark background. This gives a first impression of which kinds of artefacts this particular floor contains. Turning to the right is Gallery II, in which there are fragments of frescoes from Villa della Farnesina attached to a cream white surface on the left wall while the right wall and floor are dark grey. At the end of the room is the main part of the Villa della Farnesina exhibition that consists of three small and one large space. Here, some fragmentary frescoes are attached to separate walls while more complete frescoes are set in rooms that have been reconstructed within the museum in accordance to the scales of the frescoes’ original spaces. These reconstructed rooms represent spatial cases containing and displaying spatial artefacts. Each of the cases appears as any room of a house, except for the fact that their walls are covered with ancient paintings. Some of the spatial cases can be entered while others can only be viewed through doorway-like openings. The Villa della Farnesina exhibition contains frescoes from a formal dining-room and three bedrooms from the original Villa della Farnesina that was decorated in 19 BC and discovered in 1879 close to the river Tiber.252 These four reconstructed rooms are disposed according to the actual floor plan of Villa della Farnesina and this gives visitors an idea of the proportions and layout of the villa. The frescoes on the walls in the rooms are almost intact while the ceiling paintings in the vaults mainly consist of fragments (fig. 18).

Moving past the Villa della Farnesina area, one arrives at a reconstruction of two rooms of a villa that was discovered in the area of Castel di Guido near Rome. The villa dates back to the first century AD and the owner, who is unknown, was probably an upper class citizen.253 The rooms are placed next to each other and in

252 Matteo Cadario & Nunzio Giustozzi, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (Verona: Electa 2008), 55; Sapelli, 54.
253 Sapelli, 63.
contrast to the Villa della Farnesina exhibit, floor mosaics are displayed along with frescoes and these are set in relation to each other according to scale. The mosaics are lying on the floor and the walls are surrounding them and this gives an indication of what the combination of decorative floors and walls in a villa room might have looked like. However, instead of forming full rooms, the walls and mosaics are arranged to resemble booths without ceilings (fig. 23).

Fig. 18: One of the bedrooms in the Villa della Farnesina exhibition.

The next space is Gallery III, which contains floor mosaics created sometime between the 2nd century BC and the 4th century AD. The mosaics have been found on excavation sites not only in Rome but all over Lazio.254 This space leads to the other two galleries. In all the gallery spaces, the artefacts are displayed hanging on the walls and many of them are highly detailed and polychromic. Some are quite small, no more than 50-100 centimetres wide, while others are large, up to 3 square meters (fig. 19). The artefacts show motifs depicting, for instance, portraits of mythical

254 Sapelli, 53.
figures, geometric patterns, landscapes, and various animals. The mosaics are made of mixed materials in some cases, while others consist of one single material such as stone or glass. The techniques used in the creation of the artefacts have been finely performed considering there are no irregularities in the images. Although the motifs as such are refined, the little pieces of tesserae, and the minimal gaps in-between them, give the surfaces a certain unevenness or structure that makes the mosaics become more dynamic and seem almost animated.

Adjoining Gallery I, there is a cluster of rooms where both wall mosaics and frescoes are exhibited. One of these spaces contains what could be described as the gem of the palace: the frescoes from Villa di Livia (fig. 20 and 27). The space displays the almost complete frescoes from the villa. They depict a garden and the colours, mainly green and blue, have been restored to resemble their former richness. The villa was originally located in an area north of the centre of Rome now called Prima Porta. It was named after Livia Drusilla, wife of Emperor Augustus, and the frescoes are preliminarily dated to the time between the years 20 and 10 BC. Archaeologists discovered them in the 19th century but it was not until 1951 that they were detached from the original walls of the villa in order to be cleaned and restored. At the end of the 1990s, the frescoes were moved to Palazzo Massimo. They most likely came from a space for dining that was placed underground in order to bring coolness to its visitors in the summers. Along with the paintings from Villa della Farnesina, they are apparently the most intact original frescoes left of ancient Rome.

Fig. 19: One of the galleries displaying mosaics.

255 Sapelli, 50-53.
**Spatial disposition**

Something that all of the spaces on the second floor of the museum have in common – galleries and rooms alike – is that the ceilings are quite high, approximately 4-5 meters. The only spaces with lower ceilings are the room cases where the bedrooms of Villa della Farnesina have been reconstructed. In there, the height of the vaulted ceilings measures about 2-2.5 meters. The reason for the large volumes of the majority of the exhibition spaces is related to the typical palace architecture. Even though Palazzo Massimo has a similar layout as Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, which also has high ceilings, the rooms in Palazzo Massimo seem more voluminous in height than in width and length. The exception, of course, is the galleries, which are quite long not only individually but also because they are connected to each other and thus create an unceasingly extending space.

Among all the galleries and rooms of various sizes, the Villa di Livia room is more or less intentionally premiered. For example, it is one of few rooms on the second floor with soft benches that invite visitors to sit down and rest their legs while they thoroughly observe the detailed paintings. It provides an opportunity for pausing. In her book *On Display* (1987), Margaret Hall elaborates on the matter of punctuation and emphasis in exhibitions and she suggests that objects are accentuated depending on where and how they are displayed.256 “A significant item at the end of a vista provides a full stop, a seating area may correspond to a chapter heading,” Hall explains, using the metaphor of reading a book.257 In the case of Villa di Livia, the concepts of punctuation, pauses, and emphasis are related to certain features, such as the fact that the space provides the possibility to actually sit down on soft seats. As mentioned, very few of the other spaces offer that kind of convenience. Sitting down allows one to take a longer pause and to reflect on the space and the history of the frescoes, which is a form of emphasis. Hall also stresses that placing an artefact in certain positions can be a method for accentuating an object’s significance. Isolation, the use of different levels and angles, or even certain restrictions and inaccessibility might enhance the impression of importance.258

The Villa di Livia room is, in a sense, both restricted and isolated; it inhabits its own area where information boards are set outside the actual space where the frescoes are displayed (fig. 25 and 26). It is likely that the choice of keeping the space clear of information is due to the extent of the almost fully intact wall paintings that do not leave much room for texts or panels. Also, the information boards are more extensive and substantial than most of the texts and panels describing other artefacts on this floor of the museum. Thus, information labels would most likely be perceived as interfering with the depicted garden scene in the frescoes. Clearing the space to enhance the motif and placing the information outside the space in this manner make the space and its content seem to be the most important part of the

---

257 Ibid., 133.
258 Ibid., 133-134.
whole exhibition. The importance is emphasized by the isolation of the room that expresses calmness and stillness, not only through the garden paintings, but through the inviting seats and the absence of distracting elements inside the space (fig. 20). Moreover, when arriving at the Villa di Livia room, the space itself is not perceivable yet, except for an indication of what is to come revealed through the opening of the doorway. The rather sizeable information panels outside, on the other hand, are seen before the space is entered and already at that stage, the message communicating the value of the paintings hidden inside the space has been revealed to visitors who are about to enter. The message, then, consists of elaborate information panels that indicate that there is much to be told about the frescoes. The fact that the panels are set outside the space is a part of the message as it suggests that the frescoes are too aesthetically and historically significant to be disturbed by distracting elements. Thus, the Villa di Livia room is for contemplation and this is communicated to visitors even before they have entered the space.

There is a major difference between experiencing the rooms and experiencing the galleries on the second floor of Palazzo Massimo. The rooms mostly contain frescoes and, in some cases, large floor mosaics, while the galleries contain mostly mosaics of different sorts. The layout of the rooms encourages consideration and contemplation of the frescoes. The tempo slows down due to the spatial form and as mentioned above, some of the rooms, such as the Villa di Livia room, contain benches for visitors to sit on and rest their feet while studying the artefacts. The spatial layouts of the galleries, on the other hand, induce an impulse to continue
forward without stopping. As was discussed in relation to the galleries in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, this is a natural reaction when moving through narrow and extensive spaces, just as voluminous spaces cause us to slow down.\textsuperscript{259} This impulse might have an effect on the perception of what is on display in the different kinds of spaces in Palazzo Massimo. While it is easier to get a clear overview of the artefacts in the rooms – smaller and larger frescoes and mosaics alike – there is not enough space in the galleries to allow one to step back and fully perceive the motifs, specifically in the case of the mosaics that are over 2 square meters in size. As Merleau-Ponty stresses, “For each object, as for each picture in an art gallery, there is an optimum distance from which it requires to be seen, a direction viewed from which it vouchsafes most of itself: at a shorter or greater distance we have merely a perception blurred through excess or deficiency.”\textsuperscript{260} According to him, visitors themselves find the position in the museum space that will provide them with the optimal visual encounter with the artefact.\textsuperscript{261} In Palazzo Massimo, the galleries are only about 3 meters wide and therefore not spacious enough to provide visitors with such a viewing position. As a consequence, the large mosaics become too disproportionate to perceive satisfactorily because their motifs simply become too expansive (fig. 21). The difficulty to get a sufficient view combined with the instinct to hasten through the gallery spaces does not seem to provide adequate conditions for an experience of art – for in this context, that is what the artefacts appear to be; artworks. Their former functions as floors and bottoms of baths, fountains, and basins are easily disregarded as their impressively detailed and colourful motifs, often framed by a decorative edging integrated into the images’ patterns, make them look more like artworks to be hung on the wall than decorative floors in bath houses (fig. 22). The fact that the mosaics in the galleries are displayed as paintings, often hanging on the walls at eye-level, contributes to this impression.

Two important questions to ask are why they are exhibited in this way and why the galleries consist mainly of mosaics. There can be several reasons for this. Function, hierarchies, and traditions can all play a part. Concerning the matter of tradition, Duncan claims that although art exhibition styles and designs vary, “the modern institution of the museum grew most directly out of sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century princely collections. These collections, which were often displayed in impressive halls or galleries built especially for them, set certain precedents for later museums.”\textsuperscript{262} In other words, traditions and conventions encourage the practice of continuing to use a traditional hanging concept in such spaces, even if neither the galleries nor the art have the same function today as they had, for example, in the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Moreover, the properties and conditions of the artefacts in Palazzo Massimo contribute to the manner in which they are displayed.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[259] Bergström, 92.
\item[262] Duncan, 22.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
While the frescoes are either displayed as a more or less full-scale arrangement in a separate room or as fragmented pieces with uneven edges attached to background panels, most of the mosaics appear to be complete in motif and shape, with rectangular or quadratic form. As mentioned above, their detailed depictions with linings along the edges of the motifs make many of the mosaics more similar to classically framed paintings, more so than the asymmetrical and often partially faded frescoes. Perhaps this makes the mosaics easier to adapt to a displaying principle resembling that of an exhibition of paintings. In turn, the display and its spatial conditions affect visitors’ impressions of them as exclusive artworks rather than cultural historical artefacts with a more or less commonplace function.

The disposition of artefacts could very well have been chosen based on intuitive and practical aspects of displaying, with no particular intention of arranging the objects in a certain system or classification. Nevertheless, although it might not be the intention, the decision to hang mosaics in the galleries can be interpreted as representing a hierarchical system where the frescoes displayed in separate rooms are, for some reason, considered to be more aesthetically or historically valuable than the mosaics. The fact that the frescoes from Villa di Livia and Villa della Farnesina are well-known for their beauty as well as for being the most intact paintings found in the Roman area and thereby unique artefacts, is apparent in the manner in which they

Fig. 21: Gallery displaying mosaics up to 3 m².
are displayed. Some of the equally aesthetically appealing and historically interesting mosaics, on the other hand, are displayed in corridor-like spaces that are not always suitable for contemplative experiences, especially not considering the vast sizes of some of these artefacts. It should be stressed, however, that not all frescoes are displayed in proportionately adapted spaces such as in the Villa di Livia room and the Villa della Farnesina exhibition. Smaller, fragmented frescoes are displayed together with mosaics of all sizes in the rooms adjoining the galleries, while only a few of the frescoes, whatever their dimensions and conditions, can be viewed in the galleries. Accordingly, the galleries are mainly the mosaics’ domain, while the full-scale spaces are primarily devoted to frescoes, although the Castel di Guido display is an exception considering it contains both floor mosaics and wall paintings.

![Mosaic depicting Dionysus from the 3rd century AD.](image)

**Fig. 22:** Mosaic depicting Dionysus from the 3rd century AD.

While the fragmented frescoes are generally parts of larger wall decorations, most of the mosaics on display are, again, more or less complete and are perhaps not considered to be in need of a contextualizing framing, such as the panel of pieced-together wall reconstructions displayed in Gallery II. The mosaics simply do not require full scale rooms or fragment panels and can instead be hung in the galleries. It might, then, simply be a matter of practical solutions; where else could these mosaics be displayed when there are not enough rooms? Whatever the reason for this exhibition disposition, it is quite apparent where the emphasis is placed from a spatial perspective – in the fresco rooms in general and the Villa di Livia room in particular.
Conventional practices for displaying art are evident throughout large parts of the exhibition. All the furnishings and interior decorations that Palazzo Massimo has contained in the past have been replaced by uniform spatial designs. The cream-coloured spaces where mosaics and fragments of frescoes are exhibited create consistency and this makes them resemble modern art exhibition spaces considering their plain and unadorned design and pale surfaces.\footnote{Daniel Buren, “Function of Architecture”, \textit{Thinking about Exhibitions}, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson & Sandy Nairne (London & New York: Routledge 1996), 316; Staniszewski, 64-66.} The archaeological artefacts displayed on the walls could probably be exchanged for, for example, 19\textsuperscript{th} century paintings or perhaps the Doria Pamphilij art collection without any complaints from visitors about the spatial design not harmonizing with the artworks. The mosaics and frescoes, therefore, appear to be balancing between art and archaeology and seem to sustain different kinds of exhibition concepts. Their archaeological and historical value and their aesthetic qualities make them suitable both for reconstructions that demonstrate their functions, like the full-scale rooms, and for hanging individually according to the fashions of conventional art exhibitions.

\textit{Spaces on display}

In the Villa della Farnesina area, the dark grey walls accentuate the strong colours of the frescoes inside the full-scale rooms, or cases, where the wall paintings are displayed against cream-coloured panels. The frescoes are also emphasized by the strong white light coming from lamps set behind plastic screens in the ceiling, which contrasts against the dark grey walls outside the cases. Two of the bedrooms are red while one is white. All of them are painted with illusive decorations depicting, for instance, mythical tales, animals, humans, and architectural elements like columns and porticos as well as organic ornaments and festoons in a variety of colours. The dining-room is painted black with columns, festoons, and a frieze as decoration. These themes and motifs also dominate the fragments of frescoes that are displayed in some of the other rooms in the palace, for example, in the Villa Castel di Guido exhibition (fig. 23). The main colours of the fresco walls from Villa Castel di Guido are white and red and although the colours are intense, the motifs are somewhat faded and fragmented, but depictions of columns, animals, and humans can still be recognized.\footnote{Cf. John R. Clarke, \textit{The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration} (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press 1991), 126.} The frescoes and mosaics have been parts of floors and walls of houses and villas where people dwelled. The reconstructions of the bedrooms and dining-room of Villa della Farnesina, Villa di Livia, and Villa Castel di Guido are therefore quite familiar in proportion to the spaces people generally inhabit today. The spaces’ volumes are adapted to the needs of the owners of the houses and in the case of Villa della Farnesina, the spaces are just big enough to fit a bed for sleeping or a few couches for eating.
The Villa di Livia room is the largest space in the museum – its floor is about 12 meters long and 6 meters wide – and it could most likely fit quite a large number of couches and tables for dining. The paintings on the walls of the Villa di Livia room depict a *hortus conclusus*, an enclosed garden, with blue skies on the upper parts of the walls. The middle and lower parts show green trees and bushes, richly detailed with pink and yellow flowers and fruits, as well as birds of different colours. The colours are restored to their assumed original condition and the dominating blue and green tones are especially intense and are a striking feature of the space (fig. 27).

McKay describes interior decoration in Italian houses and villas and according to him, Pompeian-style frescoes from circa 50-80 AD were meant to impress the viewer by their beauty as well as by their illusory motifs. The frescoes most often depicted, for instance, architectural figures or scenes of nature, which indicated further spaces beyond the physical walls. Consequently, the restricting walls of the room were diffused and became abstracted due to the paintings and this made the space more dynamic.265 Although the frescoes displayed in Palazzo Massimo are not Pompeian, and even if some of them were painted before the era asserted by McKay, a similar phenomenon is implied in their compositions. The garden paintings in Villa di Livia, for instance, suggest multi-dimensionality and a visual extension of the space that allows visitors to imagine being in a garden without physically being able to sense it.

The frescoes in Palazzo Massimo do not show the kind of perspective painting that developed during the Renaissance, but even though they show a certain flatness, the paintings in most of the frescoes, especially the garden in the Villa di

---

265 McKay, 150-151.
Livia room and the architectural elements in the bedroom in Villa della Farnesina, provide a sensation of several dimensions of space.\textsuperscript{266} In the Villa di Livia room, it is twofold: a room containing frescoes illustrating a second space, the garden. In the Villa della Farnesina exhibition, however, it is even threefold: a larger space, containing spatial cases, which in turn contain frescoes depicting columns, porticoes, vaulted windows, niches, panels, and borders (fig. 24). The layers indicate a visual spatiality beyond the tangible and an extension of the space that the visitor’s body inhabits.

These kinds of painted layered spaces can be compared to the spatiality of Museo dell’Ara Pacis, where the sensation of multi-dimensions is a result of the mensa being protected by two sets of walls, or “shells.” The first set, the casing that the mensa is built into, and the second set of walls is the museum building which houses the altar. It is a tangible layering in the sense of being material and structured. In the case of the frescoes in Palazzo Massimo, the layers are partially tangible and partly visual. While the tangible dimensions are restricted to what our bodies can feel, the visual dimensions seem to be more extensive in the sense that they allow the eyes to wander further into the paintings, following an optically perceived expanding spatiality represented not so much by perspective but by another painted space, a room beyond the occupied one.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Detail from one of the Villa della Farnesina bedrooms, indicating layered spatiality.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{266} Cf. Clarke, 52-53.
Of shadows and light

In the dark grey areas where the Villa della Farnesina and Castel di Guido frescoes are displayed, as well as in the Villa di Livia room, the lamps in the ceilings are covered by dim white, seemingly plastic screens, generally one screen covering several lamps or several screens covering a large part of a ceiling and creating one screened light source. The lights therefore seem to be coming from one unified source of light when in fact there might be several sources behind the large white screen. The vast spread of light becomes evenly distributed throughout the space and it does not lead visitors’ attention in any specific direction. As Bergström asserts in her descriptions of a theatre hall in a monastery, an even flow of light creates a sensation of symmetry and harmony and the lack of windows allows one to focus on the activities on the stage without distraction from the outside world. In the dark grey spaces and in the Villa di Livia room, similar strategies that Bergström describes enables visitors to fully focus on the motifs of the frescoes without being either distracted or directed. Illuminating the large frescoes with directed spotlights would have meant emphasizing certain parts of the paintings, but instead the even flow of light seems to indicate that the whole frescoes should be perceived and contemplated. Thus, the harmonious and uniform light encourages visitors to take their time in these spaces.

In his book The Museum Environment (1978) conservator and chemist Garry Thomson argues that we need to be able to detect shadows in order to visually perceive objects. On the other hand, a very strong light can create shadows that are too dark and that generate exceedingly sharp angles, while a light that is very soft might cause no shadow effect at all. In a museum exhibition, this means that an object’s appearance can appear distorted depending on the lighting. The frescoes and mosaics in the cream-coloured galleries and exhibition rooms in Palazzo Massimo are illuminated by spotlights that are either directed straight at the artefacts or pointed in the opposite direction from them and instead shining on white paper or fabric screens that are fastened on the spotlight bars in the ceiling. The angles of the spotlights and screens are composed so that when the white light hits the screens, it reflects and softens the light, which in turn shines on the artefacts depending on the screen’s direction (fig. 19 and 21). In other words, this specific kind of reflected light is, in a sense, secondary as opposed to the primary light produced by the spotlights directed straight at the artefacts. The primary and secondary lights are combined and, in some of the corridors and exhibition spaces, they are complemented by diffused natural light coming from windows covered with thin white blinds. The combination of the three makes the secondary light somewhat less distinguishable than the primary light from the spotlights. Even if they seem to fuse, the primary

267 Sölve Olsson, Ljus i konstmuseer (Stockholm: Arkus 2004), 25.
268 Bergström, 45.
light is the most distinct. It emphasizes specific areas in the mosaics and frescoes on display, yet it does not dominate the lighting. The combination appears comfortable and soothing. According to Thomson, a combination of a variety of light sources is preferable:

Our eyes have evolved in a world where light is partially directional (from the sun) and partially diffuse (from the sky). Only a small portion of light comes from below. Thus in the museum our eyes receive visual information most comfortably and clearly when the lighting follows this pattern: from above and partially direct, partially diffuse.  

Applying this to the galleries in Palazzo Massimo, it is apparent that the combination of direct spotlight, diffused electric light, and dimmed sunlight has a far more meaningful effect in the spaces than one might at first detect. Walking through the galleries, a sensation of warmth is induced and even if one does not associate this to the light, it plays an important part. The warmth, in this case, can rather be a result of the artificial light than the daylight, because the former is the one that provides a warmer tone. In Palazzo Massimo, however, this seems to depend on what kind of artificial light is used and how. Here the lights in the dark grey areas are bright white and this makes the spaces seem colder than the mix of artificial light and daylight in the galleries. Still, daylight changes its tone depending on the weather and the hour of the day and the artificial light in the galleries sometimes seems warmer than the daylight when it is cloudy or raining outside.  

Warmness and coldness do not depend on light alone, but also on colour setting. While the frescoes on display are polychromic with colours like red, yellow, blue, or orange, and green, the colours of the mosaics, although with a variety of shades and values, are not as strong and bright. Yet, the colours of specifically the full-scale frescoes often appear to have a colder tint than the mosaics. This impression might very well be enhanced by the cool light in the areas displaying full-scale frescoes. Many of the mosaics contain touches of similar colours as the frescoes, but with paler tones, and overall the hues are rather those of warmer colours such as red burnt clay, beige, and soft yellow. All of these warm colours seem to absorb the light from both the indirect spotlights and the sun. The cream-white walls behind the mosaic panels accentuate the colouration and detailed motifs of the artefacts by almost melting into the similar colours in the mosaics and diminishing the limits between object and background surface. Still, the light accentuates the details in the motifs and this prevents the risk of the artefacts appearing distorted. Consequently, while the mosaics are less intense in colour, they are warmer in tone, and while the frescoes are strongly polychromic, they appear cooler than the mosaics, all due to combinations of colour and light.

270 Thomson, 28.
271 van Leeuwen, 38.
272 Cf. Ibid.
A labyrinth

Katie is an approximately 60-year-old office assistant from the United States. She knew a little bit about Palazzo Massimo before she arrived in Rome and she chose to visit the museum because it is a part of the national museums and displays specifically Roman artefacts. Katie says she is impressed by the extent of the exhibitions and the rooms. She finds the artefacts exceptionally appealing and states that she is amazed by the colourations of the mosaics and frescoes. She expected them to be more faded considering their age but instead she enjoys that she can still see the patterns and what the motifs portray. The Villa di Livia room is the one room that she mentions specifically when it comes to spatial aspects because of its, according to her, impressive and pleasant appearance. However, Katie criticizes the layout of the spaces. She likes the flow of it but feels it lacks some sort of direction since she does not have a map and the only floor plan she has seen was displayed on the wall by the elevators. Therefore, guidance by numbers or signs would have been considerably more effective, she believes. Katie mentions being from the United States in conjunction with the fact that she finds the disposition problematic. She does not say whether she finds this to be an issue because she is a non-Italian first-time visitor in the museum or if she, as an American, perhaps feels that she is in some way accustomed to being provided with maps for guidance in museums. Nevertheless, Katie finds the exhibition appealing and is impressed by the mosaics on the walls. She thinks her lasting impression of Palazzo Massimo will be of the Roman artefacts in general because she is attracted to paintings and mosaics and, as she describes it, anything with tiny details with intense colours.

An incomprehensible spatial disposition can be problematic in any museum because visitors mostly want to see everything, especially when having paid a fee, and they do not want to leave the museum uncertain of whether something was accidently overlooked. Also, the question “where do I go next?” might take attention away from the exhibitions and make visitors feel confused. In Palazzo Massimo, the question “have I seen everything?” arises several times and it affects the experience. Museum exhibitions are arrangements based on the combination of specific elements that form a certain meaning and if one element is in some way deficient or does not meet visitors’ expectations it might cause a disruption in the process of meaning making. It can also be felt as a disturbance in the body. An imbalance in an exhibition not only interferes with visitors’ cognitive perceptions – considering that body and mind are interrelated – but with their fully integrated experiences. Thus, a confusing layout in a museum might not only affect visitors’ orientation, but their whole visit. Falk and Dierking claim that the feeling of disorientation mostly

273 Date of visit: March 6 2012. Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University. The conversation with Katie was held in English.
274 There were brochures containing maps in the museum’s reception area at the time but Katie apparently did not take one, for one reason reason or another.
275 Cf. Galangau-Quérat, 104; cf. Pearce, 141; see also Psarra (2009), 15.
emerges for first-time visitors and occasional visitors and specifically during the first few minutes of the visit, when the route of the exhibition seems overwhelming and, in some cases, unstructured or difficult to comprehend. However, in Palazzo Massimo, this experience is not only limited to the beginning of the visit. Katie had walked through most of the exhibitions and had still not come to terms with the layout of the spaces. As indicated above, this is also my experience: after having visited the museum on several occasions and having actively observed it, the disposition of the displays and rooms seems somewhat clearer but not yet fully obvious. The question here is what exactly is lacking. Falk and Dierking argue:

Good design enables the visitor to navigate through all of these spaces without the help of a guide. A visitor’s eyes or feet are guided through the exhibition through the placement of elements, by the creation of perspective, by the development of appropriate volumes and frames either through real constructs or through the use of implied space.

As Katie mentions, she would like some sort of guidance and considering Falk’s and Dierking’s description of what good design is, it is evident that the spaces through which Katie has moved lack this kind of navigation system. The “placement of elements”, “creation of perspective”, and “development of appropriate volumes” that Falk and Dierking refer to as methods for guidance do not seem to have been adapted to the spaces of Palazzo Massimo to any great extent. Psarra argues that two of the most important factors in museums are “a route structure which facilitates the encounter between the displays and visitors, and spatial mechanisms that aid orientation […].” In Palazzo Massimo, the feeling of disorientation seems to mostly appear when moving between the different exhibition areas and not in the more thematic and convened spaces. In that sense, the encounter is less problematic: it is rather when in motion between areas that the difficulties seem to appear. Rees Leahy claims that this lack of guidance might be due to the curators’ focus when creating an exhibition. “From a curatorial perspective, it is the thing that makes the visitor stop still which is important – that is, the displayed artwork – rather than the process of moving from one object to next,” Rees Leahy states. In the case of Palazzo Massimo, this description seems at least partially accurate. The second floor of the museum does contain artefacts that are more accentuated than others considering their positions and the amount of information that supplements them. The more isolated the artefact is, and the longer its information text, the more interesting it appears.

280 Rees Leahy (2012), 75.
As has been discussed above, the Villa di Livia room is supplemented with a large amount of information about the villa, about Livia, and about what is depicted in the frescoes. The information boards are also the element that explain to visitors that there is anything to see there at all; without them the Villa di Livia room would easily be missed (fig. 25 and 26). In other parts of the floor, such as the galleries where several mosaics are displayed, there is very little information about each of the objects. Then again, the galleries and the large rooms devoted to mosaics are easier to find than the Villa di Livia room and, therefore, they do not need components like information boards to catch visitors’ attention. The rooms adjoining the galleries are clustered, which makes it easy to find the next space within the cluster. However, a consequence of these grouped spaces is that it is more difficult to find the way out of the cluster and into the next area. As Rees Leahy emphasizes, the focus on the visitor-stopping artefacts and their individual spaces might take attention away from the actual path that leads visitors to and from these artefacts. In Palazzo Massimo, it appears as if physically experiencing these spaces in situ gives a different result than when trying to understand their relations from a map.\footnote{Cf. Rasmussen, 33; cf. Bollnow 16 ff; see also Bergström 29-32.} When studying the floor plan of the second floor of the museum, it may give the impression of being quite obvious (fig. 17). However, it is surprisingly confusing as the visit progresses, as Katie observes.

Palazzo Massimo consists of spaces of confusion as well as contemplation. It is unpredictable when it comes to the spatial layout, but the artefacts on display are coherent when it comes to their origins, forms, and contents. The objects stand for a
stability that the layout seems to lack. Yet, while the main problem is the unclear route, the museums’ strengths are the well-preserved and aesthetically appealing artefacts, of which the full-scale fresco spaces offer the most original and interesting form of display. Even though there is no articulated suggestion that some of these artefacts would be more interesting than others, it is apparent from a spatial perspective that the gem of this museum’s treasury is the Villa di Livia frescoes. The fact that the paintings are displayed in specific dedicated rooms has to do with the artefact’s extensive size; displaying them elsewhere would mean having to deconstruct them into smaller pieces and that would deprive them of their impressive appearance. Still, considering that the Villa di Livia room is intentionally separated from other spaces indicates that something extraordinary is to be experienced inside. Although this makes the Villa di Livia room more difficult to notice, once there, visitors are provided with far more information about the frescoes than any other artefact on the second floor. Going from scarce information in the galleries to extensive and comprehensible information panels by the Villa di Livia room makes it clear to visitors that they are about to see one of the most exceptional assets in the museum. The effect on the visitors is probably a well-orchestrated surprise and a sense of discovery – if they find the space at all, that is.

Fig. 26: The entrance to the Villa di Livia room.
Experiences of authenticity

Visitors are faced with history on several levels in Palazzo Massimo and it can be difficult to comprehend the age of the objects in the museum, because we cannot fully visualize in what context they were used. Still, imagination is evoked when one is surrounded by the same frescoes as the people who dwelled in the original dining-rooms and bedrooms two thousand years ago. Although the displayed frescoes are in some ways transformed, considering they have been moved from their original location and rearranged in another building, they are still the actual walls. Moreover, the frescoes are arranged in new spatial settings that give an indication of their past compositions as well as allowing visitors to be seduced by their beauty. However, it is apparent that the colours of the frescoes, as well as of the polychromic mosaics, are too intense and clear to be as old as the artefacts. The museum does not withhold information concerning the kinds of restorations that have been performed on the different artefacts. In one of the exhibition rooms, there is even a film revealing exactly how these processes were conducted. This notion of added restoration and rectification could easily deprive visitors of their experiences of the objects’ authentic qualities. Yet, whether it does or does not seems to depend on how authenticity is defined in relation to these specific artefacts.

In his book Exhibiting Authenticity (1997), David Phillips, lecturer in museum studies and art history, discusses aspects of conservation and its consequences from the perspective of restorers and conservators. He states, “On the one hand is the aspiration to return the object to a condition in which it seems to have aesthetic integrity, ideally to its original condition. On the other hand, there is often concern too to respect and preserve the changes which time and reuse have brought through history.” The question is which one of these principles to follow considering the two are hardly compatible, as Phillips emphasizes. It also becomes a matter of authenticity as being bound to time and space; when and where are these artefacts actually authentic? Is authenticity embedded in the seemingly untouched? In relation to the Villa di Livia frescoes, it is apparent that it is the very aspect of returning to the original condition that has been pursued during the restoration process. The frescoes have been restored in present times, but the restorations are entirely based on the compositions, colour schemes, and colour substances of the original paintings. Thus, it might be suggested that visitors can perceive the frescoes similarly to how they were originally meant to be experienced. The other aspect that Phillips mentions, concerning paying respect to the ravages of time, would have meant maintaining the fresco walls of Villa di Livia in the condition they were during their excavation in the 1860s, when they revealed a natural corrosion due to age. Perhaps the authentic aspects of the frescoes would have been more evident in the traces of aging. The patina of an artefact and the allure of a building turned to ruin might

283 Ibid., 128.
284 Ibid.
enhance the impression of historic quality. These noticeable elements of passed time can, then, add a sense of romance and beauty to, for example, architecture. Yet, in visual art, and specifically paintings, decay often leads to corrosion of the paint and a lack of paint partially or fully obscures the original artwork. What, then, is more authentic; a painting that is difficult to comprehend visually but maintains its original qualities or a perceptible painting with new additions but perhaps at the expense of its historic validity?

In her book Civilizing the Museum (2006), the museum consultant Elaine Heumann Gurian discusses the matter of “realness” in museums. In one of her deliberations, she uses an example of an exhibited dinosaur skeleton to illustrate how the use of additional facsimiles can enhance the experience of authenticity. “Curators recognize that the experience of seeing the whole skeleton is more ‘real,’ and certainly more informative, than seeing only the authentic unattached bones that do not add to a complete or understandable image,” she claims. Applying this perspective on authenticity to the Villa di Livia room, the restorations aid visitors in their understanding of what the original paintings looked like and, therefore, they are more “real” now, in terms of experiencing their original appearance, than they would have been if unrestored. Nevertheless, even this perspective is negotiable and depends on whether one defines authenticity as a matter of the object’s substance and material or of the spectator’s experience of the same, as well as on what period of time and which condition of the object is considered as the most authentic. Consequently, authenticity is complex and difficult to identify, because it is neither easily detected nor static.

As seen in the previous chapter, the interaction between the body and the historical spaces can evoke a sensation of being placed in another time and place, even if the impression is induced by a well-composed illusion. In Palazzo Massimo, the illusion of being part of an historical space demands more of the visitors’ ability to imagine than in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj. In Palazzo Massimo, visitors have to fill in some gaps in terms of certain spatial dislocations, but in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, the spatial totality provides visitors with close to a full contemporaneous setting. The authenticities of the two palaces are in many ways similar and yet they differ when it comes to manifestations of illusions. While Palazzo Doria Pamphilj gives the impression of being almost untouched, Palazzo Massimo does not keep any secrets concerning the restoration work from visitors. Nevertheless, the sensation of wonder that is evoked, particularly in the full-scale fresco rooms in Palazzo Massimo, is similar to that which emerges when passing through the spaces of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj.

287 Ibid., 38.
288 Hein, 73-74; see also Graña, 78-79.
It seems that experiencing authenticities in museums is a matter of presence. Merleau-Ponty stresses, “It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world.”

The ability to exist within and interact with the world is thus dependent on the body having similar properties as other material elements, such as that of existing in three-dimensional space. By sensing and being sensed we perceive our surroundings and integrate with them. This would then mean that integration with museum spaces and their contents can, through spatial solutions like those in Palazzo Massimo, enhance the sensation of historical environments to some extent. Although Palazzo Massimo’s spatial arrangements are different from Palazzo Doria Pamphilj’s – the former contains a limited number of reconstructed rooms while the latter consists of an entire floor of original apartments and galleries – the multidimensionality of the two palaces is based on the same principle. They both provide visitors with the ability to be inside an environment and to be surrounded by its historic atmosphere. Also, in both palaces there are rooms that can only be viewed from the outside, but visitors are still able to perceive their spatiality visually and, through cooperation between vision and tactility, comprehend their three-dimensionality and depth.

Even if the frescoes in Palazzo Massimo do not show much perspective of depth as such, they do show other spatial realms and elements that expand the actual space and add a sense of layers.

It is quite obvious that one cannot expect to be able to actually walk into the wall in the Villa di Livia room and suddenly enter an actual garden. The paintings are simply not that realistic, although they are detailed. Nevertheless, the motifs appeal to the visual sense and contribute completely to the atmosphere of the space. They awaken fantasies of the freshness of the colours, the scents of the flowers, and the birds’ twitter and at the same time, the room suggests the presence of the upper-class Roman citizens who stayed in the villa two thousand years ago. Perhaps they too admired the beauty of the paintings, as visitors do today, or perhaps they saw similar frescoes in dining-rooms on a daily basis and were not overly impressed by this painted garden. One wonders what a dinner party would be like here. Did they in fact eat in it at all or was the space used for other activities, such as meetings and conversations of different kinds? Even if the room is no longer set in the original villa, museum visitors might still imagine what was going on between the very walls that surround them. Being situated in the space thereby enables one to get a sense of historical presence.

This would hardly have been possible had the paintings not been restored to their original appearance and the walls arranged according to scale. The mosaics and fragmented frescoes do not evoke the same impressions of authen-

289 Merleau-Ponty (1968), 136.
290 Cf. Ibid., 134.
ticity and presence and their individual hanging positions on the walls indicate little or nothing of their initial function. Therefore, they become somewhat disconnected from their original context which, in turn, challenges visitors’ perception of them and their history. There is, then, an element of authenticity in the experience of the Villa di Livia frescoes that is emphasized by the proportionate setting and the strong colours – even though they are restored – because they make it easier for visitors to comprehend the space’s historical context culturally, aesthetically, and socially.

Fig. 27: Detail of the Villa di Livia frescoes.

Conclusion
The artefacts on the second floor of Palazzo Massimo largely set the conditions for the exhibitions’ spatial solutions. While the existing palace architecture contains surfaces of varying sizes and forms, additional spaces have been added in order to display frescoes in the same scale as in their original environments. Furthermore, the palace’s spatial volume encloses other spatial dimensions not only represented by the frescoes and mosaics as such, but that are also manifested in the motifs within the works. The artefacts are aesthetically appealing, but they also contribute to the sensation of a continuing space beyond the material surface. This spatiality enables one to contemplate the frescoes and mosaics on a multidimensional level. It contributes to the sensation of visiting an art museum rather than a museum of archaeology. As well as being aesthetically pleasing, many of the objects are displayed according to art exhibition principles, hanging individually on pale walls at eye-level and with enough space surrounding them so that they will not be encroached upon by other artefacts. Still, while some artefacts are displayed according to these conventions, others are following more unusual concepts, at least in a Roman context. To create
reconstructions of environments, houses, or rooms in museums of cultural history is a common strategy for demonstrating, for example, living conditions during a certain period of time. However, this strategy is not frequently encountered in Roman museums in general. Here, it seems as if artefacts of cultural history tend to be exhibited individually and unaccompanied by extensive contextual information rather than being included in reconstructed settings to emphasize their original social and cultural environment. The reconstructions of the frescoes in Palazzo Massimo, which are in accordance with their original proportions, is an exception, even though these full-scale displays still only consist of walls and, occasionally, mosaic floors, and thus they do not tell us much of what the spaces were actually like originally. They inform us of the design of the spatial surroundings, but they lack components such as contemporaneous furniture that might have been a basic ingredient in a spatial reconstruction in a museum of cultural history or a house museum. The Villa di Livia room is presented with a story, but it is told in written text placed outside the actual space. Nothing, it seems, is to distract visitors as they contemplate the painted garden. The frescoes in the full-scale spaces are displayed in a manner that, on the one hand, enhances their aesthetic qualities as artworks, especially considering the lack of any distracting elements. On the other hand, the manners in which the frescoes are exhibited, as wall decorations in various domestic rooms, tell us something about the environments and decorations of upper-class households during antiquity.

Although the aesthetic aspects of the objects are often more enhanced than their functional and contextual aspects, the archaeological artefacts that are displayed as artworks do not completely lose touch with their historical background just because of their art exhibition arrangements. The other exhibitions and settings in Palazzo Massimo, as well as the styles and motifs of the artefacts, create a framework that places the frescoes and mosaics in an archaeological and historical context. It appears, then, to be a museum of cultural history and art simultaneously. In addition to this combination of art and history, the information boards placed outside the Villa di Livia room resemble those found in museums of natural history. The focus on, for example, different past uses of herbs as medicine, which is related to the herbs and flowers seen in the paintings, or the descriptions of various species of birds and their symbolic meaning during the time when the villa was still in use, fuses natural science and cultural history, all of which are presented from an aesthetic perspective.

Consequently, the objective of the museum seems to stretch in different directions, not in terms of contents of collections or subject matter, but concerning presentation. Although conventional in some aspects, Palazzo Massimo also contains artefacts displayed in a fashion seldom seen in Roman museums and, therefore, it offers a rare opportunity to come closer to the aesthetically appealing and historically suggestive Roman artefacts that the palace houses.
CHAPTER V

CENTRALE MONTEMARTINI

Background

Centrale Montemartini is a museum with two different focus areas, one concerning antiquity and the other treating the industrial development of Rome during the 20th century. The museum consists of a collection of ancient artefacts housed in Rome’s first thermoelectric power plant, which produced electricity using combustion to generate mechanical energy converted into electrical power. The power plant turned museum is located in the Ostiense area south of the Roman city centre, which is a region that was allocated for industrial buildings in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The building was named after Professor Giovanni Montemartini, the officer of technology who advocated the power plant. It was inaugurated in 1912 and it expanded gradually with industrial and electrical technological development and new machinery was added throughout the first half of the century. Except for a reduction of production during a few years of the Second World War, the power plant was working at full capacity until the 1950s. The last update to enhance the power production was made before 1952 and after that the power plant was essentially left untouched and generally considered inadequate and outdated. By the mid-1960s it was completely neglected and discarded.

Plans to turn Centrale Montemartini into a museum of industrial development started to take form in the late 1980s. In 1995, it was decided that the power plant was to house artefacts from the collections of Musei Capitolini. Due to renovations of Musei Capitolini, arrangements had to be made so that the objects could be moved from the museum but still be available to the public. The choice of location fell on Centrale Montemartini. At this point, the old power plant was already being restored in order to be used for cultural activities by its managers ACEA, Azienda

293 Ibid., 110-120.
294 Ibid., 127-129, 136.
Comunale Energia e Ambiente, the council-owned utility for production and distribution of water and energy. When the choice was made to use the building for the exhibition of the Musei Capitolini artefacts, the project of modifying and adapting the arrangements of the displays in relation to the spaces was initiated. The artefacts were moved to Centrale Montemartini in 1997 and a temporary exhibition entitled *The Machines and the Gods* was opened. This exhibition became so successful that the decision was made to keep the artefacts in the former power plant and turn it into a museum with a permanent art display.  

The exhibitions in Centrale Montemartini consist of mainly Roman artefacts, but also Greek objects, that were produced during mainly the Republican era and the Imperial age. The ancient sculptures and archaeological findings on display were excavated in Rome at the end of the 19th century, the same period that the Palazzo Massimo collections were excavated. Even more of the artefacts now exhibited in Centrale Montemartini were unearthed in the 1930s during the restructuring of the city that took place on Mussolini’s orders, when Ara Pacis was also finally excavated and restored.

---

295 Bertoletti, Cima & Talamo, 6-8.  
296 Ibid., 9-15, 42.
Museum context

The Ostiense area, where Centrale Montemartini is located, is very much characterized by its industrial history. It does not seem to be as frequently visited by tourists as many of the other suburban sites in Rome – at least not yet. However, Centrale Montemartini does appear to attract its fair share of visitors, who then might also become aware of the surrounding landscapes and structures. The grand gasometers, for example, reveal the presence of many elements of industrial archaeological significance, more than anywhere else in the Roman area.\(^{297}\)

Being located in Ostiense, between E.U.R. in the south and Testaccio in the north, two areas often visited by tourists as well as local citizens, Centrale Montemartini is no more than a subway ride away. The subway station closest to the museum is Garbatella, named after a neighbourhood which is sited in the district further to the east. The oldest parts of the Garbatella quarters were initially built in the 1920s as garden suburbs that have made the area famous for its urban landscape. Garbatella thereby contrasts against the otherwise industrial structures of Ostiense, but it also functions as something of an attraction for anyone interested in unusual urban structures. This area south of the city centre thus consists of a diversity of historical and cultural elements in the urban landscape, all of which are still characterized by industrialization to a great extent. Consequently, the environment somewhat sets the scene for what is to come when entering the industrial spaces of Centrale Montemartini.

There are four exhibition halls at Centrale Montemartini. Sala Macchine and Sala Caldaie are the two industrial production halls adjoined on the second floor. The other two are Sala Colonne – the Column Room – on the entrance floor and a space for temporary exhibitions on the upper floor. This chapter will only focus on Sala Macchine – the Engine room – and Sala Caldaie – the Boiler room – because they are the two main spaces where the meeting between the exhibition settings and the industrial heritage is the most discernible and accentuated.\(^{298}\)

Sala Macchine

Sala Macchine is the first space one enters when coming up the stairs to the second floor in Centrale Montemartini. Straight ahead to the left is Sala Caldaie, which is half a floor up and reached by a set of steps. The forms of the two spaces are similar (fig. 28). They both have the forms and architecture quite typical of industrial halls. In the high walls of Sala Macchine there are two types of windows: the lower are extensive, letting in a large amount of natural light, and the smaller are placed above the others, just below the ceiling. All the windows are on the right side as seen from the entrance. The ceiling consists of a double roof with a narrow open loft running

\(^{297}\) Bertoletti, Cima & Talamo, 6.
\(^{298}\) Dates of observations at Centrale Montemartini: January 19 2012; January 20 2012; February 1 2012; February 23 2012; March 17 2012. Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University.
along the axis of the hall with transversal girders attached to an extended bar creating a rectangular web of beams. The walls of the heightened loft consist of small windows functioning as sources of light. The ceiling in Sala Caldaie is similar and, except for the volumes and forms of the spaces, the design of ceilings is the main feature that the two spaces have in common.

In the center of Sala Macchine is an aisle flanked by two large diesel engines. Each one of the engines weighs more than 80 tons and is over 20 meters long (fig. 31). They are similar in construction and size and create symmetry in the space, dividing it into three wide aisles functioning as galleries following the lengths of the engines. Sculptures are displayed along the middle aisle and some of them are framed by square columns overlaid with beams (fig. 29). In the aisles between the engines and the walls, sculptures, mostly consisting of busts, are set on pedestals. The middle aisle leads up to a plateau that can be reached by some wooden steps. On the plateau is a blue pediment with mostly fragmented sculptures depicting human beings set in front of it. At the centre is a statue of Athena without a head. Another larger, almost complete Athena sculpture is set at the opposite side of the hall, i.e. behind the visitors coming up the stairs. The two statues face each other at a far distance and their placement emphasizes the expansive span of the space. Above the larger Athena statue is a balcony that is reached by stairs and that allows visitors to get an overview over the entire hall. From there, one can see the machines from above and also an iron rail with lifting hooks that is hanging above the pediment, representing another characterization of Centrale Montemartini’s industrial history. Behind the pediment is a narrow space where small fragments of temples and buildings are
displayed. A part of the space is divided into even smaller sections containing mostly fragments of various sizes of friezes, columns, and statues displayed in glass cases.

Sala Macchine is designed according to the Art Nouveau style that was in fashion when the power plant was built. This is mainly evident in the decorative lanterns that are attached to the walls. Wall panels of fake marble of rusty brown and red with bright veining and mosaic floors with geometric patterns add to the Art Nouveau atmosphere (fig. 30). The mosaic floor is dark beige framed with patterns consisting of straight lines and angles of colours like black, red, brown, and yellow. In some areas, the linear patterns are shaped as rectangles with smaller details within them, such as stripes or colour fields. One of the rectangular pattern shapes consists of two fields, one red and one yellow, framed by white and grey stripes. The red and yellow colours in two fields resemble the Roman flag and this detail with the Roman colours could be interpreted as a reminder of the history of the building as the first power station in the city.
The materials of Sala Macchine consist mainly of stone floors, concrete walls, and metal engines and rails. The sculptures are made of white marble except for two: a statue known as Victory of the Symmachii, which is made of dark grey marble, and one depicting Agrippina the Younger, which is made of basanite, a green-black stone from the desert in Egypt. There are no soft materials in the spaces and, except for the sculptures portraying human bodies, hardly any rounded shapes are seen except for in some details in the engines and the Art Nouveau lanterns on the walls. Also, some of the windows are vaguely arched. Other than that, the spaces consist of sharp angles and straight lines.

The sculptures are the only components that truly contrast against the straight sharp shapes. The artefacts, mainly the sculptures depicting human beings, bring a sense of softness to the otherwise quite flat surfaces. The clothing, bodies, and faces of the sculptures have the rounded and smooth shapes of human features and the soft forms of draped folded textiles (fig. 32). Not only do they have rounded forms, but they also give the impression of being soft to the touch in spite of the hard marble they are made of. The mere depiction of humans evokes a sensation of them as being soft due to our ability to empathize with materials. One can assume, then, that familiarity with the softness of one’s own skin and flesh, as well as of textiles, is stimulated when perceiving the same components formed in marble. In other words, touching the artefacts would mean sensing hardness while viewing them gives an impression of softness.

Considering proportions, the sculptures depicting humans are the only elements that are not perceived as being over-dimensioned in relation to the physical size of the average visitor. There are a few exceptions among these that depict over- or undersized full body sculptures or busts, but they still have physical proportions based on general human features. The magnitudes of the space and the engines, on the other hand, are of a whole other dimension and the sensation of spatial volume in Sala Macchine does not seem to be reduced by the large engines. Rather, the engines enhance the spaciousness because, despite their tremendous size, they fit into the hall with room to spare and this gives an indication of the general volume of the space. At least one more engine could even be set on top of another before the ceiling is reached and as far as floor space is concerned, it would take more than four additional engines to even begin to fill the width of the space.

The experienced volume and material of the engines are also connected to their perceived weight. There is no doubt that iron is heavy, we know that from experiencing iron and other similar materials in our lives. Therefore, it is enough to visually perceive the engines in Sala Macchine to also sense their material properties. Merleau-Ponty argues that this kind of impression occurs as the senses interact. “The senses intercommunicate by opening on to the structure of the thing. One sees the hardness and brittleness of glass, and when, with a tinkling sound, it breaks, this

299 Lundberg, 31.
300 Rasmussen, 20.
sound is conveyed by the visible glass. One sees the springiness of steel, the ductility of red-hot steel, the hardness of a plane blade, the softness of shavings,” he stresses.⁴⁰¹ To see the engines is to see stability and immobility and this sensation affects the perception of the artworks in the space as well. Marble is also a massive material of great weight and so are marble sculptures, however graceful they may appear. When it comes to perceiving their weight, though, the impression of heaviness varies. Marble sculptures might seem heavy in other exhibition spaces where they, for instance, are set in relatively unfurnished rooms and are the main focus of the displays. There is nothing to relate and compare their mass to. In Sala Macchine, on the other hand, they give the impression of being quite light in comparison to the engines. The difference in size implies this as well as the material of the industrial elements.

In addition to our ability to experience material qualities through visual perception, these impressions of the weights of the engines and sculptures might be based on our conception of the process of placing the engines in this space. Rasmussen argues, “A wall built of large stones, which we realize must have required great effort to bring to the site and put in place, appears heavy to us.”⁴⁰² Considering this, although we are not fully aware of the actual procedure of placing or building the engines inside the power station, we are still able to imagine their massive weight and to realize that they are not easily dislodged. Rather, they are incorporated in the

---

⁴⁰² Rasmussen, 23.
space as architectural components. The sculptures, on the other hand, give another impression. The disposition of the sculptures indicates that they are not fixed in the space in the same way as the industrial elements. While the engines are solidly placed in strategic positions according to their functional purposes, the antique artefacts are dispersed in the space as supplements to the already existing architectural interiors. This suggests that the sculptures have been arranged in relation to what was already in place, meaning they are more flexible and easier to reposition than the engines and this in turn gives them an air of being somewhat ethereal and graceful in the presence of the engines.

As has been discussed in the chapter about Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, we cannot perceive colour and material separately. Moreover, form is another element that is inseparable from colour and material, as Merleau-Ponty emphasizes. In Sala Macchine, the engines evoke certain sensations due to their heavy and solid material. Their colour adds to this impression as much as their shape. They have the form and material of industrial machines that, in combination with their dark colour, makes them seem powerful and, at least seemingly, indestructible (fig. 30 and 31). Likewise, the combined colour, form, and material of the sculptures are what constitute their elegance, purity, and stability. The whiteness of the marble evokes sensations of nobility and pureness and is associated with the arts and high culture of antiquity. The marble is sculptured into smooth and delicate human bodies, animals, and a few architectural fragments, that appear soft and light even though we know that those are not properties of marble (fig. 30 and 32). Therefore, the solidity of the marble, and the impression of coolness that the material also seem to convey, becomes less evident because of the refined form of the sculptures. Once again, the combination of colour, form, and material provides us with these impressions.

Even if the two categories of historical artefacts displayed in Sala Macchine are radically different, they do not compete with each other for the attention of the visitors. They are equally central in the space but of entirely different historical backgrounds, functions, and significances and they represent the history of Rome from two different historical perspectives. In that sense, there are no hierarchies. In the book Centrale Montemartini (2006), Marina Bertoletti, Maddalena Cima, and Emilia Talamo describe the process of selecting a suitable building for the Musei Capitolini artefacts. According to them, the artefacts “had to be located in a work of architecture that would take nothing away from the evocative power of antiquity.”

The quote gives the impression that there was a fear, at the time of the exhibition’s initiation, that the surrounding setting would steal the attention from the art and, therefore, take away the “power” of the antique artworks. This suggests the persisting impact of Winckelmann’s writings about the grandeur of antiquity.

---

304 Merleau-Ponty (1964), 51.
305 Bertoletti, Cima & Talamo, 6.
306 Potts, 15-16.
The concern that spatial design might overshadow the artefacts might be a reason for why the conventional use of monochromatic backgrounds in these kinds of exhibitions has been, and still is, common in museums. In Santillo Frizell’s discussion on monochromatic backgrounds in museums displaying antique artefacts, she uses Palazzo Massimo as an example. The palace was discussed in the previous chapter of this study, but Santillo Frizell’s example concerns an exhibition on another floor in the museum. When Palazzo Massimo was opened in the late 1990s, the exhibition Santillo Frizell refers to consisted of white sculptures displayed against white backgrounds. This turned out to be a problem visually because the artefacts and surfaces seemed to blend into each other and the objects became difficult to distinguish. White exhibition spaces are also often used for displaying art and so it has been ever since the white cube concept was established in the 1930s. This has been incorporated in our genre competence and for that reason sculptures exhibited in white or subtle monochromatic spaces tend to be viewed as artworks only and lose something of their cultural and historical contexts, which is also discussed in relation to certain areas on the second floor in Palazzo Massimo in the previous chapter. This specific perception is triggered by the design of the space and what it conveys: purity, plainness, and also an enhancement of the individual artworks. In Sala Macchine, the sculptures are displayed in a setting with completely different conditions; the large

\[307\] Santillo Frizell, 31. It was later decided that some of the white artefacts in Palazzo Massimo where to be displayed against backgrounds of other colours such as red and grey instead.
machines create a dynamic and, at the same time, concrete environment around the sculptures. Instead of consecrating the Roman culture of antiquity, like in Museo dell’Ara Pacis where the space is designed to emphasize the altar through strategically constructed elements, the sculptures in Centrale Montemartini are displayed in a pre-set environment and are rather balanced in relation to the industrial elements. The two different aspects of cultural history are equalized both spatially and through the manner in which they are displayed in relation to each other. The evocative power of Roman antiquity is not taken away from the sculptures; rather, the evocative power of the history of Roman industry is enhanced and this makes the two different histories equally central in the exhibition.

The industrial elements in Sala Macchine represent modernity and the industrial advancement of Roman society in the 20th century. Yet, in relation to the sculptures they might also signify the urban landscape of ancient Rome. The city of Rome was adorned with sculptures distributed throughout public spaces – mainly for religious and aesthetic purposes – and sculptures often decorated the niches of public buildings.308 The disposition of the sculptures exhibited in Sala Macchine appears to follow a similar concept. Here, the architecture is represented by the engines and the sculptures are set close to them in positions that often follow the shapes and structures of the machines. The sculptures are placed in the nooks that can be perceived as the engines’ version of the niches of a building and the artworks interrelate with the angles and contours of the machines as if ornamenting the façade of a building or fitting into the architectural topography of a city. Moreover, the blue framing beams also form an association with the Roman past. Porticoes as connecting passageways between buildings became increasingly popular architectural components in the cityscape of Rome during the ruling of Emperor Augustus and these were also often decorated with sculptures and statues.309 Similar to how these porticoes would enclose the sculptures in ancient Rome, the blue beams in Sala Macchine create frames around the sculptures, separating them from each other, and giving them another element to enhance and substantiate their presence in the space.

One of the dominating hues in Sala Macchine is a fusion of warm beige and yellow, best described as apricot, as seen in the floor and walls. The dark greyness of the engines and the whiteness of the artefacts are also conspicuous. The colour that is most salient, though, is the light blue of the exhibition pedestals, framing beams, pediment, and backdrops. According to van Leeuwen, blue can be perceived as having a calming effect, but also as being cold. “Blue can be the blue of the sky on a sunny day (hence ‘calm’ and ‘healthy’) or the blue of a hazy, misty, cold day (hence ‘cold’ and ‘gloomy’),” he states.310 While the blue in Sala Macchine gives the impression of coolness, the soft apricot colour feels warm.311 Still, both the blue

308 Palmqvist, 15-18.
309 Ibid., 17-18.
310 van Leeuwen, 57.
311 Cf. van Leeuwen, 57; see also Rasmussen, 218.
and the apricot colour add a sense of calmness to the space. The calmness seems to be present at all times and in all weather, but the warmth and coolness varies. The blue nuances change depending on the brightness of the space, which in turn depends on the weather. On cloudy or gloomy days it turns grey-blue and matte. On a sunny day, when light is flowing through the space, the blue is clear and intense. The apricot colour, although warm at all times, becomes more saturated when the sun shines through the windows. The dark grey of the engines, however, seems to turn darker in strong light because there is an intensified contrast between them, the white sculptures, and the apricot tone. At dusk, when the sun is going down, the light in Sala Macchine turns soft and deep yellow. The space becomes darker and gives the impression of being warmer (fig. 33).

It is apparent that Sala Macchine is characterized by colours and shapes that contribute to a certain spatial dynamism. The warm and energetic atmosphere that the apricot colour adds to the space, in combination with blue tones and the variety of materials and contours, seems to have an activating effect. Considering that it is a space that contains enormous static engines and ancient white artefacts, this sensation of energy is somewhat unexpected. It could easily have been perceived merely as motionless, cold, and silent, but due to factors such as a combination of natural and artificial light sources, white marble against almost black metal, delicate silhouettes against industrial bulks, and cool blue against warm apricot, the space instead allows visitors to experience variations of elements. Thus, a stroll through Sala Macchine turns into something of an adventure.

Fig. 33: Sala Macchine at dusk.
**Sala Caldaie**

Sala Caldaie is a space with a different but equally dynamic atmosphere as Sala Macchine. The space measures more than 1000 square meters and its spatial layout and form is more or less the same as Sala Macchine, except it lacks engines. Instead, an almost 15-meter high boiler at the back of the hall represents the industrial history of this space. Sala Caldaie also appears less symmetrical than Sala Macchine because the disposition of the exhibition is dissimilar. To the right as seen from the entrance are a number of separate background walls flanking each artefact and to the left is a rectangular construction framing a large mosaic lying on the floor. The centrepiece straight ahead, a military trophy depicting a soldier’s torso, binds the two sides together.

In contrast to the openness of Sala Macchine, Sala Caldaie seems more occupied because of the number of spotlight scaffolds on top of the framing beams and because of the ventilation pipes in the ceiling (fig. 34 and 35). The space, therefore, seems less voluminous in comparison to Sala Macchine even though the ceiling is approximately of the same height. The actual volumes of the spaces are similar, but not the perceived spaciousness because the feeling of being able to move freely is a bit more restricted in Sala Caldaie. Moving through a space that is open is significantly different from moving through one that is filled with objects. The first offers an overview of the space while the latter needs to be explored one area at a time.

According to Bergström, there are methods for enhancing and reducing the perceptual sensation of spatial volume. She draws parallels to gardens, which traditionally are disposed in a way that creates dispersed sets of smaller areas of plants, trees, and bushes. This means that one has to walk around these areas and thus the walking distance is extended and the space thereby gives the impression of being larger than it actually is. This does not seem to be connected to volume, but rather to the number of movements that are commanded by the space based on its floor plan. Bergström claims that curiosity is awakened if it is not possible for a person to see beyond what is immediately displayed when entering a space, be it a garden or a home. In these cases, a comprehensible overview, which is otherwise often considered to be advantageous, does not have an intrinsic value, she claims. In Sala Caldaie, the disposition of the exhibition objects certainly encourages exploration because there is no apparent direction to follow and visitors are free to walk around at their own will. However, this might not be altogether positive because lack of direction can also cause confusion. Then again, museums do not always apply definite linear route structures leading from one object to the next in order to guide visitors. There are other forms of dispositional guidance, like variations of perspectives, volumes, and framings. In Centrale Montemartini, the disposition is arranged

---

312 Cf. Tuan, 55.
313 Bergström, 91.
314 Ibid.
based on the artefacts’ origins and time periods and thematically corresponding artefacts are placed with consideration to their relation to each other rather than in regard to, for instance, chronological linearity. Thus, although a clear route is lacking, there are instead areas where objects are displayed according to factors such as time period, style, or region. On the other hand, it might not be completely obvious to visitors that this is an exhibition organized according to theme. There seems to be a fine line between exhibition planners not communicating the intended direction well enough and them stressing it to a point where visitors lose their desire to explore the space. In Centrale Montemartini, the risk of getting lost in the two exhibition spaces is however minimal due to the rectangular floor plans that guarantee that the exhibitions are adapted to a certain restricted area within four walls. This notion evokes a sense of comfort that makes the seemingly unsystematic disposition of objects appear less problematic or confusing.

Fig. 34: Sala Caldaie as seen from the entrance.

As mentioned above, Sala Caldaie appears to be less spacious than Sala Macchine despite their true similarities in volume. Therefore, it does not feel disproportionally voluminous and neither do the sculptures, which are more or less the sizes of human bodies. In other words, none of the artefacts or elements in the space evoke impressions of being oversized, like the spatial volume and engines in Sala Macchine. Yet, looking beyond the scaffolds on the frames towards the ceiling, the actual volume of the space appears. So does the boiler at the back, and considering that it is over 15 meters high and there is a gap of more than 5 meters between the boiler and the ceiling, it is evident that the hall is no less spacious than Sala Macchine. Nonethe-
less, the space is encroached by the scaffolds and ventilation pipes and so it does not give the impression of disproportionately spacious.

At the back of the space is the boiler from which the space got its name. Its presence in the space is not considerably distinct. It is hardly visible from the entrance because of the scaffolds and pipes, as well as the green frames and detached walls. When moving into the space, the boiler does not appear to be more than a brick wall with pipes and dark iron structures. Moving closer, however, the full size of the massive boiler manifests itself in its full stature. It is built of red brick, dark grey iron, and beige pipes that run diagonally and vertically along the wall of the boiler, with bridges crossing them horizontally (fig. 35 and 37). The actual width of it does not become fully apparent until one walks to the right of the facing brick wall where there is a space between the boiler and the long wall of the hall. From this angle one can nearly distinguish its extensive perimeter. This side of the boiler consists of mechanical parts and large iron pipes that transported the water that was to be turned into steam. Facing the mechanical section of the boiler, across the gap, are several artefacts such as a bust and a few fragments of friezes. This is, then, the only area in the space where industrial elements contrast against marble objects in the same way as in Sala Macchine.

The Art Nouveau style is not overly manifested in Sala Caldaie. There are no patterns in the floor – it just consists of plain beige concrete – and there are no characteristic Art Nouveau lanterns or fake marble panels. In fact, the original spatial design is in general not as explicitly prominent as in Sala Macchine. Here, the sculptures and fragmentated objects are in focus and this allows a greater opportunity to dispose the exhibition objects asymmetrically. However, it also reduces some of the experience of juxtaposition between machinery and marble sculpture. The history of the power plant is less present than in Sala Macchine and the lack of engines and other elements of industrial remnants gives the impression of the space as being more of a conventional exhibition hall when it comes to consistency of background colour and surfaces. The objects are set against separate walls and thereby have plain backgrounds instead of uneven iron machines as surrounding settings.

What stands out in the space, except for the boiler at the back of the space, is the large part of the hall that consists of an extensive row of attached framing beams divided into sections and resembling an arcade, with sculptures set between the square columns. Within the arcade is a platform on which a polychromic and fragmented mosaic is placed (fig. 35). Its motif depicts a hunting scene showing men trying to capture various animals. The mosaic is laid out on grey sand and the grey- ness corresponds with the beige background and the mainly blue, brown, and green colours of the motif. It is possible to approach the mosaic by stepping into the framed area and onto the wooden platform on which it is placed. However, in order to get a full view of the scenery one can climb the stairs to a balcony above and look down. From there, it is not only the motif of the mosaic that emerges, but the whole disposition of the space and display becomes apparent.
The light in Sala Caldaie mainly comes from artificial sources. The spotlights on the scaffolds are each directed towards a certain artefact, but the light also falls on sculptures close by. As a result, the sculptures cast two shadows on their background surfaces. Adding sunlight, the shadows become three in some cases. The light does not mix but rather remains separated according to each light source. The few but large windows seem to be either simply unclean from rain and mud or concealed with grey and barely transparent covers. However, the small windows higher up on the walls are sufficient when it comes to functioning as natural light sources. On sunny days, the light falls diagonally onto the sculptures and their green background surfaces before it hits the floor. The crossbars in the ceiling divide the sunbeams into irregular rays of light and accentuate certain areas instead of flowing evenly. Some of the rays illuminate the centred torso that catches the eye when entering and leads one towards it and into the space. While the natural light is bright white and enhances the whiteness and the shadows of the marble sculptures, the artificial light is soft.
and warm yellow and it reduces the whiteness of the sculptures and gives them more of a cream colour.

The colours of the space consist of the green of the frames, the white of the marble sculptures, and the brown-red and black of the boiler. The scaffolds are dark grey or black while the ventilation pipes in the ceiling are of a brighter grey nuance. The walls have the same apricot colour as in Sala Macchine and the floor is beige. Add to this the dynamic colours of the mosaic. Thus, the intense green of the framing beams against the beige of the ceiling and walls, the mosaic, and some of the red industrial elements in the background create layers of nuances that give the impression of the space as being rich in colour. Green is the dominating colour and as with all other colours, it can have many meanings and symbolic characteristics. In Sala Caldaie, it can represent silence, peace, and freshness. Yet, there is both energy and peace simultaneously. The green surrounding the sculptures and fragmented objects gives an impression of a garden exhibition with white artefacts placed among planted trees and bushes arranged for display. In this sense, the setting is reminiscent of Baroque Roman gardens or of the gardens of ancient Roman and Pompeian villas and houses, where sculptures and statues were a part of the concept of arranged landscapes. Therefore, in a similar manner to the way the engines and the disposition of the artefacts in Sala Macchine can be interpreted as representing the cityscape of Rome, the colour of the framing beams and the arrangement of the objects in Sala Caldaie, along with the mosaic laid out on the floor, induce associations to a garden landscape or a park decorated with artworks.

The lack of an immediate overview of the space evokes the kind of curiosity that Bergström refers to. Even though this sensation of interest in exploring the space is present also in Sala Macchine, it is even more evident in Sala Caldaie. In both spaces, the view from the entrance gives the impression of there being more to the space than what meets the eye, but in Sala Caldaie it is soon understood that one has to turn more corners and walk through more small areas and narrow spaces in order to fully experience the display. The exhibition is arranged to be more verdant and intimate, rather than open and expansive. Sala Macchine and Sala Caldaie can be interpreted, then, as symbolizing the urban environment, on the one hand, and the green landscape of a garden or park, on the other. They represent two different scenarios where artworks would be displayed during antiquity. This is manifested mainly in the blue and green colours added to the spaces as well as in the dispositions of the artworks and in the presence, and lack, of industrial elements. Ultimately, through the juxtaposition of artefacts and spatial components the differing solutions for the two spaces signify a variety of aspects referring both to the history of the exhibition contents as such and to methods that have been used for displaying sculptures in the past.

316 van Leeuwen, 56-57; Goethe, 173.
317 Palmqvist, 12, 51; cf. McKay, 44.
318 Bergström, 91.
Hybrid spaces

Jane is an approximately 20-year-old art education student from the United States who is visiting Centrale Montemartini for the first time. She says she finds the spaces interesting. In Sala Macchine, she enjoys the juxtaposition of the old gigantic masses, i.e. the engines, against classical sculptures and she feels this enhances them both. The colours of blue, white, and dark grey against each other also appeals to her and she thinks there is a pleasant unity to the whole place. She says she finds Sala Macchine organized and that she can focus on the objects individually. This is enhanced by the volume and openness of the space and the quantity of natural light that accentuates the sculptures, she states.

Jane feels that the layout is not as clear in Sala Caldaie as in Sala Macchine and this makes her unsure about where to go in the space. She also thinks it is difficult to get an overview, unlike in Sala Macchine, because the space is more closed in. In other words, she does not experience the evoked curiosity and the wish to explore that Bergström claims are induced in spaces without a clear overview – Jane rather seems to feel the opposite. She says she does not find Sala Caldaie as engaging in general, even though it is the same concept as in the other hall, with the whiteness of the sculptures against a pastel colour, in this case green instead of blue. Jane likes how the shadows of the sculptures fall on the green backgrounds but she still feels that the blue colour in Sala Macchine looks better together with the engines and that the green colour in Sala Caldaie does not feel as natural as the blue in

\[319\] Date of visit: February 1 2012. Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University. The conversation with Jane was held in English.
Sala Macchine. White and light blue can be considered a natural combination due to the lightness that characterizes them both. It is possible that Jane feels that the step from light blue to white seems shorter than from white to pastel green and for that reason, the arrangement appears to be more natural and smoother colour-wise in Sala Macchine.

Jane’s overall impression of the museum spaces is that she finds the contrast between the industrial aspect and the classical elements to be unusual. The museum spaces represent two different parts of the history of Rome and Jane considers it interesting to see completely different sides of it coming together. Although the atmospheres in Sala Macchine and Sala Caldaie are rather different, the concept is the same throughout the exhibition spaces and it is apparent that it is a museum of hybridity. In this case, the word hybrid is understood as a combination of two contrasting elements that do not melt into each other as they unite, but which maintain their specific qualities and physiognomies. As a result, the hybrid consists of two distinguishable components even as they intermingle. In Sala Macchine, one is struck by the volume of the space, the size of the engines, and the interesting juxtaposition between them and the sculptures. The exhibition concept alone is intriguing but in combination with the volume and the industrial elements, it is even more remarkable. The atmosphere is that of spaciousness and airiness, which is also due to the light blue colour of the frames, separate walls, and the pediment. At the same time, there is an impression of heaviness and stability and yet of energy and dynamism.

The hybridity is most emphasized and striking in Sala Macchine. Moving on to Sala Caldaie, the accentuation of hybridity as well as the sensation of spaciousness, is somewhat reduced. The space feels more intimate because there are more separate walls and framings and these components are also set closer together. Also, the green surfaces are more prominent, covering the separate surfaces of the space extensively and, therefore, leaving less room for the original hall to project through. The boiler’s presence at the back of the room is exposed and thereby it authenticates its industrial origin. Still, its position at the back, as opposed to in the centre of the room as in Sala Macchine, reduces the feeling of heaviness that the engines in the previous space give. The possibility to walk around the engines and fully experience their dimensions from different sides induces the sensation of massive weight. This is not as distinct in Sala Caldaie where the boiler, although being of considerable size, appears more like a wall than a separate entity. The intense green colour of the space provides the space with an organic touch and this contributes to the atmospheric qualities of intimacy and freshness. Sala Caldaie is also characterized by even more energy and vibrancy than Sala Macchine, which is dynamic and full of contrasts in its own right, but the cool light blue and large iron engines add stability to the atmosphere.
**Power and glory**

The industrial elements in Centrale Montemartini stimulate the imagination and the hybridity of Sala Macchine and Sala Caldaie are manifested when we allow ourselves to imagine what these spaces were like during their time of use. Just as Winckelmann’s legacy has influenced the impression of antique marble sculptures as representing nobility and beauty, it appears that the experience of the industrial elements in this exhibition context also communicates meanings and consequences beyond what is immediately observed.\(^{320}\) The major technological developments that took place during the Second Industrial Revolution form the background of the museum on a social and cultural level. Experiencing the machinery in Centrale Montemartini can also evoke any knowledge we have of industrial production as such. This comprehension might include conceptions of industry’s effects on the immediate surroundings and the general environment in terms of by-products and effluents. At first glance, one might not know how the engines functioned, the sounds they made, or what it looked like when some of their different components were in motion during the production of electricity. Still, it is hardly difficult to imagine how the space was full of energy and frenzy, with loud noises, motions, and factory workers monitoring all of the activity. These impressions certainly only take place in visitors’ imagination as they make meaning out of what is on display – and what is not.\(^{321}\)

Considering the activities that took place in Centrale Montemartini in the past, it would be reasonable to think that the spaces were not as clean then as they are today. Because they contain two engines and a boiler, along with a few other industrial machines and gears, one can imagine that the production of electricity might have generated large amounts of oil, steam, coal dust, and other substances. Even though these emissions have all been cleaned, this visualization of spaces that were tarnished to some extent, and probably rather noisy, is still at odds with the presence of white sculptures. The spaces of a former power station do not seem like the best possible milieu for graceful antique artworks, even if the machines are not functioning anymore. The placement of such elegant art in an environment like this can even seem discomfiting. However, this unexpected combination of what might initially be perceived as contradicting elements becomes instead curiously intriguing and gives the impression of being completely unforced on another level.

Imagining the spaces as operative has two effects. One enables an understanding of the former functions of Centrale Montemartini and that accentuates the unexpected juxtaposition of industrial architecture and classical art. The other effect of this imagined conception is that it simultaneously intensifies the notions of Centrale Montemartini’s function today, as a museum that emphasizes its own serenity. With the help of one’s imagination, one can get a sense of the energy of the operative machinery. However, the fact is that Centrale Montemartini is not functioning.

---

\(^{320}\) Cf. Pearce 141; see also Galangau-Quérat, 104.

\(^{321}\) Cf. Pearce, 141; cf. Galangau-Quérait, 104; see also Harbison (1991), 122 ff.
as a power station anymore. At the present moment in time, it is not at all tainted; it is impeccably clean and completely motionless. Thus, when the fantasy fades and the silent stillness of the spaces emerges once again, the fixative and controlling consequences of musealization are immediately enhanced and the silence of the spaces is more pronounced, not less.

Although industrial development in general has by no means stopped progressing, Centrale Montemartini displays the death of one particular form of power production and by that also the end of an era. The engines and the boiler that were once active now stand silent as large conserved monuments, frozen and quiet, reminding us of the passing of time. The presence of the sculptures further contributes to the stillness. Even if imagination does not seem to regard distance of time as an issue when it comes to fantasizing about the past, the concept of history as a linear chronology suggests that the antique artefacts represent a past that is far older than the Second Industrial Revolution. In that sense, the sculptures’ presence in the industrial spaces allows for an encounter with historical elements that dates back a couple of thousand years rather than merely a century. Furthermore, the sculptures are representatives of an epoch of advanced civilization and high culture that is now long gone while industrialism is still connected to our own present times. Due to the distance of time, antiquity has been shrouded both in myths and in layers of academic interpretations in a way that the era of the Second Industrial Revolution has not. In that sense, the elements of antiquity in Centrale Montemartini represent a time of greatness that is unexperienced and in many ways unfamiliar to us while the industrial components may still resound in our present time.

As opposed to the sculptures, which are objects that make no sounds of their own, machines tend to generate noise. Again, even if the imagination can travel anywhere at any time, the rumbling of the engines and the boiler is vivid in our memories because we have had previous encounters with similar machinery. It is a part of our social and cultural context in a way that antiquity is not. Whereas the immobility of the sculptures is expected, because they are simply not meant to move, the quietness of the large machines seems rather peculiar and therefore even more palpable. The overall frozen paralysis in the spaces of Centrale Montemartini becomes an indicator of vulnerability, mortality, and transience.\(^{322}\) The museum contents communicate to visitors that all things will one day cease to be. Even the most powerful machines stop functioning and even the greatest cultures fade.

The artefacts and spatial settings in Centrale Montemartini – the art and machinery alike – stimulate fantasies about their original functions and contexts on equal terms and at the same time, and they are equally silent. They are all museum objects incorporated into a well-preserved environment. As a result, the industrial components and the artwork tell their two completely different stories in the same manner. Their presence quietly whispers of a time when they were part of a cultural and social context where they were admired for their aesthetic appeal, on the one

---

hand, and for their technically advanced properties, on the other hand. Considering the hybrid aspects of the Centrale Montemartini spaces, then, it is not only in the industrialism contrasted with antiquity where hybridity can be found, but also in all the layers of historical representation and meanings, as well as in the different perspectives on how perception is affected by spatial arrangements. Consequently, the juxtaposition of the spaces and their contents is appealing in itself, but beyond that there is even more to be experienced in terms of symbolic and representational aspects.

The spaces of Centrale Montemartini are heterotopic. Not only do they represent accumulated time, but two different aspects of time that, when combined, create a third time, namely the hybrid of times. Centrale Montemartini represents two pasts and the present while simultaneously being “outside time”, as Foucault describes it.\(^\text{323}\) Yet, the museum is not outside time in the sense of being separated from “the real world” or contemporary society – it is rather highly contemporary considering its display, which is equivalent to an avant-garde art installation. Centrale Montemartini is outside time regarding the combination of two eras that historically have nothing to do with each other but, when integrated within the spaces of the museum, they represent a time that does not follow the conventional chronological history. Furthermore, the stillness of the artefacts and the sensation of transience and mortality that they convey enhance the impression of the spaces in Centrale Montemartini as containing a time of their own, a time that refers to history and the present simultaneously while also representing a time standing still. The accumulation of all times in one space is, as Foucault points out, one of the things that signify museums as heterotopias.\(^\text{324}\)

Fig. 37: A slab of a frieze in front of the boiler.

---

\(^{323}\) Foucault, 355.

\(^{324}\) Ibid.
Conclusion

Centrale Montemartini is not unique when it comes to combining art and industrialism. Tate Modern in London is housed in a power station and Musée D’Orsay in Paris consists of a former railway station. In Essen, the Red Dot Design Museum juxtaposes design exhibitions with the industrial elements of a coal mine building. Among the five museums studied here, however, Centrale Montemartini is the one museum that is truly in-between museum genres. Describing it as solely an art museum would be inadequate, as would labelling it a museum of cultural history. As Jane observes, Centrale Montemartini consists of hybrid spaces that create a new atmosphere and new meanings. Not only different times of history, but also different materials and colours are juxtaposed. The heaviness and slight coarseness of dark iron meets the smooth and detailed surfaces of white marble and together they create both a contrast and a unity. Although being a museum of history, even on two separate levels, Centrale Montemartini rather seems to appear as a museum of art. Here the artwork is represented by the antique artefacts that have been placed in an environment in which they are not usually seen and they have gained different meanings than if they had been displayed in more conventional spaces. Conventional in this context means the kinds of exhibition rooms where antique sculptures are displayed against plain monochromic backgrounds, often white or greyish, and stripped of elements that might draw too much attention away from the artefacts. These exhibition concepts are easily associated with the modernistic white cube, in which the artwork is meant to be experienced individually and without distractions. In Centrale Montemartini, the sculptures have instead been placed in a dynamic environment where industrial machinery represents the building’s original function. The sculptures are not as conspicuous in these spaces as they would have been in more conventional exhibition spaces. Here they are viewed against backgrounds and surfaces that are themselves artefacts on display, such as the large engines and the boiler. Furthermore, the framing columns, surfaces, and beams that function as background and support to the artefacts, add blue and green colours that seem to both ease and energize the spaces. In this environment, the white artefacts are in no way less interesting or aesthetically appealing than they would be in a monochromic space with open surfaces. Rather, the interaction with the surrounding elements makes the sculptures fuse into a context where the aesthetic appeal is beyond each separate artefact and is instead generated by the unity of these elements.

According to Psarra, “museums have to combine the value invested in objects with the value invested in architecture through an imaginative approach that uses the one to strengthen the other.” In Centrale Montemartini, the focus on the individuality of the artefacts is reduced and the effect of juxtaposition is enhanced as

325 Cf. Santillo Frizell, 31. This exhibition concept can be seen in Rome and generally in museums all over Europe which display antique sculptures. Examples can be seen in British Museum in London, in the New Acropolis Museum in Athens and in parts of the sculpture exhibitions in Palazzo Massimo alle Terme in Rome.
326 Psarra (2005), 81.
a result of such a combination as Psarra describes. The juxtaposition itself becomes something of an art installation. Consequently, as in the case of Museo dell’Ara Pacis, the spatial design and the displays seem to draw attention to themselves more than the histories of what is exhibited. The sensation of moving through the two halls in Centrale Montemartini is rather intense and visiting the museum is in fact very much a bodily experience considering how the possibility to move in-between sculptures and machines constantly alters one’s perspective on the spaces and the displayed artefacts. Moreover, it allows visitors to come close to the objects and that enables comprehension of the sizes and proportions of the machines and the sculptures. Also, details of the machinery’s functional components and the sculptures’ decorative ornamentations and facial expressions become more perceptible. The visit thus becomes a meeting not only between different cultures and histories, but also between physical masses and shapes, where one’s own body stands in relation to refined marble and heavy iron. Moving through the spaces in Centrale Montemartini is something of an exploration of strange routes, of new perspectives, and of contradictory relations between proportions, materials, and aesthetics. And yet, considering the museum on the whole, there is nothing contradictory about it at all; it is merely an unexpected composition.
MAXXI

Background

MAXXI, Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo, is a museum of contemporary art and architecture located in the Flaminio area north of the city centre of Rome. The museum was built between 2003 and 2010 and was designed by the British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid. It is both an architectural monument and a museum for art exhibitions consisting of two more or less separate institutions, MAXXI Arte and MAXXI Architettura. The purpose of the museum is to combine different artistic expressions and thereby unite the two artistic fields of architecture and art. Another intention is for MAXXI to function as a factory or laboratory, as Pio Baldi, director of MAXXI Foundations, describes it.\(^{327}\) This implies that the museum constitutes creative environments for new contemporary art where various ideas and techniques can meet. MAXXI’s collections include creations made by both architects and artists from all over the world and while some of the museum’s artworks are permanently on display, temporary exhibitions and projects dominate their activities. MAXXI contains a foyer, five galleries, and five additional rooms for exhibitions, education, and archive studies.

Although the design of MAXXI is unique, it is one of many art museums of the 20\(^{th}\) and 21\(^{st}\) centuries whose experimental and innovative architectural styles have been formed in an attempt to articulate the specific museum’s function and contents in various ways. In the case of MAXXI, the building represents the art it houses while also manifesting the architect’s own artistic influences. In his book *The Art-Architecture Complex* (2011), art critic and historian Hal Foster describes how Hadid was inspired by modernist art from an early stage in her career, particularly the Suprematist artwork of Russian artist Kazimir Malevich. Hadid’s paintings of the early 1980s depicting abstract architectural forms show an incorporation of the modernist inspiration in the development of her personal creative process and in

the qualities of her architecture.\textsuperscript{328} She would later come to form her own manifesto as she and Patrik Schumacher, her closest partner and co-architect in most of her projects, developed a genre referred to as \textit{parametricism}. In an interview made in 2010, Schumacher explains that “parametricism suggests the introduction of gradients and of simultaneous interpenetrating orders of reference, with overlapping domains enabling intensive networks of cross-reference to be spatialized and articulated. The resultant exhibitions are more layered and able to set up more alignments and cross-references between the elements of the exhibition.”\textsuperscript{329} Even though this declaration of parametricism corresponds with the architecture that Hadid and her co-architects produce, it does not seem to be the only possible description. Foster discusses how influences of other modernist art movements, specifically Futurism and Expressionism, are also articulated in Hadid’s architecture. He states that “a styling of Futurist lines, Suprematist forms, Expressionist shapes, and Constructivist assemblages” constitutes to her designs.\textsuperscript{330} Thus, Hadid’s work is so complex that it can be compared to a number of previous architectural and artistic styles and this indicates that her architecture is hard to classify in simple terms. Therefore, MAXXI will be defined here not as a representative of “–isms”, but as an avant-garde contemporary art museum.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{maxxi_floor_plan}
\caption{MAXXI floor plan showing Galleries 2, 3, and 4 on the first floor.}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{330} Foster, 85.
\end{flushright}
**Museum context**

The museum is located in the Flaminio district, an area whose planning and use has changed radically over the last hundred years. In the early 20th century it was a place for industrial plants. Rome’s hosting of the World Fair in 1942 led to the district’s development into becoming an area for amusement and leisure.\(^{331}\) When Rome hosted the Summer Olympics in 1960, most of the events took place at the Foro Mussolini, now Foro Italico, which was built mainly in the 1930s in the Flaminio area. Now housing a number of sport stadiums, some spaces for music events, and two major art museums – MAXXI and Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna – the Flaminio district is today a place for entertainment, culture, and sports. The district lies outside the Roman city walls and so it is not regulated by the same building restrictions that affected the building of Museo dell’Ara Pacis in the central areas. In Flaminio, modernist architecture is allowed to expand without further obstruction.\(^{332}\)

As she usually does, Hadid took location and surroundings into account when planning and designing MAXXI. The site on Via Guido Reni was complicated structure-wise because it used to contain army barracks that did not leave much space for a new building. This was taken into account and some of the barracks were demolished, one was integrated into the museum building, and a few have been renovated into additional exhibition halls.\(^{333}\) The floor plan of the MAXXI building was curved in order to fit into the shape of the location and the urban structure (fig. 38). Also, the main material used for the museum construction was concrete that corresponds with the surrounding environment. A courtyard was created in front of the façade, leaving room for outdoor exhibitions. Although the building is adapted to the conditions of the Flaminio district, its design makes it one of the most noticeable examples of the avant-garde elements of the area.

Contemporary art museums world-wide are often characterized by innovative and unconventional architecture, such as the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the Groninger Museum in Groningen, and Tate Modern in London. The three museums are examples of buildings that are at least as famous for their architecture as for their exhibitions.\(^{334}\) Like MAXXI, they represent art museums in which the art perspective is not only a part of the displaying programs but is also evident in the design of the buildings. MAXXI is thereby a part of a genre of contemporary art museums that manifest their specific concepts, contents, and profiles through their architecture.\(^{335}\)

---

\(^{331}\) *MAXXI: Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo*, eds. Sofia Bilotti & Alessio Rosati (Milan: Electa 2010), 84.

\(^{332}\) *MAXXI: Museum of XXI Century Arts*, 8, 164.

\(^{333}\) *MAXXI: Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo*, 86; *MAXXI: Museum of XXI Century Arts*, 8.


\(^{335}\) Dates of observations at MAXXI: November 12 2011; November 13 2011; January 22 2012; February 18 2012; April 11 2012. Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University.
The foyer

When entering MAXXI, one’s eye is immediately caught by the vast volume of the foyer. Its width is difficult to measure because its curving walls and winding angles extend into adjacent spaces, but the ceiling is about 20 meters high. Unsupported stairs and ramps appear to float in the air; they fill the space, not cramming it, but rather leaving it open enough for the foyer to appear bright and spacious (fig. 39 and 40). In comparison, the sensation of volume of the exhibition space Sala Caldaie in Centrale Montemartini, discussed in the previous chapter, seems to be reduced by the number of components, such as scaffolds and ventilation pipes that hovers in the air. This is not the case in the foyer in MAXXI, where the stair structure enhances the impression of volume and openness as flowing shapes spiral up through the air. While the scaffolds in Centrale Montemartini are sharply angled and evidently attached to fixed physical elements, the stairs in MAXXI are softly curved and flows freely. Thus, they rather resemble a flying object circling through the air of the space, like a bird or a kite.

Even though the shapes of the foyer are rounded and soft, the concrete on the walls and floor creates a cold atmosphere. Some of the concrete is not painted and has its original colour, bright grey, while the rest of the walls and the floor are white. These pale shades add coolness to the room and enhance the impression of volume. The walls are steady and stable in contrast to the ramps and stairs floating in the air and the space seems heavy and light at the same time. According to Foster, this effect emerges because Hadid’s designs are generally characterized by lightness when it comes to shapes and flows, but she then chooses heavy materials such as concrete for the construction. Consequently, the designed shapes and the building materials have different qualities when it comes to impressions of weight and density. “This effect counters the vaunted materiality of her work,” Foster states as he argues that the weight of the material tends to reduce the lightness of the design.

In the foyer of MAXXI, the countering effects that Foster refers to are represented in the concrete walls that, no matter how smooth and curved, do not seem to fully convey the lightness and flowing movement that can be seen in Hadid’s drawings and plans for the building. The stairs and ramps, on the other hand, do evoke sensations of flow and lightness, although they consist mainly of different kinds of metal. The sides are fenced with solid black metal boards functioning as bannisters and the steps of the stairs consist of steel grates. Grates are also used as floors on the ramps but they are laid on top of screens containing lamps that shine white light from underneath the grates to give the impression of walking on light. Unlike those on the ramps, the grates of the stairs are not resting on screens. Instead, they function as steps without support from underneath and this allows one to see all the way down to the floor of the foyer.

336 Foster, 84.
337 Ibid.
338 Drawings and plans can be found in MAXXI: Museum of XXI Century Arts, passim.
Walking on these unsupported stairs and ramps might evoke a feeling of unease and instability. According to Bollnow, these kinds of sensations are induced when we do not feel solid ground under our feet. “If this solid ground is absent, man must fall, and if it is only partially absent, as when an abyss opens close to him, at a steep cliff in a mountain area, or at the unprotected edge of a high tower, he becomes dizzy, because the basis of his ability to stand is endangered,” he explains. In MAXXI, this feeling appears not so much as a reaction to the danger of actually falling, as is indicated in Bollnow’s description, but the impression of instability, and a kind of insecurity, does arise because the stairs are not only floating free and unsupported, but also have see-through grates for steps. On the other hand, the bridges and stairs can add to the impression of flow and fluidity. One is in fact walking through the air at quite a height. When standing on the uppermost bridge looking down at the stairs and ramps below, a pattern seems to emerge. The formation creates an asymmetric S-shape spiralling from the floor upwards, branching out to the galleries. This three-dimensional effect gives an impression of spaciousness and movement that is not as apparent from below, presumably because when standing on the ground floor the spaciousness of the foyer is experienced from a position on solid ground. The perception of space is different when standing on the highest bridge because one is integrated with the space and its volume in a different way. Also, the view of the space, including its curving stairs and ramps, is simply better.

339 Bollnow, 48.
The grates of the stairs resemble the kind of grates used in urban contexts to cover openings in streets and pavements leading to underground systems. Similar grates can be seen on the sidewalks in the streets surrounding MAXXI. Hadid’s interest in geology, landscapes, and topography are incorporated in her designs and so it was her intention to let the lines and forms of the architecture follow the structures of the streets nearby. Rows of concrete tracks consisting of flat bars in the ceilings, running continuously through the spaces and following their flowing forms, resemble elements in the streets (fig. 41 and 44). These examples of materials and formations all relate to urban structures and traffic flow. In other words, the design of the museum seems to refer to urban modern Rome and this is in accordance with the profile of MAXXI as a museum of contemporary art and architecture.

The foyer does on occasion contain a few artworks. For example, video art has been shown on monitors hanging from the ceiling. However, art that is displayed in the foyer does not catch the eye as naturally as the stairs and ramps. Therefore, the hall might very well be seen as a kind of exhibition space for architectural art in particular. Though most of the galleries combine architecture and art to create a unity, some rooms generally emphasize the artworks alone without any extensive experimentation or interaction with spatial forms. The foyer, on the other hand, seems to concentrate mainly on architectural elements. Here, the stairs and ramps do not just represent their architectural functionality, as constructions used for transportation between the different galleries. They also appear to be designed to represent artworks themselves and thereby to combine function, art, and architecture into one design. Other elements turned artworks in the foyer are the extended red cylinders hanging from the ceiling and taking up spaces in-between the stairs and ramps (fig. 39 and 40). They give the impression of connecting the different levels of the ramps and creating links between them by hanging diagonally or vertically from long wires that are hardly noticeable at a distance. The cylinders can be associated with columns and their function as supporting elements in architecture. These cylinders, however, do not support anything but rather seem to float in-between the stairs and ramps. They are probably the elements of the space that represent lightness in the clearest and most evident manner because of their ostensible weightlessness. The blazing red cylinders add dynamism and energy to the otherwise grey-scale space.

The concept of the foyer as an exhibition space for what might be defined as a stair art piece becomes more evident when displays are changed in the galleries. The galleries are then closed one or two at a time, even if the rest of the museum is still open. The galleries where exhibitions are not changed are mostly accessible but are generally reached by other routes than by using the stairs. Thereby, the stairs lose their function. Yet, when there is less to see in the museum in terms of art, the architecture becomes more central and when the stairs of the foyer become less accessible they also become more like visually engaging design objects than func-

---

341 Cf. Rasmussen, 218.
tional architectural components. In the article “The Exhibition as Theatre – On the Staging of Museum Objects” (1995) museologist Marc Maure claims that an object that is placed in an art museum space turns into an artwork. He argues that it becomes “totally isolated from real life, liberated from any functionalist connection or socio-historic condition and raised to a new dimension.” 342 To suggest that museums are not a part of reality is drastic because they – as heterotopias – are as engaged with reality as they are disengaged from it; the museum represents society and is, simultaneously, a separate space within it. 343 Still, Maure’s statement indicates that the spatial conditions and visitors’ preconceptions of art museums contribute to a consecration of objects, no matter their original functions or positions. In MAXXI, it is not completely obvious what is supposed to be viewed as art and what is not. Still, there is no “right or wrong” when it comes to visitors’ perception of art versus other interior decoration or furnishing here because the museum is marketed as an overall art-architecture concept. Therefore, the stairs and ramps in the foyer are neither merely functional nor only artworks. Rather, they show that this particular museum treats architecture as an art form on the same conditions as any other and by making this statement immediately in the foyer, visitors learn right away what kind of museum they have entered.

Fig. 40: The foyer stair structure with a view of the ceiling tracks.

343 Cf. Foucault, 352-356.
Exhibition rooms and galleries

The design of MAXXI suggests the architect’s intention to create an unlimited flow in indefinable spaces. The dispositions of spaces and exhibitions do not suggest a certain direction or discernible route. Although the galleries are numbered, one might choose where to go spontaneously, without extensive restrictions. Walking through the galleries can evoke feelings of confusion but also of playfulness and surprise; there are constantly new openings, angles, and spaces to explore when turning the corner.

From the position of the entrance on the ground floor there are two exhibition rooms to the right, Sala Claudia Gian Ferrari and Sala Carlo Scarpa. The first displays the museum’s photography collection and, at the time of my visit, the latter contains an installation consisting of mainly video and audio art. To the right is the entrance to the first gallery, a curved space that then extends into a rectangular hall, Gallery 1, temporarily containing the exhibition Re-cycle (fig. 41). This exhibition consists of over 80 drawings, models, and designs of architectural plans and landscapes made in the contemporary contexts of Italian architects in co-operation with artists. Models and drawings are placed on tables dispersed throughout the gallery. At the end of the space is a smaller room, the architectural archive centre.

Fig. 41: Gallery 1 and the Re-cycle exhibition.
The first floor contains Galleries 2, 3, and 4. The second floor consists of the exhibition room Sala Guido Reni and the third floor houses Gallery 5. The different levels can be reached by the stairs and ramps in the foyer or by elevators.\textsuperscript{344} Gallery 2 is the most extensive of the spaces, reaching from the one far end of the building to the other. It can be divided into three areas, the first consisting of a long corridor and the second a rectangular space following the shape of Gallery 1 on the ground level below (fig. 38). Here, Galleries 1 and 2 are connected by some steps. The third area, a smaller separate space, is set close by these steps.

Gallery 2 can be used for displaying a single exhibition or a combination of several exhibitions. A collective exhibition called \textit{Indian Highway} is temporarily on display and it consists of artworks created by contemporary artists from India. The exhibition contains elements such as photographs and an installation, the latter including bird twitter and the scent of burning incense. \textit{Indian Highway} combines different artistic expressions to appeal to visitors’ varying senses and it explores immaterial factors as well as the material and tactile aspects of art. Even though the sound and scent are part of a specific exhibition and emanate from that particular setting, they overflow from their designated area into parts of Gallery 3. The artworks in the neighbouring space are, therefore, also affected by the twittering and fragrance and the border between the two galleries is transcended by invisible, yet fully perceptible, art elements.

Gallery 3 follows the layout of Gallery 2 to some extent and – with several slopes and a few steps – it is the one gallery that offers the most surprises when it comes to varying floor levels. The space is sectioned into smaller areas separated by glass screens or, in some cases, such as at the top of the slope towards the back wall, by high concrete walls. This affords the artworks certain areas within which they can be the centre of attention. The layout of the space and the disposition of art do not reveal all. The shape of the space at large is apparent, but the artworks are fully or partially hidden due to architectural components, like walls and dividers, or to spatial compositions, for instance, varying levels and ramps. Gallery 3 thus contains elements of asymmetry and arrhythmia. Walking through the exhibition, one has to be observant of the inconsistencies and irregularities of the space so that one does not stumble upon an abrupt shift in the floor.

In this gallery, as in most of the museum spaces in MAXXI, the linear shapes tend to be softly curved, although in Gallery 3 the soft forms are combined with more erratic lines. These lines appear as asymmetrical to the eyes and this might cause sensations of unpleasantness and insecurity.\textsuperscript{345} According to Lundberg, we associate soft curves with rhythmic relaxing impressions like that of, for example, the curling waves of a lake. Erratic lines, on the other hand, require more energy for the eyes and the body to follow and are generally associated with tension.\textsuperscript{346} This

\textsuperscript{344} The floors are numbered according to Italian definitions.
\textsuperscript{345} Cf. Wölflin, 16.
\textsuperscript{346} Lundberg, 26-27.
tension is, however, not necessarily negative. A straight and regular line or a symmetrical space can cause one to experience a sense of relaxation and perhaps even control. Irregularities can be perceived as unpleasant but they can also create an energetic and suggestive atmosphere. In Gallery 3, the spatial disposition with its visual obstructions prevents the eyes from fully perceiving the whole space at once; it contains elements of surprise while also evoking curiosity. Therefore, it is a space that can cause contradicting reactions.

Fig. 42: A section of Gallery 3.

The design of Gallery 3 opens up possibilities for exhibition producers, curators, and artists to experiment with the space and to juxtapose spatial elements and artworks. The space allows for the art to be presented under other conditions than perhaps a plain white cube would allow and thus the correlation between space and art gives the impression of unity. Gallery 3 is particularly dynamic, more so than the other galleries and rooms with their open surfaces and more comprehensible layouts, like Gallery 4. Gallery 4 is slightly curved but it still provides visitors with close to a full overview of the space. Nevertheless, the different artworks exhibited in Gallery 4 are generally disposed in rather traditional ways, regardless of which types of artworks are on display. Sculptures and other art objects stand on the floor while flat artworks, such as paintings and screens showing video art, are hung on the walls at

347 Lundberg, 26-28.
348 Bergström, 91.
eye-level. Gallery 4 has the most conventional spatial design of all of the galleries, even if it is not nearly as white cube-like as, for instance, Sala Claudia Gian Ferrari.

The final exhibition space, Gallery 5 on the third floor, is generally used for projecting video art. It has the layout of a movie theatre with a sloping floor set with backless couches for sitting. Yet, unlike a cinema, one can walk past the video art area, which is quite dark, and move into an open and brighter exhibition space used for displaying varying kinds of sculptures. This part of the museum is situated in a projecting section of the building that protrudes in the opposite direction to the curved wing containing Galleries 1 and 2. The striking element in this area of the building is the panoramic window with a view over the northern Flaminio neighbourhood, an area that is not generally experienced by non-local visitors. The large wide window gives the opportunity to see another side of Rome, the parts that influenced Hadid in her planning of the museum (fig. 43).

Unlike the large windows in Museo dell’Ara Pacis, the windows in MAXXI are not at street level. Instead, they are so high up that there is no possibility to stand outside and look in. The overview perspective decreases the dynamic effect that the windows have on the space in Museo dell’Ara Pacis where their transparency displays the movements and traffic of Roman everyday logistics. The panorama in MAXXI rather shows a tranquil picture of buildings and greenery and of an urban landscape that extends into the distance. The view is incorporated in the exhibition space and becomes a part of the display that it houses. Accordingly, the idea of a museum that fuses art and architecture is not limited to the building and its exhibited artworks, but extends beyond its walls and includes the modern city in the concept. The visitors do not only perceive a nice view of Flaminio per se, but a view that is part of the museum concept and that represents an artwork in its own right.

Fig. 43: A view from inside Gallery 5.
Spatial effects

Due to its large windows, the foyer is bathed in the natural light that seems to be the space’s main light source. In the evening, when the sun has gone down, it turns rather dark and the sensation of weightlessness is then reduced because the darkness gives the impression of the space as being heavier and more closed in. The darkness is more intense in the uppermost areas of the space. Because the lamps on the bottom of the stairs and ramps are lit, the stair construction gives the impression of being heavier because the trails of intense white light make the stairs more prominent. The light emphasizes the darkness rather than reduces it and thereby creates a dramatic effect.

The lights on the bottoms of the stairs and ramps somewhat resemble the headlights of cars passing by in the night or even a space vessel taking off into space. This seems even more in line with the entire architecture, which resembles some sort of a science fiction space craft suddenly having landed on Roman ground. The association with unidentified flying objects adds to the perception of futuristic design. Leaving Futurism as art movement aside, the futuristic design of MAXXI is manifested in the flowing shapes, the almost fluorescent light under the stairs, and in the rather clinical coolness of the smooth concrete surfaces. In fact, Hadid’s designs in general often resemble space vessels such as they tend to appear in science fiction movies with defined futuristic elements of light, shapes, and materials. In some cases, this similarity is mainly evident in the exterior designs of her buildings, yet MAXXI resembles a space ship inside and out, revealing the thorough thematic approach that Hadid has shown in her later work.

In contrast to the artificial white lights in the foyer, the natural light is softer regardless of the weather. Dull and grey weather does not seem to affect the space any differently than sunshine. The small gaps between the flat bars in the ceiling shift the light although they do not separate it enough to make it cast sharp linear rays of light or shadows into the spaces. The natural light in the galleries is white or white-yellow, while the artificial light is of a softer and darker yellow, close to the hue of copper. Instead of emphasizing the artworks by directing bright spotlights toward them, the natural and artificial light are of different colours and thereby they cast different shades on various areas. The spaces and artworks are thus evenly illuminated, but illuminated with varying nuances. This accentuates the artworks not by highlighting, but rather by colour-coding them in the spatial environment in which they are set.

Even though the materials of the spaces are generally heavy and solid, countering the impression of weightlessness of the design, the spaces still appear airy because of their brightness and openness. The sensation of airiness is also due to the whiteness and bright grey-scales that have the effect of opening up and extending

350 Cf. Foster, 80-81.
351 Rasmussen, 218.
the spaces. The tracks of bars in the ceilings give the impression of a continuing space. Also, as opposed to the solidly limiting and enclosing effect that plain ceilings might have, the gaps between the bars open the spaces up towards the sky, not only letting in natural light but also creating an impression of spaciousness. This effect is specifically evident in the small and narrow spaces in MAXXI.

![Fig. 44: A section of Gallery 2.](image)

Gallery 2 is approximately 3-4 meters wide in certain sections and narrower in others. Due to the arrangement of a temporary display, a wall has been erected to divide the space into a 1.5 meter wide corridor on one side and smaller exhibition spaces on the other. While the wider areas of Gallery 2 seem to provide enough space to move about, the walls of the narrower section give the impression of closing in on one’s body (fig. 44). The gallery does not have ceiling tracks but instead, it has a wall of windows on one side. The windows provide aeration throughout parts of the space, even if it is only a visual perception of airiness and not an actual operative ventilation system. Because of this effect, the instinct to pick up the pace and move along to another more voluminous and airy space does not appear as urgent as it might have been if the gallery had resembled a solid concrete tunnel. Instead of the narrow extended form of the corridor pushing and drawing the body forward, the windows provide the corridor with spaciousness, light, and a sensation of freshness. The windows thus give the space a comfortable touch, just as the ceiling tracks does in the other galleries in the museum.

\[^{352}\text{Cf. Bollnow, 218; Rasmussen, 218.}\]
MAXXI is not a museum with obvious paths and directions; routes cross each other and levels and floors are interconnected to create a flow of spatiality that is not always easy to comprehend. The ceiling tracks link the spaces together and suggest a route for visitors to follow when the spaces appear to dissolve and reform. Still, the tracks are mainly visible on the upper levels of the building and this means that one needs to find other spatial clues to find the route on the lower floors. The flowing spaces and unexpected turns, in combination with unconventional spatial forms and dispositions, require an ability to orient oneself without further guidance from the spatial design, because such guidance is not always provided. Psarra claims that museum design needs “spatial mechanisms that aid orientation and enable the building and the exhibitions to be seen as one whole.”353 In MAXXI, there is very little aid; on the other hand, there is a unity in the avant-garde design housing contemporary art displayed in often unconventional ways. The confusing layout thereby becomes a part of the changeability of the architecture. Although the architecture in MAXXI has a certain theme when it comes to materials and forms, it is dynamic and unpredictable. The spaces are disposed in such a manner that narrow corridors and smaller spaces are intersected with more voluminous halls of different shapes and sizes. This variation causes continuous adaptation of the given tempo. According to Bergström, this kind of mixture of volumes and shapes might have positive effects on the experience because one’s muscles are constantly changing their workload and rhythm and the body avoids monotonic movements.354 In that way, the visit becomes less repetitive and tiresome. There is an element of surprise when it comes to the spatial disposition and design in MAXXI and this element can have different effects on visitors. One effect is that, as Bergström suggests, the variation of pace keeps one alert for what is to come next and how to adapt to the coming space. From that perspective, it simply does not get boring. An opposite effect is that the constant discovery of new spaces might start to become wearying, especially when it is not only a matter of discovering new spaces, but also new artworks that are displayed in unconventional places within the erratic structures of the spaces. Hence, the architecture of MAXXI can cause various reactions with differing results.

Nina is an approximately 50-year-old medical doctor from Rome who is visiting MAXXI with a friend.355 She says she finds the museum design and contents fascinating. She has only seen the upper floors and the foyer, but she thinks these spaces are interesting. Nina says she feels at home in the museum and she refers to the spatial design as a contributor to that feeling. She senses openness, mainly because of the many windows in the foyer and in a few of the galleries, and this appeals to her. As was discussed in the chapter concerning Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, individual opinions and experiences are shaped by previous encounters and familiarities. Also, Merleau-Ponty claims that we can easily interpret a person’s preferences

353 Psarra (2005), 81.
354 Bergström, 92.
355 Date of visit: April 11 2012. Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University. The conversation with Nina was held in English.
and viewpoints by their favoured objects, colours, and places. In this case, Nina’s association with a homelike environment indicates that she either lives, or has lived, in open and bright spaces or that she generally prefers to spend time in such rooms. Nina also mentions how the spatiality and layout of the foyer and the disposition of the stair and ramps make the space visually appealing. Even though she has not passed through all of the spaces in the museum, she says she got the impression that they do not feel claustrophobic. She specifically comments on the spaces as not resembling cubes and it seems as if she enjoys the museum’s unconventional design. Nina mentions a transparent glass inserted in the floor of Gallery 5 through which one can see the galleries underneath and this seems to be one of the architectural details that makes her think of openness. Finally, Nina also mentions that she thinks that it is apparent that a woman designed the building and that it can be detected in the design because the spaces and the architecture create a “whole body”, as she puts it. In that sense, there is a coherency and no parts differ too much from the others, something that Nina apparently associates with the gender of the architect.

Hadid herself has stated that architecture should induce sensations of harmony and comfort. According to Pallasmaa, an increasingly occurring feature of modern architecture is just that; it is moving away from mere function and is more focused on design with the intention of inducing positive experiences:

Transparency and sensations of weightlessness and flotation are central themes in modern art and architecture. In recent decades, a new architectural imagery has emerged, which employs reflection, gradations of transparency, overlay and juxtaposition to create a sense of spatial thickness, as well as subtle and changing sensations of movement and light. This new sensibility promises an architecture that can turn the relative immateriality and weightlessness of recent technological construction into a positive experience of space, place and meaning.

In other words, as Pallasmaa emphasizes, there is an idea among modern architects that weightlessness and flow enhance visitors’ comfort and well-being. This can naturally not be determined because experiences are different for different people. Still, this was apparently the experience Nina had when she visited MAXXI and this shows that Hadid’s aim succeeded in Nina’s case, because her attention was mainly caught by the openness of the spaces in the museum and her reaction to it was positive.

The flotation and weightlessness that Pallasmaa claims is characteristic of contemporary architecture is evident in MAXXI and when combined with the unconventional forms and spatial compositions, the futuristic elements of the design once again become manifest. Considering the materials of the building, however,

356 Merleau-Ponty (2004), 63; Pearce, 24.
357 Zaha Hadid quoted in MAXXI: Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, 9.
358 Pallasmaa, 32.
they seem to refer both to the future and to the past. Pallasmaa expresses scepticism towards certain aspects of contemporary architecture and criticizes what he claims to be an over-use of what he calls “machine-made materials of today”, as opposed to natural material.\textsuperscript{359} He argues that while natural materials tell their own and their users’ stories through the origin and age of their substances and functions, machine-made materials, such as plastic and certain kinds of processed glass and metals, present their “unyielding surfaces to the eye without conveying their material essence or age.”\textsuperscript{360} Whether the materials of MAXXI will eventually show signs of aging is yet to be seen, but Pallasmaa’s point is that the emphasis on conceptuality and technological advancement in modern-day architecture makes the buildings lose touch with time. This, he stresses, is also the intention – to strive for “ageless perfection,” as he describes it.\textsuperscript{361}

MAXXI’s design most certainly does not refer to historical architecture and it principally encapsulates a futuristic and ultramodern atmosphere. Nevertheless, as the material that primarily characterizes the solid construction and the compact and yet polished appearance of MAXXI, concrete gives the impression of being both ageless and permanent. It is a material that has played a role throughout the history of Roman architecture. An early form of concrete was commonly used as core material in buildings in the Roman Empire, such as the Pantheon, and it is also described by Vitruvius in his chapter about floors in \textit{The Ten Books of Architecture}.\textsuperscript{362} Therefore, using concrete as the main material in MAXXI places the building in a position that is not without time, but rather in-between times. It can be seen as referring to history as well as to the future. Still, it is mainly the futuristic features that distinguish the architecture of MAXXI. Even though the museum most certainly will become a period piece in time to come, it is presently without signs of age due to its modern design and its persistent materials.

\textit{To be or not to be a white cube}

It can be established that the spaces in MAXXI do not follow traditional structures when it comes to their forms, but some of the conventions of art museum practices seems to linger even in this museum. According to Anna Mattirolo, director of arts at MAXXI, the exhibition galleries of the museum do not at all resemble ”traditional spaces – sterile and closed-off white cubes,” as she describes it.\textsuperscript{363} Mattirolo is accurate in that the layouts and forms of the galleries are not “closed-off”. The dynamic designs of the spaces offer possibilities to experiment with the settings; artworks can be hung from the ceilings or hidden behind curved walls. This is the case in some of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item[359] Pallasmaa, 32.
\item[360] Ibid.
\item[361] Ibid.
\item[362] Magnusson, 416; Vitruvius, 202.
\item[363] \textit{MAXXI: Museum of XXI Century Arts}, 160.
\end{thebibliography}
the galleries and open spaces as well as in the foyer. In some of the other rooms, however, the displays are more traditional, meaning the artworks are placed in more or less straight lines along the walls. So, although cubic forms are rare in the galleries, white and light grey dominate the whole building. The surfaces are, therefore, still similar to what Mattirolo calls “sterile” white cube exhibition spaces. The white-grey surfaces do bear resemblances to those of a white cube, even though the layout and form do not. The white cube atmosphere is present in the museum and seems to function almost as an alibi of its status as an art museum; it communicates to visitors that MAXXI acknowledges history while looking toward the future.

One of the original ideas with the white cube concept was to reduce what was considered distracting colours and to move focus away from the space towards the art.\footnote{\textcite{364} Staniszewski, 62-66; Duncan, 110.} According to museum planner Heather Maximea, specifically \textit{pure} white is not required for this purpose. Other “neutral” tones such as variants of whites and light grey, as in MAXXI, and occasionally also pale green might very well be used as backgrounds in white cube spaces. Maximea claims that these nuances emphasize the colourations of the artworks and thereby make them more prominent.\footnote{\textcite{365} Heather Maximea, “Exhibition Galleries”, \textit{The Manual of Museum Exhibitions}, eds. Barry Lord & Gail Dexter Lord (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press 2001), 171-172.} The use of white or other pale colours in art museums is, of course, also a question of functionality in relation to temporary exhibitions: an unadorned space does not have to be repainted or extensively altered when displays are changed.

![Fig. 45: White, yet not a cube.](image-url)
Whether a colour can ever be “neutral” can be debated. As seen in the second chapter of this study, the whiteness in the main hall in Museo dell’Ara Pacis adds several possible interpretations and meanings to the perception of the space as well as the altar. It is hardly any different when it comes to white cubes or to MAXXI, but the meaning of whiteness might be different here than in Museo dell’Ara Pacis. Even though the whiteness of an art museum space can be interpreted as infinite, sacred, and pure, just as in Museo dell’Ara Pacis, its function leads to other conclusions. When serving as a “neutral background” to art, whiteness is the non-colour of modernism. O’Doherty, himself a critic of the white cube concept, argues that the white cube is an artificial space “devoted to the technology of esthetics,” where the outside world is sealed off so that the art can be perceived on its own terms, free from the influence of temporal and social context. According to O’Doherty, however, the immaculate white cube rather isolates the art and excludes the spectator. This can be seen as the result of a practical separation, such as covering the windows of the art gallery and painting the walls white, indicating a clear distinction between the clean inside room of the art and the unclean mundane world of outside. It can also be understood as a symbolic sanctification of the art space, where the white represents timelessness and neutrality, or rather the misconception of neutrality, as O’Doherty emphasizes.

Symbolically, the whiteness and light greyness of the walls in MAXXI seem to have the same function as in any white cube, i.e. to provide the displays with a background that allows the art to “speak for itself” and not be interrupted by surrounding colours. Interpreting O’Doherty’s criticism on a practical and mechanical level, though, the architecture of MAXXI differs from the isolated white cube of his description. The openness and urban structures of its general design do not detach the art from the outside world at all. In fact, many of the spaces continuously remind visitors of the spatial and urban context that surrounds the museum. Not only do the large windows allow visitors to keep visual contact with the outside, the grates on the stairs and ramps, the tracks in the ceilings, and the concrete also imply the city’s presence. However, as mentioned, there are conventional spaces even in MAXXI; Sala Claudia Gian Ferrari, where the museum’s photography collection is generally exhibited, is more or less as traditional as any white cube with standard displays. Once again it is evident that MAXXI has one foot in the conventional and one foot in the avant-garde.

The use of unconventional architecture to create a design that is equal to the art it houses is not unique for MAXXI. Klonk compares the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and Tate Modern in London as examples of modern art museums that attract visitors because of their extraordinary architecture. Internally, however, they do not reflect the external design; most of the spaces in the two museums still bear

366 O’Doherty, 15.
367 O’Doherty, 14-15; see also Buren, 316.
368 O’Doherty, 15, 79-80.
resemblance to the white cube. Since the concept of white surfaces was generally introduced in the 1930s, it has been the established principal design in contemporary art galleries and museums. According to Klonk, the kind of avant-garde art museum buildings that have largely increased in number since the 1980s have been unconventional in their exterior design, but the interior designs are still following the traditions of cubic or homogeneous concepts.

What binds the Guggenheim Museum, the Tate Modern, MAXXI, and also the avant-garde museum MoMA together is that in each one of them there are one or a few spaces that diverge from the rest of the galleries. In the Guggenheim Museum, it is the gallery in the reception area with its large volume and curved walls that differs, even though it is also white. The former power station that houses Tate Modern contains the Turbine Hall, a voluminous industrial space from which the galleries are reached. The entrance hall in MoMA is a voluminous and open white atrium space with a grey-green floor. Like MAXXI, these three museums contain a striking and dramatic reception hall. Consequently, the reception areas and the galleries represent two diverse sides of the same museum in all of these cases. The reception halls and foyers signify the architectural concepts of contemporary museum design, while the exhibition rooms and galleries embody the principle of rather stereotypical art exhibition spaces. Then again, in comparison to, for example, the Guggenheim Museum and Tate Modern, MAXXI does not contain the same distinct and traditionally cubic shapes for its galleries.

One of the contemporary art museums that has taken another turn concerning contemporary design is the Groninger Museum in Groningen. The current Groninger Museum was opened in 1994 and was designed by several architects and this is apparent when one sees the variety of shapes and colours of the exterior. The interiors of the museum are strikingly different from other modern museums, including MAXXI, because they do not use uniform colour settings. The colouration is instead polychromic. Floors, walls, and ceilings are all covered with intense colours such as red, yellow, blue, and pink, often one colour for each surface. On the other hand, as opposed to MAXXI, the spatial forms are more traditional with straight lines and cubical shapes. Art museums of today thereby appear to move towards new design concepts, but one step at a time.

Time and the contemporary artwork

In Gadamer’s discussions on historical understanding, he uses avant-garde art as an example of how temporal distance – or in Gadamer’s terms, perhaps, layers of interpretations rather than distance – has not yet been processed and for that reason, contemporary artworks are more difficult to define.

---

369 Klonk, 195.
370 Ibid., 196-204.
Everyone knows that curious impotence of our judgment where the distance in time has not given us sure criteria. Thus the judgment of contemporary works of art is desperately uncertain for the scientific consciousness. Obviously we approach such creations with the prejudices we are not in control of, presuppositions that have too great an influence over us to know about them; these can give to contemporary creations an extra resonance that does not correspond to their true content and their true significance. Only when all their relations to the present time have faded away can their real nature appear, so that the understanding of what is said in them can claim to be authoritative and universal.\(^{371}\)

Consequently, contemporary artworks cannot attain a certain place in art history until temporal distance has made its mark on them and enough layers of interpretation have been added. Through these interpretations, the artwork is given specific meanings and by that comes also new understandings.\(^{372}\) Rasmussen emphasizes the importance of recognition during a perception act: “Usually it is easier to perceive a thing when we know something about it beforehand. We see what is familiar and disregard the rest. That is to say we re-create the observed into something intimate and comprehensible.”\(^{373}\) Perceiving art could then be construed as specifically recognizing that which can be associated with previous experiences and understandings of an artwork and that perception only happens within the recognition. In that case, historical artworks would be more accessible to us because we tend to have preconceptions of them given to us by the layers of interpretations that have been developed over time. Nevertheless, personal interpretation based on previous experiences is still at work when we perceive contemporary art even if there is less of a defined collective appreciation of it.

Art produced before the late 19\(^{th}\) century is generally of the more figurative kind while artists during and after that period began to develop abstract art forms, something that can also be considered as making contemporary, and abstract, art less accessible. Moreover, it might be argued that a lack of insight into the aesthetic context in which the artwork was made and the culture in which it is set can prevent access to it.\(^{374}\) Maure even claims that visiting an art exhibition is something of an ascetic activity. “No other category of exhibition demands so much concentration, motivation and proficiency of the visitor,” he argues.\(^{375}\) This indicates that visiting an art exhibition demands not only some insight but also hard work. However, contrary to these mentioned perspectives, Merleau-Ponty asserts that the artwork “is to be seen or heard and no attempt to define or analyse it, however valuable that may be afterwards as a way of taking stock of this experience, can ever stand in place of

\(^{371}\) Gadamer, 265.
\(^{372}\) Gadamer, 265-266; cf. Warnke, 90-91.
\(^{373}\) Rasmussen, 36.
\(^{374}\) Cf. Heumann Gurian, 39.
\(^{375}\) Maure, 166.
the direct perceptual experience.” He emphasizes the importance of perceiving and contemplating the composition of an artwork, both its form and contents, which he argues “cannot exist separate from one another.”  

It seems, then, as if Merleau-Ponty’s definition of what constitutes an art experience is the direct perception of an artwork rather than analysis and interpretation, something that follows Merleau-Ponty’s general approach to phenomenological perception of objects. Yet, regarding art experiences there are not really any “rights” or “wrongs”. During contemplation we still might very well project our perspectives onto artworks – be they figurative or abstract, historical or contemporary – and make meaning out of them as we see them from our individual standpoint, using our own imagination and creativity. As Dewey declares, “For to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience.”

Turning to architecture, similar issues of perception of contemporary buildings are central. How does the architectural context affect our experiences of artwork for which we lack any preconceptions? In MAXXI, the spatial design is very much in line with contemporary architecture, specifically of art museums, in the sense that it seems to strive for timelessness when it is, in fact, time specific. The futuristic science fiction touch does not guarantee that the style of the museum will persist, that it will be modern forever, and that its place in the history of architecture will be unambiguous. Rather, the mere idea that it represents timelessness reveals its relations to specific tendencies of our times. In his book All That Is Solid Melts Into Air (1982), philosopher Marshall Berman discusses experiences of modernism in culture and art and modernization in a rapidly expanding society as well as the positive and negative effects of their interrelated development.

Berman describes the modernism and modernization of the 20th century as a complete break with the pre-modern ways of living, a break that has led to an explosion not only of technical and economic advancement, but of concepts, perspectives, and artistic experimentation. On the other hand, it has also resulted in a fragmentation of thought and according to Berman, the concept of modernism has drifted further away from its origin. Considering architecture in relation to this description of modernization and modernism, their mechanisms are still at work today. Even though Hadid’s architectural style is difficult to define in terms of specific “-isms”, the context in which she works is relatable to her designs no matter how avant-garde she is considered to be. Modernism has clearly made its mark on her architecture, as in many others’, insofar that her designs cross borders and fuse with other forms of cultural expressions and activities. In the 1960s, attempts were initiated in art and literature to unite different art forms and to, in Berman’s words, “break down the boundaries of their specializations and work together on mixed-media productions and performances that would

---

376 Merleau-Ponty (2004), 95.  
377 Ibid., 97.  
378 Dewey, 54.  
380 Ibid., 16-17.
create richer and more multivalent arts.” Seeing Hadid’s architecture in the light of this development, it is apparent that a sense of unlimited flow between interior and exterior and a fusion of art forms recurs also in her style. In Hadid’s case, her architecture is perceived as innovative and unconventional and yet it is a concept that goes back five decades, and more. The idea of presenting something new and unexpected is not very new and unexpected in itself.

According to Berman, post-modernism also tends to ignore history in order to claim novelty. He describes how artistic intellectuals within different fields have renounced their modernist involvement and “embraced a mystique of post-modernism, which strives to cultivate ignorance of modern history and culture, and speaks as if all human feeling, expressiveness, play, sexuality and community have only just been invented – by the post-modernists – and were unknown, even un-conceivable, before last week.” There is, then, a strive for originality and a claim of never before seen innovations. Furthermore, this perspective indicates an intention of creating works and designs that are not only new today but that will also be forever perceived as contemporary. Again, although MAXXI can give the impression of being timeless, the same timelessness might very well be what will signify the architectural style of the museum in the future.

Gadamer’s statement that contemporary art needs time to be fully comprehensible could also apply to a building such as MAXXI. The architecture appears futuristic, unfamiliar, and innovative to us today, even if it is not the first time we have encountered unconventional architecture. There is truly a uniqueness to Hadid’s physically intense and yet sinuous designs that makes her architecture recognizable. However, in relation to the general designs of museum architecture developed throughout the 20th century until present times, MAXXI is completely in accordance with this evolution. It is thus a museum that is unique and avant-garde but that is also a part of a greater movement. In a few years from now it might, therefore, be possible to understand MAXXI architecturally on another level; it will then be a part of the history of architecture that celebrated the art-architecture correspondence and that put as much emphasis on the design of the building, and in some cases perhaps even on the architect, as on the art on display.

Conclusion

The white cube appears to live on by being enclosed in architecture that does not always mirror its interior design. While the exterior is avant-garde and unconventional, the inside can still consist of white cubic spaces. In MAXXI, the concept is somewhat different. Although white and light grey, it generally consists of interesting displaying methods in unconventionally shaped and open spaces. The whiteness is present and it affects the experience, but visitors’ recognition of the values of art

381 Berman, 32.
382 Ibid., 33.
does not solely depend on whether it is displayed against white-grey backgrounds or walls of other colours. Any art space with a clear purpose and function, whether it is a privately owned gallery or a national art museum with or without white walls, can trigger our genre competence. Art museum and galleries have the effect of consecrating artefacts simply by embedding them in their spaces, whatever their design, while we as visitors bring our genre competence into the art museum, thereby adding to this consecration ourselves. The whiteness, however, contributes a sense of purity and sacredness to this experience. In this situation, it is less important whether we know much about the artwork or not. What is important is that the space, often – but not necessarily – white, reassures us that what we experience there is “real” art due to the fact that inside the art exhibition space there are no actual uncertainties; there are only artworks on display and they are considered to be of high quality. The exception, of course, is the occasional fire extinguisher, which might become a source of confusion among visitors if placed anywhere near the art displays.

The concept of reducing limits between spatial design and artworks, which is significant for MAXXI, would explain the strategy of developing unconventional shapes and layouts instead on focusing on colour settings. Form and structure are central here and they are specifically manifested in the encounters between art and spatial elements, when artworks are strategically placed in relation to architectural forms to create a juxtaposition to surprise the viewer or to visually frame and highlight an individual artwork. Because of the curved and sectioned spaces of most of the galleries, the artworks can be viewed individually without the gaze straying to artworks in other parts of the space, as they tend to do in spaces that offer a clear overview. The walls and sections prevent the individual artworks from being fully perceivable until one is situated in the specific area where an artwork is displayed. Although elements such as slopes and steps, as well as separate walls dividing the spaces into corridors and sections, might move the focus away from the art to some extent, the architectural elements also complement the exhibitions and they make an interesting combination rather than intruding on each other.

Experiencing exhibitions in such an environment means embracing new conditions for perceiving art, conditions in which the spatial context is fundamentally palpable. Space is always taken into account during a museum visit whether we enjoy the spatial design or not. Even though the purpose of spatial designs like the white cube concept is to provide the art with a “neutral” background that is preferably not noticeable, there is really no neutrality in that sense. In MAXXI, the spatial design affects visitors’ movements and haptic perceptions in a manner that in turn affects the visual experiences and interpretations of the art on display. As one moves through the spaces of MAXXI, the visual and haptic senses are highly attentive to unexpected spatial curvatures and height differences while one simultaneously tries to identify artworks, and the one sense supports and influences the other in these attempts. Merleau-Ponty asserts that “every vision takes place somewhere in the

tactile space. There is double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one."³⁸⁴ In relation to the spatial design in MAXXI, this is not only applicable to sensational experiences, but also to what is perceived, because the art and architecture are also two components that are both unified and separate at the same time. Regarding perception, it is not possible to “separate things from their way of appearing,”³⁸⁵ as Merleau-Ponty emphasizes.³⁸⁵ In MAXXI, as in other museums, we cannot separate our impressions of the art from the way it appears in its spatial setting. The art affects how we perceive the spaces and the spaces affect our impressions of the art. Together they form a specific meaning, although with two constituents and as their relationship changes, so does the meaning.³⁸⁶

According to Psarra, the architecture of a museum can be just as central as the exhibitions when it comes to attracting visitors. A building might become iconic enough to appeal to audiences regardless of what is on display.³⁸⁷ In the case of MAXXI, one cannot ignore the fact that Hadid is one of the most prominent and influential contemporary architects of our time. Her ability to create atypical buildings contributes to MAXXI’s being an attraction not only as a museum, but as a building, just like many other avant-garde museums. Although leaving the issue of colour unreformed, she at least largely reshapes the white cube design and lets the design imbue the museum building inside and out. This is also the idea of parametricism, to have the architecture manifest a correlation between interior and external design while taking the surrounding environment into account.³⁸⁸ Considering Hadid’s futuristic style combined with her interest in the locations on which her works are set and from which she draws inspiration, MAXXI is certainly a museum that stands out in the environment of northern Rome and that simultaneously blends in with its urban structures. Its site-specific features, which are characteristic of Hadid’s architecture in general, make it fuse with the street systems of the Flaminio area and the remaining barracks on the site.³⁸⁹ Still, it remains somewhat alien – at least for now. At this moment, before enough layers of interpretation and temporal distance has influenced our understanding of Hadid’s architecture, MAXXI appears as a large grey space vessel that happens to have landed on Roman ground, but on a piece of Roman ground that suits its design.

³⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty (1968), 134.
³⁸⁵ Merleau-Ponty (2004), 94.
³⁸⁶ Cf. Galangau-Quérat, 104; see also Psarra (2009), 15.
³⁸⁷ Psarra (2005), 78-79.
³⁸⁸ MAXXI: Museum of XXI Century Arts, 18; Foster, 80-81.
³⁸⁹ Cf. Foster, 81.
Visiting five Roman museums and describing each of their designs and atmospheres allows a few conclusions to be drawn. In this final chapter, these conclusions will be considered further in relation to more general perspectives and theories on spatial design in museums and the effect it has on visitors. The discussions will concern subject matters like balanced and imbalanced spatial design, experiences of time and authenticity, and the issue of what happens with perception when museum objects are placed in museum spaces for which they were not intended. A phenomenological approach to museum experience is explored towards the end of the chapter, which then finishes with a general conclusion. However, the beginning of this concluding analysis on displaying spaces provides a background on what spatial designs in museums are and what they can mean to visitors.

The function and meaning of spatial design

Throughout this study, discussions have touched upon the subjects of different kinds of spatial emphasis and the positive and negative effects they might have on visitors’ experiences. The difficult question of what good spatial design in museums actually is will be discussed from different perspectives in this final analysis. Yet, initiating this discussion by addressing the issue of the role that spatial design plays in visitors’ experiences of museums, the five previous chapters have indicated that there are such things as too much and too little when it comes to how we experience museum exhibitions. The common denominator in all of the analyses seems to be the concept of balance. It appears as if imbalance occurs in museum space when the two levels of experience – the informational and the spatial – cannot function equally. When there is too little information, for example, the feeling of being absorbed by the exhibition as well as the conscious reflecting on what is represented seems to become unstable. Also, when losing direction in an exhibition, the sensation of being in an experiential, perhaps illusory flow is lost because the task of finding the route interrupts it. In both cases, visitors are missing some kind of spatial or informational guidance. Spatial design might also cause annoyance if it is perceived as overshadowing an exhibition. In his article on art museum architecture, Nick Stanley acknowledges that space cannot be separated from its contents, yet he criticizes the
impact that architecture and spatial design might have on museums and exhibitions as well as on visitors and their perceptions of the objects on display. He wants to initiate a discussion on, as he describes it, “the consequences of permitting architects and other designers to steal the show, constantly to distract us from the objects of our visit,” and he questions the extent of “manipulation” that he finds that museum architecture causes. He continues by arguing that unless the roles and interrelations between designer and curator are thoroughly re-evaluated and deliberated, then “there remains the constant danger that architectural features will come to substitute for exhibition theory and design and that we will become constrained by the vision of the architect.” Stanley indicates here that this is a matter of preventing future museum buildings from “stealing the show”, so to speak.

Stanley is not alone in addressing the issue of museum architecture versus its contents; others have also suggested that the relationship between museum practices and contemporary museum architecture is shifting. Stanley, however, not only focuses on architecture specifically intended to function as museums. He also treats museum buildings that, like Centrale Montemartini, have had other former functions and he mainly focuses on the example of Tate Modern, but he also considers Musée d’Orsay. He claims that using existing buildings as museums is not a new phenomenon, but according to him, “the former usage continues to interfere in the museum experience.” In other words, Stanley believes the exterior and interior design of Tate Modern and Musée d’Orsay dominate the exhibitions as such, as well as visitors’ impressions of them. Considering Stanley’s questioning of manipulation and interference in relation to museum architecture, it is relevant to consider Centrale Montemartini and MAXXI, the latter having, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, an articulated mission to unify art and architecture. Stanley seems to presume that visitors come to a certain museum solely to see museum objects without any particular interest in the building in which they are displayed. This is, however, a question of individual interest and motivation. As has been discussed in relation to MAXXI, the museum building might very well be considered as equally interesting and attractive as the exhibitions it houses. In Centrale Montemartini, the spatial design and the industrial elements are what transform the display of antique artefacts into something other than a conventional classical art exhibition. Consequently, it is not always the objects that make the display interesting and the architecture does not always overshadow the exhibitions but can very well enhance them. Museums like MAXXI or the Guggenheim Museums in New York and Bilbao would perhaps not attract such large audiences if it were not for the architecture. Even if Stanley’s

390 Stanley, 48.
391 Ibid.
392 Suzanne MacLeod, “Rethinking museum architecture: Towards a site-specific history of production and use”, Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, design, exhibitions, ed. Suzanne MacLeod (London & New York: Routledge 2005), 21-22; Victoria Newhouse, Towards a New Museum (New York: The Monacelli Press 1998), 11, 220; Magnago Lampugnani, 14; Conn, 11-12; Foster, x-xii; see also Heumann Gurian, 117-125.
393 Stanley, 42.
concern is relevant in many cases, other cases show that architectural design, although dominating, can fill a very important function both in terms of visitors’ experiences of the exhibitions and concerning attracting audiences in general.

Stanley uses the word *manipulation* to describe how museum architecture affects visitors’ experiences through particular layouts and spatial designs. The negative tone of the word manipulation, I would suggest, might be redefined as *strategies* in order to correspond more suitably to the concept that Stanley seems to refer to. Museum and exhibition design very much rely on strategies and codes in order to guide visitors and produce comprehensible messages. This is not only a matter of architecture; it also includes artefacts. Exhibitions are arranged in certain manners in order for visitors to make sense of them. It is well known within museology that exhibitions are altogether based on selections made by curators and producers and that the displays are designed according to their specific intention. One can choose to consider this to be a problem or as a part of museum practice, but it can at least be established that museums are manipulative by definition; it comes with the genre. Therefore, museum practitioners, exhibitions producers, and curators do manipulate in their daily work. Claiming that architecture and spatial layout is intrinsically manipulative, then, without considering museum practice in general, is problematic.

Regarding museum space from an historical perspective, spatial strategies have certainly been a method for guiding visitors in specific directions, both physically and socially. Tony Bennett’s review of museum history describes the museum as an institution of control and power in relation to architecture and spatial design, but from a slightly different perspective than discussed above. He claims that when museums became more accessible to the public in the 19th century as an act of democratization, the museum architecture was also changed. As the number of visitors increased and began to include working-class citizens, so did the need for supervision because the crowdedness evoked fear of the risk of theft and pick-pocketing. The spaces became open, voluminous, and transparent, resembling arcades and department stores, so that visitors could see the objects on display – as well as each other. The public became self-monitoring and the result was surveillance through spatial design. This also meant civilizing working-class citizens, because they could view sophisticated art and at the same time observe the bourgeoisie and learn how to behave and dress according to the standards of higher- and middle-class citizens – inside the museums as well as out in public. The museum, Bennett argues, was used for political purposes, for managing the public in an attempt to bring order into society.

---

394 Bal, 3 ff; Sandell, 186.
397 Bennett (1995), 97-100.
Even though this particular kind of political agenda of social management and power might not appear as central in museums in general today, the use of manipulation—spatial or otherwise—to achieve a goal such as making visitors behave, move, and experience in certain ways is still relevant in other respects. In museums, the ritualistic behaviours that Carol Duncan discusses in her book are induced by the conditions that the museum concept represents. “Like most ritual space, museum space is carefully marked off and culturally designated as reserved for a special quality of attention—in this case, for contemplation and learning. One is also expected to behave with a certain decorum,” Duncan argues. She does not mean simply architecture as such; although she refers to the museum buildings which, at least historically, tended to be monumental and temple-like, she argues that this rituality is not restricted to architectural factors. It concerns the whole concept of museums and follows visitors from entrance to exit.

Anne Eriksen’s definition of genre competence includes a similar kind of behavioural aspect. As was described in the introduction to this study, Eriksen claims that visitors are aware of the museum’s conditions and this knowledge becomes a part of the museum experience. They know about the circumstances and follow the often unspoken rules of how to behave in the museum. It would be adequate, then, to assume that the expectations on visitors’ behaviour are not only generated by the museum atmosphere, even if it does have a significant effect, as Duncan emphasizes, but are also brought there by the visitors. Still, visitors’ expectations have presumably been induced by a museum at some initial point. It is likely that this competence is a result of a combination of watching other visitors’ behaviour and thereby learning what to expect and how to behave and of acknowledging the atmosphere of that particular museum and adapting to it. One might assume that this experience would be remembered at the next museum visit and the next after that and eventually an idea of what correct museum behaviour consists of would be formed. According to Eriksen, it is not only the behavioural factor that shapes genre competence in this case, but also the knowledge of what a museum tend to consist of other than exhibition spaces, such as cafés, museum shops, cloak rooms, and bathrooms. These facilities are usually incorporated in museums and they too become a part of the museum genre. Being genre competent in this context means being aware of what signifies “museums” in general and recognizing the signifying components as being related to the museum when confronted with them. Even though not all museum visitors might have genre competence, it can be assumed that most do to some extent and, therefore, visitors’ abilities to recognize the conditions of museum strategies and practices should not be misjudged.

398 Duncan, 10; see also Rees Leahy (2012), 5.
399 Duncan, 10-12.
400 Eriksen, 15-18.
401 Duncan, 10; Eriksen, 17-18.
402 Eriksen, 15-17.
The impact that spatial design and architecture have on perception in museums is not often considered in academic museum studies and analyses because these tend to focus on the design of exhibitions *per se* – involving mainly objects, texts, and dispositions – and only include the space in which these are set to a limited degree. The extent to which museum practitioners consider museum space appears to vary depending on the individual and the museum. This is not to say that they fail to take space into account when creating exhibitions. Spatial elements play as important a role as exhibition components in the creation of atmosphere and museum practitioners seem to generally recognize this. The contribution that space provides to atmosphere might, however, not always be prioritized by exhibition producers because of the competing demands of factors like restricted architectural functions and designs, or even time pressure. However, exhibition producers and curators create narratives and messages by planning routes and dispositions and these are certainly matters of spatial perspectives. So, what might seem to be a lack of strategic spatial planning in museums is generally not – in most cases such planning is carried out with a more or less elaborated intention.

Museums have the requirement to keep collections of objects and to display these in spaces that add new dimensions to them, regardless of how the spaces are designed and how they correspond to the display – for it should be emphasized that museum spaces are not always successfully designed. But why do we experience some exhibition spaces as successful and some as not? As mentioned, it is difficult to demarcate precisely what a successfully designed museum space is because this is often based on individual taste, opinions, and subjective experiences. What is evident, though, is that space matters. The first-time visitors participating in this study – Eric, Carlos, Katie, Jane, and Nina – all tended to focus on specific areas that they found particularly appealing or problematic. It became apparent that particular perspectives and elements caught their eye and these were central during our talks. Moreover, they all spontaneously mentioned spatial factors in one way or another. Eric felt that the design of the hall in Museo dell’Ara Pacis corresponded with the exhibited altar and he emphasized that the object thus appeared to be important, but he did not understand why. Carlos found the galleries and apartments in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj to be too lavish, but he perceived the Aldobrandini room to be soothing because of its plainness. Katie thought it was difficult to understand the layout and to find her way through Palazzo Massimo. In Centrale Montemartini, Jane enjoyed the combination of space and artefacts and found Sala Macchine more appealing than Sala Caldaie, partially because she could not get an overview over the latter. Nina enjoyed the openness and flow of light in MAXXI. Considering their experiences, it seems to be when a balance is maintained between openness and closeness, freedom of choice and guidance, information and openness for interpretation, that the museum experience becomes pleasant. These factors are produced by strategic planning.

So, whether we call it strategic planning or manipulation, let us compare museum design with cinematographic production from a manipulation perspective.
When watching a movie, we are aware that what we see is not reality. Although the movie is *Schindler’s List*, *Braveheart*, or *Elizabeth*, all of which are based on true stories, we still know that the film at hand is fiction by using our genre competence concerning films. An adaptation has been written, the actors have been directed, the scenes have been edited, and the cameras have been monitored to suit the cinematographic and artistic vision. We might not know exactly to what extent the story is accurate – sometimes it is obvious and sometimes we have to guess – but even if we often want to believe it all, the movie is still a product of a few individuals’ vision of how the true story should be presented. The movie is, then, manipulative and the audience is manipulated.

The phenomenon is not so different in museums. There is a theme or an event, often historic, that has been adapted to suit the exhibition’s narration, disposition, and setting that all correspond with the vision of the curator or producer who directs the story. The difference is that while movies only have a story projected on a flat screen, museums often, but not always, have original elements such as objects or spatial settings, i.e. something tangible and three-dimensional, to build their stories around and to make them, in a sense, authentic. Yet, these physical objects are selected by one or a few persons to play roles in the story that these individuals have chosen to tell. The reason why historical events are often slightly modified in movies is to increase the dramaturgical appeal and the audience interest. This can also be applied to museums and exhibitions, but here the story is made interesting not only for dramaturgical reasons but in order for visitors to enjoy, understand, and make meaning out of the physical experience of being present in the museum – whatever the message and intention of the exhibition producer or spatial designer might be. Bennett shows that museum architecture has been strategically used for political and social purposes and this indicates that architecture certainly *has* an impact on visitors’ movement and behaviour in museums as well as on their visual experiences. Through his critique, Stanley also recognizes this. Architecture *is* always manipulating, as Stanley would say, or strategic, which is the term I prefer.

The issue that Stanley wants to debate is whether architecture can be too dominating. It is true that there is always a risk that architectural design might overshadow the objects it houses. Still, it would be complicated to discuss architectural domination on a general basis because it is a matter of relations and context as well as individual experiences. An exaggeratedly designed museum building might be considered dominating by most. However, in cases like MAXXI, where the architectural design is equally interesting as the art on display, or even more so according to some, the impression of possible domination depends very much on individual taste and previous experiences. Discussing individual perspectives in terms of correct or incorrect would be inappropriate. We do not always have the same conceptions individually when it comes to how spatial elements affect us – even if we have the same comprehension of the elements’ appearance. The interplay between intersubjectivity and subjectivity thus manifests itself and shows that although everything is subjective, everything is also intersubjective. In a museum, this means that visitors
are functioning both as individuals and as a part of the collective, in some respects affected by others and in other respects relying on their own personal perspective.

Conversations with five different persons in five different museums make it apparent that the physical experiences of the various spatial designs and architectures have often correlated with what I have observed, even if our opinions have sometimes differed. There seem to be certain spatial factors that are fundamentally perceived similarly by most people because the spaces are designed in ways that are supposed to evoke certain sensations within the human body. Even though those sensations would not be the “right” ones, i.e. the intended ones, the relation between the body and its surroundings is dynamic and will always evolve into some sort of experience. So what is wrong and what is right when it comes to these kinds of sensations? What is a “correct” museum experience? These questions lead us to the subject of authenticity and authentic experiences, something that can be considered one of the very central issues in museum practice and museum studies alike.

A matter of authenticity

Because authenticity is mainly discussed here in terms of something that is experienced, I will henceforth use the term original quality as a definition of the actual origin of a spatial setting or object in order to make a distinction between authenticity in matter and authenticity of experience. The definition original quality applies to that which has been created in the past and is attributed to a certain time and space in history that determines its historical validity. It is assumed here that restoration does not alter or spoil the original quality of historical objects. Attempts to restore, recreate, or rearrange do not turn them automatically into replicas; they are still original artefacts at the core and thereby maintain their original quality. In contrast, authenticity of experience might very well change depending on how spaces and artefacts are displayed and what meaning they create in the meeting with visitors and their (inter)subjective perspectives. However, as we shall see there are no rules without exceptions.

The composition of the mainly original spatial layout and disposition in the case of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj and the spatial full-scale reconstructions and more or less intact mosaics and frescoes in Palazzo Massimo evoke sensations of authentic environments. With a little bit of imagination, one can manage to “frame” the exhibitions as a whole and create an idea of what it might have been like to live in or to visit the original spaces. The spaces in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj offer the opportunity to be physically present in the apartments and this induces experiences of “being there” in the 17th or 18th century. In Palazzo Massimo, the artefacts evoke fantasies of sleeping and dining in rooms where colourful figurative frescoes cover the walls. These sensations are similar in the two palaces and the only real difference between them is related to place. The frescoes and mosaics are not in their original environment; they have been moved from one location to another and reconstructed in the
museum. The spaces of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, on the other hand, are where they have always been.

Mónica Risnicoff de Gorgas describes how house museums are often musealized with the intention of giving the impression of being untouched, thus preserving the illusion of authenticity. However, it is just that: an illusion. As was discussed in relation to Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, Risnicoff de Gorgas claims that it is not possible to actually perceive the spaces as they were originally because we are bound to a certain point of view that is rooted in our specific temporal and contextual situation. Therefore, we have not actually “been there” because our frames of reference are unconditionally restricted to the knowledge we have of history filtered through our contemporary contextual perspective. “Objectivity does not exist in the exhibition given that each object is displayed as an interpreted object, with emphasis being placed, in some form or other, on certain aspects,” Risnicoff de Gorgas argues. She also emphasizes that the museum’s objective “is not history or life per se, but portrayal of history or life; not the past per se, but its representation.” Therefore, house museums are never completely untouched, even if they appear to be. This is an important point because it is not only true in house museums, but in more or less any museum that displays historical objects. Still, Risnicoff de Gorgas argues that although there is manipulation involved, there is also a certain degree of authenticity and “reality”:

Fiction is portrayed as reality in these ‘theaters of memory’ that are house museums. This kind of stage-management provides, on the one hand, the indelible traces of those who lived and used the original objects and whose ghosts can still be felt, and, on the other, the meanings ascribed by conservators, researchers and museographers.

Risnicoff de Gorgas acknowledges that there is still a certain presence of history in these specific museum spaces that is provided by the original spatial elements and objects. She emphasizes that exhibitions consist of “concrete reality and the representation of reality” simultaneously. Yet, Risnicoff de Gorgas seems to suggest that this is something visitors are often unaware of because house museums give the impression of being “real” and un-manipulated and, therefore, visitors believe they are, in a sense, time-traveling as they enter the museum.

It is somewhat generalizing to believe that all visitors expect that everything in a museum, or specifically a house museum, has been fixed in time, but most mu-

---

403 Risnicoff de Gorgas, 356-360.
404 Ibid., 357.
405 Risnicoff de Gorgas, 357; cf. Ehn, 43.
407 Risnicoff de Gorgas, 360.
408 Ibid.
409 Ibid., 356-357.
seum visitors would most likely expect the presence of historical material in one way or another. This is crucial in any museum that claims to represent history, whatever its time-period or category; if there are no historical elements, then it can truly be questioned whether it can be defined as a museum of history. Consequently, experiencing some kind of historical original component would be anticipated by practically any visitor coming to a museum of history, while only some would expect the whole museum environment and setting to be original. As has been stressed before, visitors are generally aware of the conditions of the museum as a genre, that it is a place of both a “concrete reality” and a “representation of reality”. Once again, we should not insult the intellect of museum visitors. They, or rather we, most likely have some sort of preconception when entering a museum. Even if we know nothing about the exhibitions or the profile of a specific museum beforehand, we still have an idea of what museums are because we have genre competence. But our understanding that museums are not places that “only” represent reality does not prevent us from letting ourselves be swept away by a stimulating exhibition.

Like Risnicoff de Gorgas, Hilde S. Hein discusses the matter of authenticity and original quality. However, her focus is set not so much on authentic experiences in relation to original objects as on experiences as a priority in exhibition design. Hein argues:

The museum’s predisposition to world making, well assorted to the spirit of our times, is vindicated in successful practice, and the authenticity of the worlds thereby created needs only the convincing experience of museumgoers to validate it. Where past representations of museum quality might have given scant notice to what appeared only a by-product, today that production is foregrounded as essential, and the museum’s capacity to fabricate experiences (rather than to confirm reality) is celebrated as its raison d’être. The measure of the museum is taken by the intensity of the experience it commands and the degree to which that experience ‘feels real’.410

By asserting that museums do not “confirm reality” as much as “fabricate”, which is a disputable comment in itself, Hein seems to indicate that experience as a factor in museums threatens the validity of original objects as representatives of “truth”. She also claims that there is a tendency in museums that “valorizes emotive over cognitive meaning. It identifies the experiential with the empathetic, and in calling for a reality of experience, it covertly gives priority to the evocation of feeling.”411 It seems here as if Hein, among many others, separates experiences from cognitive stimulation and understanding. This perspective establishes once again the idea that these two ways of making meaning out of a museum visit are heavily reliant on the idea of a dichotomy between mind and body.

410 Hein, x-xi.
411 Ibid., 79.
In Hein’s defence, she is not explicitly arguing that humans are incapable of experiencing on several levels. Her focus is on museums and her point is that museums are losing touch with “reality” when relegating objects to the role of supporting actors rather than the stars of the show. Nevertheless, what Hein tends to ignore is that museum spaces designed for experiencing are as “real” as museum spaces with a clear focus on objects, such as spaces with a white cube design. Also, Hein seems to forget that all spaces provide an experience no matter the design, for as Henri Lefebvre emphasizes, “space is never empty: it always embodies a meaning.”

Furthermore, experience can never be turned off; as long as our senses register an environment surrounding us, we experience, feel, comprehend, and make meaning out of the perceived. There is, then, no possible way of shutting sensations out during a museum visit.

Even though Hein is right in her observation that museums in general have become more experience oriented, it can still be debated what role should be attributed to the objects. I would argue that they have not lost their power at all. On the contrary, experience and “reality” in museums are in no way incompatible and one does not exclude the other. Rather, they complement each other. In the museums discussed here, the objects, and in some cases also the spaces, are without question originals. Surely, imagination can be used when one visits spaces or sees objects that are replicas of the originals. Yet, there seems to be something in the originals, a certain atmospheric quality, that enhances the experience. They stimulate the feeling of temporarily “being there”, even if they have been retouched. In that sense, the claim of authenticity and “reality” in museums is essential.

Even if some museums would become more story centred and use original objects to emphasize and fortify the story’s validity and not as the main characters in the play, so to speak, original objects are still original at the core, regardless of restorations. This is because, as Risnicoff de Gorgas argues, museum objects are almost always changed in one way or another, be it through preservation, rearrangement, or by their constant gaining of new meanings. They are also physically changed due to the ravages of time. As was discussed in relation to the Villa di Livia frescoes in Palazzo Massimo, one might argue that the ravages of time are exactly what make the objects and spaces interesting. However, the core intention of museums as genre is to preserve – to oppose transience – and for this very reason the ravage of time is countered by preservation and restoration practices as soon as a setting or object is placed within the walls of a museum. Even the fragmented ancient friezes and the sculptures missing limbs in Centrale Montemartini, for example, have gone through some sort of preservation process even though they seem untouched. The ravage of time is thus apparent to the eye but it has in fact been manipulated.

---

412 Lefebvre, 154.
414 Risnicoff de Gorgas, 357.
In most museums these kinds of manipulations are not extensively spoken of, but in Palazzo Massimo it is not concealed at all. The information that is provided to visitors in Palazzo Massimo does not seem to affect the authentic experiences of the full-scale arrangements, such as the Villa di Livia room. Surely, it can be argued that the colours of the frescoes in the museum are not authentic because of their repairs in which the original colour material has been cleansed and in some places mixed with, or replaced by, new colour substances. However, restorers might very well claim the opposite. The frescoes are now authentic, as opposed to how they appeared before the modifications. Experiencing coloured frescoes that are restored to the same colour setting as when the space was originally used is perhaps to come closer to an understanding of its original quality than when experiencing faded walls. This is because the colourful garden paintings were what Livia, or whoever visited the dining-room, saw two thousand years ago. This authentic experience is based on an idea of “being there” by using one’s imagination and falling in with the illusion, but a material essence or core of original quality anchors the experience in history. An authentic experience of historical elements can hardly occur without just that: historical elements. This kind of contemporaneous experience is, I would claim, also very much enhanced by enabling surroundings.

In Museo dell’Ara Pacis, authentic experiences differ from those in Palazzo Massimo. Because Ara Pacis was not originally white, but was painted in a variety of colours enhancing the decorations, the perception of it today is not historically accurate in comparison to its appearance two thousand years ago. The object is the original, although it has been restored. However, it is difficult to imagine it as a polychromic altar when the only information describing the colour setting consists of a visual illustration on a computer screen placed in a different room. The occasional event L’Ara Pacis a colori, when the front and back of the altar are multi-coloured through light projections, aims to show how the altar might have been coloured – with emphasis on might. It is hardly possible to say exactly what it would have looked like, but it can be established that it was in fact not white at all. As mentioned in the second chapter, this special show can only be witnessed by a lucky few and because this event happens irregularly it is difficult to consider it as a sufficient source of information in the museum.

We experience whatever we encounter, for example, an object in a museum, as it appears to us in the moment. To this we add our own experiences, insights, and prejudices, and the result is what we might describe as an experiential authenticity that originates inside the visitor. As there is no communication without an interpreter, it becomes apparent that in order for museums to claim that they display authentic objects, there naturally has to be an interpreter who can make meaning out of these objects and perceive them as authentic.415 If this would not be the case, then what is the purpose of museums of history and what is their practice if they do not have the uniqueness of authentic objects to lean upon? The objects in the museums

415 Kress, 36.
that are analysed in this study, be it the frescoes in Palazzo Massimo, the paintings and spaces in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, the Ara Pacis, or the sculptures and engines in Centrale Montemartini, are authentic artefacts in the sense of being originals. Yet, they have all been restored and/or rearranged. Also, since we do not perceive them from the perspective of their specific historical context, then can they be considered to be truly authentic? Evidently, the definitions of authenticity are truly shifted here.

Experiencing and understanding history

When Hans-Georg Gadamer states that “the meaning of a text goes beyond its author,” he proposes that when a message is received, it is not only a reproductive action but also a productive one.\(^{416}\) This is related to the principle that as understanding occurs, so does interpretation because the two are always interrelated.\(^{417}\) Furthermore, the search for the meaning of, for instance, an historical object or text is an endless progression because new interpretations and comprehensions are revealed throughout the passing of time.\(^{418}\) In other words, the perceivers of a message reproduce its meaning through understandings and, consequently, interpretations in an on-going process. Although Gadamer’s object of study is specifically writings of the past and the traditions that are handed down through historical texts, his perspectives on perceptions of the past relate to museum experience and the understanding of historical objects and spatial settings. According to Gadamer, we are inevitably connected to our present horizon, which consists of interpretations and perspectives on history made within our contemporary context.\(^{419}\) In this sense, Risnicoff de Gorgas and Gadamer are speaking of similar forms of experience and understanding because they both argue that we are always relating to our contextual perspectives to some extent. We can, however, relate to history through what Gadamer defines as historical horizons. Historical horizons are not acquired at the moment when we seek to understand the past; rather, he argues that we understand the past because we already have a historical horizon.\(^{420}\) The possibility to expand our horizons, whether present or historical, is virtually unrestricted because it is simply a matter of learning to “look beyond what is close at hand,” according to Gadamer.\(^{421}\) Also, horizons are never isolated or closed: the horizons of our own perspectives and our historical horizons are adjoined and together they create one single horizon that comprises all that is included in our consciousness, which itself is constantly moving and reforming.\(^{422}\) Gadamer argues that history is not made up of divided sections and that there

---

\(^{416}\) Gadamer, 264.
\(^{417}\) Ibid., 274.
\(^{418}\) Ibid., 265-266.
\(^{419}\) Warnke, 34.
\(^{420}\) Gadamer, 271.
\(^{421}\) Ibid., 272.
\(^{422}\) Ibid., 271.
are no gaps between our present time and specific times of the past. Instead, history is processed through interpretations:

Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged, because it separates, but it is actually the supportive ground of process in which the present is rooted. Hence temporal distance is not something that must be overcome. This was, rather, the naive assumption of historicism, namely that we must set ourselves within the spirit of the age, and think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own, and thus advance towards historical objectivity. In fact the important thing is to recognise the distance in time as a positive and productive possibility of understanding. It is not a yawning abyss, but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which all that is handed down presents itself to us.423

The horizon of the present is very much related to, and based upon, traditions and it is shaped by the past and continuously developed as time goes by. Consequently, we cannot, and perhaps should not, leave this horizon as we attempt to “place ourselves” in another time. However, as we try to expand our historical horizons by understanding a specific time and place in history, we place ourselves in that situation. We disregard ourselves in the present, but at the same time we acknowledge our own contemporary perspectives in order to be able to observe, relate to, and understand the “otherness” of the specific historical situation.424 This concept of placing oneself is, in Gadamer’s words, “not the empathy of one individual for another, nor is it the application to another person of our own criteria, but it always involves the attainment of a higher universality that overcomes, not only our own particularity, but also that of the other.”425 Applying these perspectives to a museum context, our experiences of exhibitions are filtered through and fused with our present contextual points of view. Nevertheless, we can still understand and interpret the past as we place ourselves within the histories that are displayed throughout our museum visit, thereby implementing our historical horizons and expanding them at the same time.

In museums, the presence and physical sensations of spatial elements and materials of the past create a certain atmosphere that stimulate our ability to imagine and understand and give us the impression of being brought closer to history. Moreover, the comparison between our own living environments and historical environments, which are simultaneously familiar and strange to us, make the experience exceptional in museums. The resemblance of tangible and basic elements of our own spatial and architectural references might, for instance, make us relate to the setting, while the unfamiliar decorations, layouts, and designs of the past make us fantasize and imagine what the living conditions, strategies, and references of prior genera-

423 Gadamer, 264-265.
424 Ibid., 271-272.
425 Ibid., 272.
tions were like. As we enter a museum, we do, then, place ourselves in a certain situation that we can recognize to some extent and that we can relate to our present perspectives or, if the setting is unfamiliar to us, we widen our horizons and learn about elements of the past that we do not yet recognize. The fact that dining-rooms of today generally are not painted as blooming gardens like the frescoes of Villa di Livia is what makes that particular space interesting in the sense that it represents another time, when such paintings were quite common in certain social classes. Because the age of the frescoes appeals to our fascination with the past, the displays also evoke thoughts on what the living conditions were like for these people. It is, therefore, a matter of experiencing a tangible past, such as the ancient material of fresco panels, and of visualizing the activities of the specific individuals who dwelled in this space. Additionally, it is a matter of imagining an entire other culture in another time. Experiences of history in museums are thus multifaceted and involve factors like sensational perception and imagination as well as previous and gained understanding. However, these components are very much affected by the environment in which the historical element is set. In fact, as has been indicated above, authentic experiences of history cannot be solely reliant on some kind of fabricated idea of history. They require empirical evidence of a past and this is precisely what museums of history represent and consist of – a combination of empiricism and of experience, genuineness and substance, as well as of recreated spaces and strategically designed settings.

**Authenticity in spatial settings**

The multimodal approach to semiotics that Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen apply when analysing visual communication and messages, can be used to explain the role spatial design and architecture play in museums. They stress that a message, such as a written text, will be experienced in different ways depending on the material it is written on. Using a wooden panel, a metal plaque, or a plain white paper sheet as the background for a text has an effect on how the text is perceived. The material production is a part of the message.426 Applying this to a museum-space perspective, one could say that the visual appearance and message of an exhibition changes depending on the kind of environment in which it is set and the character and atmosphere of that environment.

It seems to be a common conception that museums, specifically museums of art or history, need objects with original qualities in their collections because these qualities are one of the absolutely most essential factors in museums. They are what make them museums and not another kind of institution or venue. Agreeing with this perspective, I would also argue that although objects might change when they are placed in a museum, in terms of how they are perceived and recharged with new meanings, their material does not change as such. True, material substances can be

---

426 Kress & van Leeuwen, 69.
affected by environmental conditions or preservation and restoration, but these practices are most often done with great respect for the objects’ original materiality. Spatial design, on the other hand, does not affect the substances of the objects. When set in a strategically planned space, the artefact is part of a new context, but its transformation is not material – spatial design cannot do that to an object. Yet, it can, and does, affect visitors’ perceptions of the artefacts on display. Consequently, because objects are inevitably to be set in a space, why not in a space that is designed to provide a comprehensible contextual framing and that creates a certain atmosphere to suit the exhibition? Or why not in a space that juxtaposes artefacts in order to create a whole new meaning generated from hybridity? The space will unconditionally, no matter how it is designed, have an effect on how the objects and the exhibition are perceived and if the relation between space and display is set up in a balanced way it might very well emphasize the objects as representatives of history.

Museo dell’Ara Pacis and Centrale Montemartini both display antique artefacts, but in two entirely different manners. Comparing the exhibitions of antique artefacts in the two museums, it is more or less obvious that they have to differ considering that Museo dell’Ara Pacis is devoted to one single object while Centrale Montemartini displays a large number of artefacts. However, what mainly separate the two are the spaces in which the objects are exhibited. Generally, the spaces in which antique artefacts are displayed in Roman museums have been more or less plain, static, and monochromic, enhancing the whiteness and the perceived high status of antiquity.427 This convention is evident in Museo dell’Ara Pacis, but with some alteration considering that the large windows bring dynamism to the space. Still, the movement, colour, and liveliness is outside the museum, not in the actual exhibition space. Inside, the status of antiquity is represented by the altar that is emphasized by the architecture and spatial design through the centralized order in the space as well as through the shades of white.

Centrale Montemartini, on the other hand, does not have any of these spatial features. It is polychromic and dynamic and does not focus solely on classical artefacts, but also on the former power plant that houses them and on the industrial history of Rome. Here, the objects are included and interspersed in their surrounding environment of the engines, the boiler, and other industrial elements of the original building. The sculptures and fragments on display are less exposed and centralized in the spaces and they rather appear to be equalized with their surroundings. The antique artefacts are still accentuated, but by being in an environment that is not directly related to them, they are emphasized by contrast instead of by a conformed spatial setting. They stand out in the unexpected meeting between space and objects and in the hybrid of histories.

Palazzo Massimo displays antique objects in yet another fashion that is partially traditional and partially unconventional. Mosaics and fresco fragments are

427 Cf. Santillo Frizell, 31.
generally hung on walls in the same way as paintings and a few large mosaics are laid on tables or, rarely, on the floor, as in the reconstructions of the spatial elements excavated in the Castel di Guido area. The almost complete frescoes, on the other hand, are mostly set in full-scale spaces. Compared to Museo dell’Ara Pacis and Centrale Montemartini, the display methods vary and one of the reasons for this might be that the artefacts exhibited in Palazzo Massimo are not white. They are polychromic and depict gardens, architecture, animals, and humans and this makes them very different from the antique sculptures and architectural fragments that have lost or been stripped of their colour.

These three different approaches to exhibiting antique artefacts very much depend on the type and function of the objects: these particular spatial designs were chosen, as sketches or as existing locations, to complement different representations of antiquity. The altar in Museo dell’Ara Pacis is displayed in a space specifically designed for it and the space enhances its aesthetic qualities and sacredness. A number of sculptures and fragments in Centrale Montemartini are dispersed in an already existing space, with industrial elements and coloured structures framing them, creating a dynamic environment. Frescoes and mosaics are also exhibited in already existing spaces, but the palace has been stripped of its former interior furnishing and decoration in order to make the spaces suitable for displaying artefacts and also for enabling the objects to be adapted to the spaces. The three ways of exhibiting antique objects in these varying types of spaces opens for different interpretations and experiences. The impression of the sacredness and beauty of Ara Pacis would most likely have been reduced if the altar was set in Palazzo Massimo, considering the palace spaces are less voluminous and are coloured in a pale but warm and mellow cream colour. The sculptures and fragments from Centrale Montemartini would most likely have been perceived as far more prominent and significant if exhibited in the main hall in Museo dell’Ara Pacis. Some of the intensity of the colours and the details of the motifs in the frescoes and mosaics from Palazzo Massimo, on the other hand, might have become diffused if displayed in the dynamic environment of Centrale Montemartini. True, there is a mosaic in Sala Caldaie and, conversely, there are busts in Museo dell’Ara Pacis – but these are few and are placed in limited areas. If these spaces had been filled with more of the sort, however, the objects would have gained new meanings and our interpretations of them would most certainly have changed.

Let us also consider the effects that would occur if the objects from Palazzo Massimo were be displayed in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj and vice versa. Would there be a difference in our experiences of the artefacts and spaces? One might think there should not be that much of a contrast between two palaces with such similar layouts. Yet, there is a major difference. Palazzo Doria Pamphilj as a whole is more of a museum object in itself than Palazzo Massimo. The former has more or less original interiors while the latter has been completely rearranged. Thus, the layouts might be following the fashion of Roman palace architecture, but the spatial designs within them are entirely different. What also separates the two is the objects on display;
their properties, origins, and purposes. The ancient frescoes and mosaics represent a different historical period and have a whole other function than the 17th and 18th century paintings. They are also placed in a setting and location that is not their original. They have been taken from various sites in the city of Rome and assembled in a building that has been renovated in order to house them. It is, therefore, not a site-specific museum. Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, on the other hand, is absolutely site-specific considering it is arranged according to its original settings in order to represent a certain time period and manifest the Doria Pamphilj family’s prominence. On the other hand, the two palaces can be seen as similar in the character of their display methods. The walls in the galleries in both of the palaces are used in a traditional manner as surfaces for displaying artefacts – paintings and mosaics alike. Still, there is a difference in that the galleries in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj contain many more artworks hung frame to frame, while the artefacts in the galleries in Palazzo Massimo have more space around them.

Even if the frescoes in Palazzo Massimo have been removed from one place and rearranged in another, the experience of walking into full-scale reconstructions of ancient spaces is in some ways similar to the sensation of walking into the apartments of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj. Spaces and objects that have been removed from their original site and set in a new space can be seen as losing their authenticity or as gaining a different form of authenticity. In Palazzo Massimo, the authenticity factor does not depend on location but rather on the full-scale reconstructions that give visitors an opportunity to step into a setting and make meaning out of history from the perspective of space rather than place. The original location as such is not what is presented here, but what was found in that location, i.e. the mosaics and frescoes that tell a story of spatial design and decoration during antiquity. Experiences of original locations and experiences of representational settings in museums are, I would argue, equally authentic – but under different conditions. For example, a site where a historic battle took place during the American Civil War or a covered mass grave from World War II, places that have no traces of events, are authentic even if they do not seem to consist of anything other than plain ground. A rifle from a soldier of the battle or a piece of jewellery from someone buried in the mass grave are authentic too, even if they have been relocated to a museum and are thereby physically detached from the site where they were discovered. Both of these aspects of authenticity are represented in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj. It is in its original location and has its original objects and settings, although there has been some retouching. However, the restorations are what make the spaces what they are. If the apartments had not been rearranged to resemble their previous settings, they would most likely have been rather dull and decayed and would have exhibited very little of their former stature. It would have been both unflattering to the Doria Pamphilj family and given visitors a quite underwhelming experience and that was probably not the intention when the decision was taken to open the palace to the public in the 1990s. Just as in the past, the palace is still meant to impress visitors. How would that goal be achieved if it would not have been restored to resemble its former appearance?
Contemporary authenticity

Authenticity has been discussed so far in terms of experiencing mainly historical spaces and artefacts. In MAXXI, however, there is very little history. The building is only a few years old and the artworks on display are contemporary. In such a young art museum we might, therefore, focus on the relationship between art and space and discuss how an artwork can be experienced authentically depending on the environment in which it is set. The art collection in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is site-specific; it is exhibited with a certain intention and in spaces adapted for displaying the family’s collection. It is more or less static, save for a few rooms for temporary exhibitions. MAXXI, on the other hand, is anything but static. For example, the layout of its spaces is unpredictable and irregular while the Palazzo Doria Pamphilj layout is comprehensible and logically structured. Also, while the collections in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj were, and are, meant to be perceived as a unity, the objects in MAXXI are intended to be seen as separate exhibitions or as individual artworks that are not necessarily related to each other. The preconditions for viewing art are in many ways differing in these two museums, both in relation to spatial design and to how art is approached today compared to how it was approached three or four hundred years ago. Art spaces change as time passes and so do the methods for displaying and, furthermore, for viewing. Yet, despite these variations, the prominence of the white cube concept appears to persist. Even if there might be some alterations even in the designs of white cubes, the principles appear to stay the same. Also, the whiteness seems even more characteristic of art museums or galleries than the cubic shape. Whiteness has already been discussed here in relation to antiquity, as a symbol of purity and consecration. The whiteness of the white cube is, however, something different, although it also represents some of the values of pureness and sacredness that the whiteness of antiquity seems to convey.

In museological research there have been many discussions concerning sacredness in relation to exhibition spaces, in particular the white cube.\(^\text{428}\) Whiteness is often considered to be something that frames and consecrates art within a designated area, thus suggesting associations with sacred spaces. When the white cubic space design was established in modern art museums and galleries in the 1930s, the strive for neutralization was very much a matter of function. According to Charlotte Klonk, the spaces were meant to be flexible and to give the impression of openness and flow, hence the whiteness and the generally cubic shape. The design has been criticized for being enclosing and rejecting, which was never the original intention. Instead, the expression white cube is, in Klonk’s words, a “fiction” that was invented by the avant-garde artists of the 1960s, such as Brian O’Doherty.\(^\text{429}\) As seen in

---


\(^{429}\) Klonk, 218.
the chapter about MAXXI, O’Doherty specifically opposed this particular design concept, arguing that the cube isolates the art and excludes the spectator. He also disputed the assumed neutrality of whiteness. O’Doherty’s opinion, as “a ghetto space, a survival compound, a proto-museum with a direct line to the timeless, a set of conditions, an attitude, a place deprived of location, a reflex to the bald curtain wall, a magic chamber, a concentration of mind, maybe a mistake.” According to Mary Anne Staniszewski, attempts to enhance the autonomy of the artwork were one of the central reasons for the white cube concept to emerge. The space was meant to be non-specific and “neutral” enough for the artwork to be experienced on its own terms. This is, she claims, a modernist invention that has become a convention:

It is extremely suggestive that this installation method has become the norm within twentieth-century modern museum practices, so common and so standardized that its language of form and its function as a representation have become transparent and invisible. But this conventional manner of displaying modern culture and art is itself far from neutral: it produces a powerful and continually repeated social experience that enhances the viewer’s sense of autonomy and independence.

As Staniszewski stresses, there is nothing neutral about the white spaces in museums. Just like any other space in any other context, white spaces have an effect on visitors’ experience of the display. The supposed neutrality of the white cube interiors does not just disconnect the art from its social and temporal; it also encloses visitors in this allegedly timeless and socially detached environment. Or, as Helen Rees Leahy argues, it could be interpreted as disregarding the visitors’ physical presence altogether. According to her, O’Doherty’s criticism of the modernist white cube as a space of exclusion “exposes a museological conceit whose roots stretch back into much earlier institutional practices: namely, the disembodiment of perception and the associated production of display schemes that ignored the inconvenient presence (and comfort) of heterogeneous and unpredictable bodies.” Rees Leahy asserts that because early art installation photographs of white gallery spaces generally show no indications of visitors’ presence, these images also contributed to establishing the normative concept of the white cube as a pure disembodied space. While the body previously had been a crucial part of the museum space because it was a place for watching others and being watched, for encounters and exchanges,
the modernist white space design made it merely a vessel for the perceiving eye.\textsuperscript{436} Still, it was a vessel that had no place in the white cube because “while eyes and minds are welcome, space-occupying bodies are not,” as O’Doherty maintains.\textsuperscript{437} The modernist concept of art experiences as sensed by an autonomous spectating eye indicates a distinction that is similar to the Cartesian idea of the body as separate from the mind, with the eye as its window to the world.\textsuperscript{438} Following Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s perspective on the body-mind dichotomy as non-existent and recalling his statement that “man is a mind \textit{with} a body”, the body inevitably takes up space within the white cube’s immaculate walls.\textsuperscript{439} Interpreting O’Doherty and Rees Leahy, the “hostility” of the white cube seems to demand something impossible from us – namely, to somehow disintegrate and leave the body behind when entering a white art space. Because we cannot do this literally, then we are at least made aware of the pure serenity of the space and the integrity of the art and we are reminded that our body’s presence is not entirely appropriate. So, even though visitors and their bodies defy the disapproving and unforgiving whiteness, there is still a distinction between space, human, and artwork and the white cube remains a space of certain remoteness.

Of course, the pioneers developing the white cube concept in the 1930s had a differing view on the function of its design. According to them, the encounter between artwork and visitor in the white space was, at best, an encounter between two autonomous entities on neutral ground, giving the artwork the opportunity to be judged on its own qualities and enabling visitors to independently and critically consider the artwork without distraction.\textsuperscript{440} Although it can be considered a creation of its time, being a product of modernism, the white cube has, as Staniszewski asserts, prevailed. Perhaps this is because the original intention of creating a functional space is still adequate. One should not forget the advantages of a space that offers a “neutral” background to every new exhibition and that does not need to be repainted or rearranged. Still, an artwork, whatever it might be, placed in such a setting gives the impression of being something of a sacred object. It is placed in this clean and pure environment because it apparently has value. Yet, we might not be aware of what exactly its value is. Because the object is placed in an art museum, in a white cube, we assume that it is an artwork of importance – or simply that it is, in fact, a piece of art.\textsuperscript{441} Once again, our genre competence tells us that it is an artwork because it is set in an art museum and, more importantly, in a white space. We can compare this with the experience Eric had in Museo dell’Ara Pacis; we might not know why an artefact is valuable and important, but the design of its environment tells us that it is.

\textsuperscript{436} Rees Leahy (2012), 48-49.
\textsuperscript{437} O’Doherty, 15.
\textsuperscript{438} Rees Leahy (2012), 48–49; Olsen, 64; Frykman, 76; O’Doherty, 15.
\textsuperscript{439} Merleau-Ponty (2004), 56.
\textsuperscript{440} Staniszewski, 66; cf. Maure, 166.
\textsuperscript{441} Maure, 166.
Different room, different meaning

As Risnicoff de Gorgas stresses, museum objects “speak with many meanings and in many combinations. They change with backdrop and grow with use.”442 Thus, placing an artwork in a different spatial setting than, for example, a white cube changes the artwork’s contents and meanings as they appear to the viewer. The interpretations vary depending on the environment. Whether an artefact is exhibited in a space such as in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, in Centrale Montemartini, or in a white cube – the space communicates something to us and sets the scene for the artwork, whether historical or modern. Museum space is not “a shapeless vehicle for the museum contents,” as Fabienne Galangau-Quérat emphasizes.443 For example, a touring exhibition might be perceived somewhat differently depending on the spatial context in which it is displayed, even though the ensemble and its contents are consistent. Furthermore, the visitors, exhibition, and space are inseparable and, in Galangau-Quérat’s words, “the exhibition scene as a whole is more than the sum of the elements composing it – the cognitive experience of the scene emerges as an unpredictable novelty involving semantic, emotional, sensory and symbolic dimensions.”444 Consequently, the meaning of an exhibition is easily altered if one of its components is changed.445

A discussion was initiated above on what would happen if artefacts from the specific museums analysed here were to switch places and if there would then be a difference in our experiences of the artefacts and spaces. Let us consider this scenario once more, but this time imagining the objects from Palazzo Massimo displayed in the avant-garde spaces of MAXXI. The artefacts exhibited in Palazzo Massimo are archaeological objects, but when viewing them, they appear as works of art considering their aesthetic appeal and the skillful technique with which they were executed. In their museum context, some of them, especially the mosaics, are also displayed in a manner that is similar to that of art exhibitions, either along gallery walls or in rooms where each one of them is highlighted by spotlights. Perhaps one would think, then, that the thought experiment where the Palazzo Massimo artefacts move into MAXXI should not bring such a radical alteration when it comes to perception because the artefacts are, in a sense, artworks and MAXXI’s spaces are designed to exhibit art. Therefore, if there were a difference in perception it would be easy to believe that it would be due less to spatial factors than to the preconceptions and contextual aspects that come with a museum visit.

The fact that Palazzo Massimo is a museum of cultural history containing archaeological artefacts and MAXXI is a museum of art and architecture is something that is effectively conveyed in the two museums’ profiles and it is not easily over-

442 Risnicoff de Gorgas, 357.
443 Galangau-Quérat, 104.
444 Ibid.
looked by visitors. However, as the mosaics and frescoes enter the galleries of MAXXI, they become a part of the avant-garde spaces that the museum represents. The futuristic spatial design of the museum tells us that it is contemporary and this indicates that what is displayed inside is also contemporary provided, of course, that we do not have any preconceptions of the artefacts’ age. The mosaics and frescoes would then appear to be thousands of years younger than they actually are. As visitors, we might be confused about the age of the archaeological objects on display because the artefacts communicate one thing and the space communicates something completely different. On the other hand, if we do have preconceptions about the artefacts’ age, then a juxtaposition between the ancient and the avant-garde would create a whole new meaning, as a result from the mixture of the old and brand new and of different aesthetic representations. But the Palazzo Massimo objects’ position as artworks would nevertheless be further accentuated in the MAXXI spaces both due to the spatial design and because of our genre competence of contemporary art museums.

Now let us consider further juxtapositions of this kind. What if the artworks from MAXXI were placed in one of the large state apartments of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj? Or if the Doria Pamphilj collections were displayed in the main hall of Museo dell’Ara Pacis and Ara Pacis, in turn, was relocated to the industrial halls of Centrale Montemartini? Imagining these alterations, the results might appear as more or less successful as we visualize them in our minds, some of the examples perhaps seeming odd while some are intriguing. The fact is, though, that this kind of experiment is exactly what has been performed in Centrale Montemartini; antique objects are integrated with the spatial elements of a former power plant, making it a hybrid space. As has been discussed in the chapter about Centrale Montemartini, the individuality of the artworks is experienced in relation to the spatial design and to other components in the spaces. Therein is also the difference between MAXXI and Palazzo Massimo, on the one hand, and Centrale Montemartini and Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, on the other; in the impression of individuality and separation versus spatial unity and fusion.

In the case of Museo dell’Ara Pacis, the spatiality and the altar can be discussed both in terms of fusion and of separation. There is no doubt that Ara Pacis is in focus, hence there is individuality, and yet the space is designed to complement the altar, hence fusion. In Palazzo Massimo, the artefacts are experienced more or less individually, either as reconstructed rooms or as separate objects. The spaces in MAXXI are meant to erase limits between art and space and even though the structures and forms might create a flow and open up new possibilities for unconventional displaying techniques, the grey and white walls still mark a separation between what is an artwork and what is an architectural element. Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is, unlike Centrale Montemartini, based on a uniform spatial concept throughout the whole palace. It is, in a sense, a period piece that offers visitors a well-defined representation of a certain time and space, or at least an idea of it. Centrale Montemartini, on the other hand, offers another kind of unity and fusion based on two completely
different elements coming together. Do these differences in fusion and individuality matter when it comes to visitors’ perceptions of the exhibitions? It matters in the sense that impressions change depending on the design of the display and the museum space. However, they do not matter in terms of one being “better” than the other, because the issue of “successful” exhibition design is much more complex than that. The question of what is good and bad design in museums has already been approached above and even if it might be difficult to find a definite answer, John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking give the following explanation:

Good design balances unity and variety to evoke relationships and forge visual and mental associations. Balance between unity and variety can be achieved through shape, texture, color, pattern, or informational content. Unity is essential to communicate information and provide context; variety is essential to maintain visitor interest and enjoyment. Similarly, the design principles of balance, emphasis, and rhythm relate to the designer’s capacity to create a visual ‘feast’ for the visitor that both attracts attention and facilitates intellectual engagement, allowing the visitor to engage in the whole and focus on the specific. When all of these aesthetic elements complement each other, an exhibit ‘works’; when they do not, neither does the exhibit.446

Thus, the key to a successfully designed exhibition can be pinned down to balance, according to Falk and Dierking. In theory, emphasis on balance can appear indisputable because balance in general has a positive connotation and, therefore, would seem to be the safest keyword in exhibition design. But how does one validate balance and success in practice? Taking the five Roman museums as examples it is apparent that they all do, in some way or another, show more or less successful variations of balance in their exhibitions and spatial designs. The symmetry and stability of the hall in Museo dell’Ara Pacis harmonize the interaction between the inside and the outside and offer a calm space between two streets. Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is consistent and coherent throughout the apartments and galleries, even though with a slight over-emphasis on decoration and art, as Carlos noted. Palazzo Massimo appears to be imbalanced layout-wise, but the displaying methods are well-balanced and so is the use of colours in the exhibition spaces. This might leave visitors with a sense of balance in the exhibitions per se, but there is still an imbalance in the layout. In Centrale Montemartini, the artefacts and original interior meet in a strangely harmonious juxtaposition, while MAXXI seems to represent a controlled imbalance, considering irregularities and flow is the very core of its characteristic architecture. Whether one appreciates it or not, the imbalances are what makes MAXXI unusual and thus the irregularities becomes its strength, but also its weakness in some respects.

The balance between unity and variety that Falk and Dierking claim to be an effective recipe for a successful exhibition may very well be so. Still, even though it

---

might be advantageous to strive for balance, one should not undervalue spatial disharmony and asymmetry either. An unexpected twist in the layout or a surprising splash of colour might be exactly what a visitor needs to wake up from museum fatigue caused by too much harmony. As Falk and Dierking emphasize, variety is necessary as well. But how much of one or the other is appropriate is not a simple question to answer, since it is not possible to measure and calculate a perfect formula for museum space and exhibition design.\textsuperscript{447} What we can consider further, however, is how imbalances in exhibitions and spatial design affect museum visitors. As has been mentioned above, Eric did not feel as if he was provided with enough information about Ara Pacis when he visited Museo dell’Ara Pacis and Katie did not find the layout logical in Palazzo Massimo. It can appear, therefore, as if orientation in space and written information about an object are two different problems that should be approached in separate ways. It might be argued that Eric’s sensation of deficiency was cognitive while Katie’s was physical. Yet, considering again the phenomenological perspectives on the body as completely intertwined, not only in the relationship between body and mind, but concerning all our senses, experiences, and functions in general, there does not seem to be that much of a difference regarding the consequences of such deficiencies in an exhibition context.\textsuperscript{448} The issues that Katie and Eric experienced are, in a sense, one and the same: an imbalance in the exhibition setting that interfered with their fully integrated experiences. At this stage, \textit{how} it interfered is subordinate to the fact that there \textit{was} interference. The question of which one of the five senses is affected or whether it is a cognitive or physical disruption is less relevant because it is all experienced within the same body.\textsuperscript{449} What is relevant here, though, is that museum visitors are attentive to imbalances in exhibitions and that their bodily perceptions are as sensitive to interferences as the cognitive impressions simply because they are integrated.

\textit{Conclusion}

As was established in the introduction to this study, my aim has been to analyse spatial design in museums and how it affects experience and meaning making. Moreover, I have attempted to describe what is communicated through the spatial designs of the five museums analysed here. I have examined what exhibition contents convey in relation to spatial elements and how spatial design can stimulate experiences of authenticity. The analyses have not, as of yet, generated a conclusive answer to questions such as what a sufficient exhibition actually is or how a museum space should or should not be designed in order to be considered “successful” by its visitors. In fact, there simply is no overall design or formula that is universally applicable and unconditionally appreciated by all. Still, my study has presented a

\textsuperscript{447} Fleming, 59.

\textsuperscript{448} Merleau-Ponty (2004), 56; cf. Merleau-Ponty (2002), 176-177; see also Maure, 156.

\textsuperscript{449} Merleau-Ponty (2002), 266-267, 271-272; see also Merleau-Ponty (1964), 15.
number of results by describing and emphasizing the role that spatial elements and design play in museums as well as their relevance and meaning. These results have been distinguished and reflected upon continuously throughout the previous chapters more or less explicitly. In this final conclusion, I aim to accentuate and concretize them further in order to summarize the general themes and outcomes of this study.

Museums contain collections of original objects, spaces, and/or settings, and the possibility to both retain and display these collections of rare artefacts make museums unique as a genre. They can create stories and representations that evoke emotional and sensational experiences within visitors.\textsuperscript{450} Along with this comes the educational mission that is still one of the essential functions of museums. Considering these factors as some of the fundamental elements of museums, one can conclude that conflicts between them do not have to exist; experience and education go hand in hand with meaning making in museums. I would argue that the distinctive combination of the object-centred exhibitions and spaces that stimulate experiences is what separates museums from other venues and institutions. Here, we can perceive the conditions of other times and spaces by physically experiencing representations of history. These experiences are related to the very existence and display of original artefacts in combination with settings and spaces.

There is something special about the possibility to move through space, to see the displays from different viewpoints, and to use our senses to experience exhibitions that apparently appeal to us, otherwise we would not visit museums. To be present in a museum space means having certain access to environments and objects that we generally do not encounter in our everyday lives. We experience rare artefacts in settings that create an atmosphere that very much forms the manner in which we observe, react to, and feel about what we see. Meaning making happens within us as we process the impressions and fuse them with our own previous experiences and perspectives on time and space. Interpretation is influenced by our individual external and internal experiences. Although we cannot perceive historical objects and spaces as they were in their original context, interpretation and meaning making can still happen through fusing of horizons between the present and presumptions about the past. Practices of communication are manifold and each component plays a part in the creation of meaning making.\textsuperscript{451}

In museums, we are a part of a specific context that makes us behave and think in certain ways according to our genre competence. We are also a part of the context that museums are presenting through their exhibitions. There are, then, two layers of contexts that we as visitors inevitably consider: the museum as such and the subject matter that is on display. These layers represent two different modes of times and places. Museums are a part of the present time while displaying other times. Still, there are exceptions. Contemporary art might, for instance, suggest temporal shifts in conceptual meanings or motifs without the artwork itself deriving

\textsuperscript{450} Michael Belcher, \textit{Exhibitions in Museums} (Leicester: Leicester University Press 1991), 38, 41.
\textsuperscript{451} Kress & van Leeuwen, 111.
from the past. Museums are absolutely physical; as soon as we enter a musealized space or house, our expectations on what is to come shift immediately. Once inside the architectural space, the exhibitions allow us to enter additional places – the displaying spaces. Thus, the museum as heterotopia is essentially, in Michel Foucault’s words, “a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable.”

As Merleau-Ponty stresses, we do not stand beside the world and observe it, but are at all times entangled with it. Accordingly, we do not stand beside the museum space and observe it as something that is detached from us. Once inside it, we are present in that space. Yet, as our bodies engage in our surroundings, whether in a museum or elsewhere, we are given the ability to reflect on what we experience. So, while we are entangled we also consider and analyse the surroundings with which we are intertwined. Martin Heidegger’s term Dasein, meaning presence or existence, or simply being there, illustrates human beings’ existence within the world – while deliberating the issue of existence itself. Consequently, we as humans are entangled with the world while simultaneously reflecting upon our own being.

Given that Dasein represents the ability to reflect on existence while existing, museums stimulate further reflection on several levels concerning presence, authenticity, and humanity by treating subjects concerning society and culture throughout time and space. Museums are a kind of meta spaces that, as Foucault describes it, contains all times, eras, and styles while simultaneously being without time in the sense that the walls of the museum shields its contents from the passage of time. The heterotopic properties of the museum consist of its capacity to preserve and display different aspects of representations of the world, of societies, of nature, and of art, with a focus on various periods of history. Museums present and represent a world that is our own and yet completely different from it. We might not always fully recognize the world that is displayed in a museum as resembling our own environment, due to differences in time, culture, or individual backgrounds, but most often some sort of collective perception of history and universality enables us to relate to the exhibition. Nevertheless, when it comes to museums of art and cultural history, like the five Roman museums analysed here, social and cultural issues are generally manifested in one form or another, be it in an avant-garde artwork or in a two-thousand-year-old sculpture. This means that visitors of such a museum not only reflect on their own existence, but are also confronted with existence at large on a level beyond their own personal time and place. Thereby, visitors are no longer only concerned with personal existence, but with the existence of the world, of other individuals, and of mankind at large. The heterotopic museum space allows for visitors to imagine other humans in other times and places as well as to empathize with what is experienced and to imagine themselves in those times and places.

---

452 Foucault, 352.
454 Olsen, 66.
455 Foucault, 355.
Therefore, the concept of existence becomes manifold the museum space and it extends beyond the issues of individual presence.

In the museum context, the stories and objects that are presented in the displays and in the spaces are understood on several levels simultaneously. One is to understand exhibitions as representations of “reality”, i.e. arranged ensembles which visitors reflect upon based on their perceptions of the premises of the museum by using their genre competence. The other is to make meaning out of the exhibition through imagination and feelings. These levels of meaning making should in no way be considered as dichotomies – they are simply different ways of making meaning on different levels. We find ourselves conceptualizing while simultaneously letting ourselves be swept away by the exhibition contents and the spatial setting. We can, in other words, experience through our bodies and make meanings through our senses and we can simultaneously understand and reflect on what we are experiencing intellectually, in order to make meaning on a more conscious level. It could, therefore, be argued that physically being in museum spaces could mean that the body stays in the present time and space while the mind travels. However, once again, the body enables the mind to travel in the first place by providing it with impressions. The physical reactions to certain materials or the senses’ detection of a colour or of a ray of light that warms the skin or leads the eyes to a certain object: these perceptions would not be possible without the body. Ultimately, these sensations are the stuff that sentient thoughts are made of.

The hierarchic approach to cognitive versus physical perception that characterizes René Descartes’ dichotomous order has been debated by many theorists and philosophers, such as Merleau-Ponty, and it will in all probability continue to be challenged within various contexts and disciplines. According to this study, it is apparent that regarding meaning making in relation to museum space, such a dichotomous and hierarchic perspective on experience misses the target. It is when a receiver interprets a message that meaning is made and this is important to take into consideration in museum studies and exhibition production because visitors are the receivers of the messages that the curator or exhibition designer transmits. Nevertheless, museum exhibitions should not be restricted to a message in singular terms of, for instance, an image or a text; the exhibition is a three-dimensional medium that visitors experience through physical movement, visual perspective, and through information perceived through the senses. Regarding what is beyond the informative factors and taking the surrounding elements into account is crucial if one aims either to analyse a museum exhibition or to create one. For that reason, to perform an exhibition analysis of more traditional form – with a focus on cognitive perceptions of texts, images, artefacts, and their arrangement – will leave out a large and significant part of what really makes a museum visit a unique and memorable experience. This study tries, therefore, to go beyond exhibition studies that consider the body and mind to be separate entities.

Exhibitions that address body and mind as an interrelated unit might be perceived as generally more appealing and satisfactory than those that place heavy
emphasis on either sensual experience or intellectual information. Also, exhibitions that are designed as separate components with no or little relation to each other can  
be perceived as unsettling and confusing. As suggested by Falk and Dierking above, a balanced exhibition space might provide better conditions for visitors to have a satisfying experience. However, imbalanced museum spaces have as much of an impact on visitors’ experience as balanced ones. Spatial design sets the mood and shapes our experiences and meaning making. Even if we do not find a space appealing because of an imbalance in design or as just matter of taste, it still persuades our senses to engage in the spatial atmosphere because, as Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, we are absolutely intertwined with our surroundings.456

Space and content are as inseparable as the means with which we experience and make meaning out of them, namely the mind and body. Recognizing this, it is apparent that museum space is acknowledged by us as visitors, whether we are aware of it or not, and therefore the meaning making potential of the spaces should also be thoroughly considered by designers throughout the exhibition production process. Planning a museum space is not simply a matter of creating an environment for visitors to imagine themselves physically and mentally relocated in time and space, for enabling a better view or understanding of the exhibition, or for spatially illustrating the context of what is on display. It is also a question of mediating an atmosphere that provides visitors with a sensation of comfort and safety and with excitement and curiosity. Museum space can be all of these things and so much more. It can, at its best, function as the framework that bridges the gap between the visitors and the intention behind an exhibition by setting an atmosphere and suggesting a context within which the displays can be comprehended and related to. At its worst, spatial design in museums can give very inadequate and poor clues or even give clues that contradict the theme of the exhibition and thereby interrupt visitors’ attempts to make meaning out of it. The first of these two extremes is detected in Museo dell’Ara Pacis, where space fills in the gaps where information is missing. The latter is apparent in Palazzo Massimo where the colour, lighting, and spatial shapes do not contradict the exhibition at all, but the layout obstructs visitors from following a clear path, thus distracting the flow of impressions. MAXXI also has a somewhat confusing layout, but it is embedded in an unconventional spatial design that seems to be arranged with the purpose of giving an impression of dynamic flow and energy to complement the avant-garde art on display. Together the spaces and artworks create a futuristic atmosphere of never-ending movement. The spatial design in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj can be considered to have the same function as the design in MAXXI in the sense that the spatial design is the exhibition to a large extent and that the spaces supplement the art by creating a contemporaneous framework. Yet, while MAXXI represents the present, Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is the past, and more importantly, it was not originally a space for the general public to see. In Centrale Montemartini the spatial design could not be more confusing in the sense

456 Merleau-Ponty (2002), x-xii, 94.
that it says very little about the historical context of the objects on display. However, this complete contradiction is so obvious that it becomes a juxtaposition that stimulates meaning making beyond what is immediately perceived and it evokes existential reflections on the past and the future.

In conclusion, museum spaces communicate and convey meaning, sometimes coherently harmonized with the display, thereby intensifying the exhibition theme and making it easier for visitors to comprehend it. Sometimes the spatial design is not coordinated with the display and then the whole exhibition takes on a new meaning, one that can appear to be interesting and curious, impenetrable and imbalanced, or simply poorly arranged and confusing. Yet, when we are present in a museum and the experience is in the making as we move through its spaces, perhaps with a feeling of frustration or with fascination and awe, it might not always be clear to us exactly which factors are causing these sensations. In this situation, moving the focus from the objects and inspecting the surroundings can give an indication of some of these factors.

My study reveals that engaging in a museum exhibition can be an existential experience beyond cognitive stimulation and learning. It shows that a museum experience cannot be reduced to the components of an exhibition. We have to consider the whole context in which the exhibition is set – the museum environment at large as well as how all the multimodal elements that contribute to museum experiences are interconnected. What constitutes a museum experience is much more than we might recognize and, therefore, museum spaces require further acknowledgement. In order to develop a museological language, methodology, and theory concerning space as a significant factor in museum practice and studies, we need to strive for a new approach to the relationship between space, human beings, experience, and meaning making. The restrictions provided by a positivist separation of experience and fact in museology, as well as the well-established body-mind dichotomies in philosophy, could easily destine studies of museum space to come to similarly dichotomous conclusions.

Hopefully, this study has given an indication of alternative results although it is only a small step towards the further development of an approach to exhibition studies and design that encompasses and acknowledges the full potential of museum spaces and their contents. To enrich the museological discipline with further studies on spatiality in museums, such dichotomies as presented above would entail re-evaluation and alteration. It would be necessary to consider not only if new theoretical and methodological approaches can contribute to the development of museum spaces, but also how spatial design in museums can, in turn, contribute to this elaboration of new approaches. A good place to start such a development would be to visit a museum space, where aspects of experienced authenticity and the sensation of presence are most evident.
SUMMARY

Introduction

The theme of this study is spatial design in museums and how it affects experiences and meaning making. My case studies consist of spaces in five museums located in Rome that are examined and analysed based on my own observations and experiences. Furthermore, the analysis is developed in dialogue with theoretical perspectives in order to examine the effects spatial elements have on experiences and meaning making in museums. Some of the questions of this study are: What is communicated through spatial design in the five museums? What does space convey in relation to the contents of an exhibition? How can spatial design contribute to the experience of authenticity in museums? These questions function as points of departure as the observations of spaces in the five Roman museums are discussed and analysed. The selected museums are Museo dell’Ara Pacis, Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Centrale Montemartini, and MAXXI. The selection of the museums was based on their diversity as they are of various categories, ages, and styles. However, what is characteristic of most of them is that they, despite their variety, strike a balance between the genres of art museums and museums of cultural history. The only exception is MAXXI, which is dedicated to contemporary art and architecture and in that sense is also a museum characterized by combinations. Thus, the five museums represent multiplicity, yet with a common denominator in the fact that they are not exclusively genre bound. All of these museums are included in the context and chronology of Rome and their contents relate to different layers of Roman history. They contain both ancient and contemporary artefacts within buildings and spaces from different times in history.

I have used a method based on observations to describe and analyse the mentioned museum spaces. The method followed a plan that I developed in order to systematize the observations. This plan included observing the spaces and describing the experiences that occurred during the observations. Also, the plan had a focus on certain spatial aspects such as layout and form, the disposition of exhibitions, material and mass, volume and proportions, and light and colours. The museum spaces were revisited on five different occasions and at different hours of the day. The plan was implemented on each of these visits. On one of the five visits, I had a conversation with a first-time visitor about her or his experiences of the museum. Finally, I analysed my descriptions and experiences, as well as the observations made by the first-time visitor, in relation to relevant theoretical perspectives.

The theoretical framework of this study consists of a collection of perspectives and approaches from a variety of academic fields. The museological aspects used here span over several fields of research within the same discipline. Still, most of them concern museum experiences, authenticity, and spatial matters. As a complement, theories within architecture are applied to the analyses of spatial experiences of for example materials and forms, while theoretical aspects on art are used in
relation to discussions on art history as well as experiences of art spaces. Moreover, analyses of the effects of colours, light, and symbolic meanings are related to approaches within multimodality and semiotics. While hermeneutics is represented mainly in discussions concerning authentic experiences and understanding of history, phenomenology is considered here as a point of departure. The phenomenological approach to the mind and body as interdependent and the body as the medium through which we perceive the world is here assumed to be a fundamental precondition for spatial experiences in museums.

**Museo dell’Ara Pacis**

Museo dell’Ara Pacis is centred on the peace altar Ara Pacis, which was originally erected in Campus Martius as a dedication to the Roman Emperor Augustus in the year 13 BC. It was completely excavated during the Fascist era and placed in a pavilion on the Piazza Augusto Imperatore on the eastern side of the river Tiber, next to the Mausoleum of Augustus. In 2006 a new museum, replacing the pavilion, was inaugurated. It was designed by the American architect Richard Meier, whose designs are most often characterized by white surfaces and straight lines, and this is also manifested in interior and the exterior architecture of Museo dell’Ara Pacis.

The white and decorated altar, which is circa 11 meters wide and approximately 7.5 meters high, is placed in the midst of a rectangular hall that is also characterized by white surfaces. However, the western and eastern walls of the space consist of large windows that allow for a view of the surroundings from the inside as well as a view of the altar from the outside. The windows evoke a sensation of an open air environment, and this is confirmed by a model and a map in an information area placed to the right of the entrance, both of which demonstrate the altar’s original location on the Campus Martius. Thus, visitors might associate the airiness of the space with the original site and vice versa. Yet, not all of the altar’s past is revealed. While the aesthetic qualities of Ara Pacis are much emphasized by the spatial design, the history of the altar is not always as easily identified. For instance, the fact that the now white altar was once painted with rich colours is hardly communicated to visitors through the information area, spatial elements, or other exhibition components. The immaculate whiteness of the altar is also fortified by the almost temple-like white interior architecture, which appears to correlate with Western museums’ general tendency to reproduce the misconception of white antiquity through white-on-white displays.

Because there is no permanent and regular effort to explicitly present visitors with as many historical facts as possible – which audiences generally expect from museums of history – something is missing in the representation and communication. The first-time visitor Eric, a Swedish student of history, noted this and he found the information in Museo dell’Ara Pacis to be insufficient. Therefore, he drew his conclusions from perceiving the spatial design and the placement of the altar, which left him with the impression of the altar as being very important, although he
did not know why. Without explicit knowledge of the altar’s history, its present state, white and conspicuous, might be taken as authentic. Still, the history of Ara Pacis can be detected in its ornaments, which depict scenes of contemporaneous ritual processions, as well as in the Piazza Augusto Imperatore and the Mausoleum of Augustus outside the windows, which indicate the connection between the altar, Emperor Augustus and the Fascist era. The story of Ara Pacis’ past is there implicitly, but this is exceeded by the aesthetic properties of the altar, which is further emphasized by the elegant and evocative spatial design.

*Palazzo Doria Pamphilj*

Palazzo Doria Pamphilj is located on Via del Corso in the centre of Rome. It dates back to the 15th century and has been renovated in stages throughout the years to become one of the largest palaces in Rome. It is owned by the princely Doria Pamphilj family and houses the family’s private art collection. Pope Innocentius X, himself a member of the Pamphilj family, officially inducted the collection in 1651 and its expansion continued until the 19th century. Today, the palace and the collections are arranged according to their 17th and 18th century setting. The public apartments of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj consist of twelve rooms and four galleries.

Considering the 17th and 18th century spatial design and disposition, moving through the spaces evokes a sensation of “being there”, i.e. being present in the past that the palace represents. This impression is very much a physical experience. Standing inside the actual room where residents and house guests have dwelled for the past four hundred years stimulates one’s senses and thoughts. The spaces of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj seem to enable a kind of imaginary time-travel, considering that their settings encourage visitors to partake in a visit to a represented time and place in history. However, although the spaces give the impression of being untouched, they are in fact restored and thereby they have also gone through a musealization process. Also, as visitors we cannot fully grasp the breadth of the palace’s history without interpreting it through our own contextual conceptions. There is both the aspect of what has previously been and the aspect of what is now. The settings, spaces, and objects in museums are related to various contexts, such as their original environment, their new environment brought on by musealization and the contexts that visitors apply through their interpretations and experiences.

A 17th century visitor of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj was meant to be impressed by the grandness of the spaces and the rich art collection. Today, these arrangements might be perceived otherwise. It is evident in the conversations with Carlos, a Mexican student of illustration and animation, whose impressions of the spaces in Palazzo Doria Pamphilj give a clear indication of his opinions on spatial balance. While he finds the Aldobrandini room, which is white and unadorned, appealing and comfortable, he does not fully appreciate the galleries, which he finds to be too lavish and somewhat fatiguing. Consequently, because visitors of today do not belong to the target group – i.e. the 17th, 18th, and 19th century upper class – the palace
might evoke such feelings as fatigue. Applying a present-day contextual perspective on the palace interiors gives the objects and spaces new meanings and new interpretations that do not always agree with individual visitors’ taste. Yet, even if we perceive the palace from our present perspectives, the historic accuracy of Palazzo Doria Pamphilj gives us indications of what the domestic, cultural, and social practices of prominent families were like at the time, enough for us to have authentic experiences of “being there”.

**Palazzo Massimo alle Terme**

Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, or Palazzo Massimo as it is referred to here, was built in 1883-1887 by the architect Camillo Pistrucci. It was dedicated to the Jesuit Massimiliano Massimo and functioned as a Jesuit college until the 1960s. In 1981, Museo Nazionale Romano, the National Roman Museum, was given permission to use Palazzo Massimo for exhibiting its collections. The collections consist of archaeological objects discovered in the Roman area during excavations that were initiated in the early 1870s due to restructurings of the city, which had become the capital of the recently united Italy. Palazzo Massimo was opened to the public in stages during the 1990s. In this chapter, only the second floor of the museum is treated. It contains mosaics and frescoes, some of which are the most complete in the Roman area. The Villa di Livia frescoes, consisting of four extensive walls depicting a garden, are the gem of the museum.

On the second floor of Palazzo Massimo one can easily get lost in the spatial disposition, which Katie, an American office assistant, noticed as she visited the museum. She enjoyed the artefacts, specifically the mosaics, but the layout kept her visit from running smoothly. In addition to the interior architecture complicating Katie’s visit, the shapes and sizes of the frescoes and mosaics have contributed to spatial alterations and adaptations, and these might also cause some confusion regarding layout. Some of the artefacts are displayed on additional walls, separate from the original palace walls, while others, the more or less complete frescoes, are displayed according to the same dimensions as in their original environments. Thus, spatial elements were added to the already existing interior architecture to create rooms for the frescoes.

In Roman museums of cultural history, reconstructed environments are rather uncommon. But not all of the artefacts in Palazzo Massimo are exhibited accordingly. Many of them are displayed in the same manner as paintings in conventional art exhibitions, placed separately at eye-level on pale walls. In other words, while the museum contains conventional exhibition concepts, it also has proportionate spatial displays and thus it gives visitors an opportunity to intimately experience these appealing and evocative artefacts in their original three-dimensional scales.

In Palazzo Massimo there are no secrets kept from visitors concerning restoration work. There is even a film showing in one of the spaces that explains the restoration and preservation processes. This knowledge does not, however, affect the
experiences to any significant degree. Even though it is apparent that the garden paintings in the Villa di Livia room are restored, this is hardly an issue. The space evokes a sensation of historical presence and it seems unlikely that this impression would occur if the frescoes had been left unrestored or if they were arranged otherwise. Artefacts that are displayed as paintings on the walls or placed on tables do not convey the same experience of presence and authenticity. The manner in which they are exhibited does not create the same contextual frame as in the case of the Villa di Livia room because they provide visitors with little or no indications of the artefacts’ original functions. This disconnection from context might distort their history as well as the visitors’ perception of them. Consequently, the full-scale arrangement and the intense paintings, although restored, facilitate an understanding of the frescoes historical context from an aesthetic, cultural, and social perspective, thereby adding an element of authenticity to the experience.

Centrale Montemartini

Centrale Montemartini is a museum that combines two different aspects of Roman history. An art collection consisting of objects from antiquity is displayed in the industrial spaces of Rome’s first thermoelectric power plant, located in the Ostiense area south of the city centre. The power plant was operational mainly during the first half of the 20th century, being inaugurated in 1912 and completely discarded by the mid-1960s after a few years of neglect. Discussions on turning the building into a museum were initiated in the late 1980s, then with the intention of focusing on industrial development. However, when Musei Capitolini was to be renovated and some of their artefacts needed to be relocated, Centrale Montemartini was chosen to house them and in 1997 the collection of ancient sculptures and archaeological findings were moved into the building to form a temporary exhibition. The concept was successful enough that the power plant was transformed into a permanent museum and parts of the collection remained on display. Most of these artefacts were excavated at the end of the 19th century in the areas around Capitoline Hill.

This chapter focuses specifically to the two major exhibition halls Sala Macchine, containing two sizeable engines, and Sala Caldaie, containing a large boiler at the back of the room. The two spaces are over 15 meters high and approximately 1000 square meters in area. They contain ancient white marble sculptures and fragments of a mosaic and a temple, objects that are disposed throughout the spaces in relation to the industrial elements. The spaces also contain framing beams and free-standing walls that have been added to frame the sculptures and add a touch of colour. Sala Macchine is characterized by a cool blue colour while Sala Caldaie is pastel green.

Compared to the other museums in this study, Centrale Montemartini is the one that contains the most obvious combination of museum categories and styles. It would be misleading to label it as either an art museum or a museum of cultural history. When conversing with Jane, an American art education student, she ob-
served that the main characteristic of the Centrale Montemartini is that it has hybrid spaces in which unity creates new meanings. To her, the combination of historical phases, objects, and different shades of colours is the most appealing aspect of the museum. Furthermore, Centrale Montemartini not only treats different times of history, but it also juxtaposes material and colours. The dark iron is heavy and slightly rough and it contrasts against, and simultaneously interconnects with, the smoothness of the marble surfaces of the delicately detailed marble sculptures. Placing antique artefacts in a setting that they are usually not associated with means they are perceived differently than they would have been if they were exhibited in, for instance, a more conventional and plain art space. In Centrale Montemartini, the industrial setting of the spaces are on display on equal terms with the sculptures and does not serve only as a backdrop.

The spaces of Centrale Montemartini allows for visitors to explore unexpected routes and surprising combinations of elements and relations, materials and proportions, aesthetics and perspectives. Nevertheless, although the Centrale Montemartini spaces are characterized by dynamism, it is also a museum of stillness. Even if the industrial elements might evoke images of what the spaces were like when in use, their silence becomes even more palpable now that they have stopped their production. The stagnant spaces of Centrale Montemartini thereby represent transience, and their contents convey that although the museum as such stands for durability, all things do have an end.

MAXXI

MAXXI, Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo, is located in the Flaminio area north of the city centre of Rome. The museum, which was inaugurated in 2010, focuses on contemporary art and architecture and was designed by the British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid. Like many other art museums with avant-garde architecture, MAXXI’s design also gives the impression of communicating the museum’s function and contents. The architecture of MAXXI signifies both the art it contains and Hadid’s own distinctive style, which is characterized by spatial layering and flow as well as coinciding interior and exterior design set in relation to the structures of the surrounding location.

MAXXI contains a foyer, five galleries and five additional rooms for exhibitions and education. The foyer is characterized by a science fictional appearance, containing seemingly unsupported stairs and ramps that appear to float in the air up to the galleries on the upper floors. The sensation of flow and uninterrupted space is also evident in the galleries. Their layouts are unconventional in the sense that they do not follow a traditional white cube structure, but are curved and extended. This is something that the first-time visitor Nina, a medical doctor from Rome, finds the most interesting about the museum. According to her, the openness and spaciousness is highly appealing and it becomes clear that Nina has noticed the spaces even
more than the artworks during her visit to MAXXI, most likely due to the unexpected spatial designs.

The colour setting in the museum is more conventional. It is mainly light grey, close to white, which tends to correlate to the standardized white surfaces often seen in exhibition spaces for modern art. These kinds of pale environments for, mainly, contemporary art affect visitors’ perception of the artworks they are housing. In such spaces the art is often provided with its own dedicated zone where it is not distracted by other elements. The artworks’ individuality and contents – aesthetic or conceptual – are emphasized and the white or light grey enhances the purity of the space and the sacredness of the art that occupies it. Thus, these kinds of exhibition spaces consecrate objects simply by enclosing them.

Considering MAXXI, it cannot be disregarded that Hadid is one of the world’s leading architects at the present. Her unique style contributes to MAXXI being considered an attraction because of its architecture and not only as a museum. Even if Hadid leaves the colour setting more or less unaddressed, she restructures the white cube and makes the interior and exterior designs correspond. Moreover, she takes the surrounding environment into consideration and draws inspiration from it and as a consequence, MAXXI becomes a museum that simultaneously stands out in the Flaminio area and merges with its urban milieu.

Like much other contemporary museum architecture, Hadid’s designs seem to signify innovation and radical progression. Furthermore, they imply that they are not only advanced now, but their futuristic style suggests that they will continue to be perceived as contemporaneous in the future. However, even if MAXXI’s architecture perhaps appears to be timeless, the same suggested timeless design might become the style by which the museum will be recognized in the future. The architectural timelessness is, in fact, time-bound.

Displaying spaces

In this final chapter the results of the museum analyses are further discussed in relation to general perspectives and theories on spatial design in museums. The discussions include subject matters such as balance and imbalanced spatial design in museums and authentic experiences of historical and contemporary artefacts and spaces. The chapter ends with a reflection on future academic and practical approaches to museum space.

What constitutes good spatial design in museums is an intricate question considering it is very much a matter of personal opinion. Still, as has been indicated in the chapters discussing the five Roman museums, there are such things as exaggeration and insufficiency when it comes to experiencing museum settings. The common denominator seems to be balance. When there is too little information, for example, the ability to consciously reflect on what is represented appears to be disrupted. On the other hand, when spatial design fails in giving directions, for instance, and a visitor gets lost in an exhibition, the sensation of being in an exploratory and satisfy-
ing flow is lost because the task of finding the route interrupts it. In both cases, the visitor is missing some kind of guidance, be it spatial or informational. A strategically planned space might complement the museum experience and make the context more coherent. Spatial design can also be perceived as manipulative considering how it leads visitors’ eyes and bodies in certain directions, sometimes leaving too much or too little room for individual decisions. However, manipulation is a part of museum practice, and objects are selected and displays are planned according to subjective perspectives.

Objects and spatial settings in museums are continuously changing through, for instance, preservations and rearrangements or because of constant reinterpretations. Furthermore, age changes their physical conditions. It might be argued that these traces of aging are what make historical objects and spaces interesting. However, because the intention of museums in general is to oppose transience, the ravages of time are encountered by acts of preservation and restoration as soon as the musealization process is initiated. The question is if restored museum objects then should be regarded as truly authentic.

Restorers might argue that these artefacts are authentic after they have been restored, rather than before. Experiencing historical elements that look like they did when they were in use is perhaps to come closer to an understanding of their original qualities than if experiencing them in a faded and fragmented condition. This authentic experience stipulates that visitors go along with the illusion of “being there”. In museums, historical settings can evoke an experience of being brought closer to history. The atmosphere created by the presence of spatial components and materia of the past stimulates imagination and understanding. While we can relate to specific factors in a museum setting by recognizing certain basic human behaviours, unfamiliar elements of, for example, past living conditions encourages us to imagine what life of prior generations might have been like. Authentic experiences of history in museums are multifaceted and involve aspects such as sensational perception, empathy, imagination, and previous understanding. This is often greatly inspired by the environment in which the historical element is set.

How, then, can authentic experiences manifest themselves in relation to exhibition spaces that do not seemingly indicate any relation to history, or to any contemporary contexts for that matter? A category of museum spaces that does not explicitly reveal any spatial and temporal references is the white cube, which has been commonly used as a spatial design for art exhibitions since the 1930s. It is a space in which artworks are meant to be perceived as autonomous and it has been described as both sacred and reclusive. Here, it is the visitors’ responsibility to understand the art often without any indications of context and, in the case of contemporary art, without previous interpretations to support their own understanding. Authenticity becomes not a matter of reference, but of instinctively believing in the artworks’ intrinsic value based on their setting inside a white art space. The impression is that they have apparently been deemed significant enough to be set in a space dedicated to art and so they must be artworks. The experienced authenticity is there-
by based on the spatial environment’s sacredness and reclusiveness rather than on any historic qualities. The space sets the scene for the artwork, whether historical or modern, and other museum objects might also take on other qualities if placed inside a white cube. If a single object or a whole exhibition changes spatial setting, they also change meaning. When imagining an exchange of objects among the five museums of this study, the manner in which we would perceive the artefacts as well as the sceneries in the museums would alter. Museum spaces and their contents are thus interdependent in that they create a relationship in which the one influences the other.

Spatial design in museums does not just concern creating an environment that enables visitors to better understand the exhibition contextually or to experience a relocation in space and time. It also means forming an atmosphere that makes visitors feel comfortable, excited, and curious. When moving through museum spaces, different sensations might appear that are not necessarily caused by the exhibition. Often, the space is the contributing factor to these reactions. Although they are not always the first thing we consider, spaces affect our experiences and meaning making more than we might think. Therefore, it is important to further develop museological approaches to space as a significant factor in museum practices and studies. This would require evaluations of the relations between space, human beings, experience, and meaning. Not only is vital to discuss what new methodological and theoretical perspectives can mean for future construction of museum spaces, but it is also important to consider what spatial design in museums might in turn contribute to the development of these new perspectives.
REFERENCES

Observations

Recorded and transcribed fieldnotes September 2011-April 2012.
Recorded and transcribed conversations with reference persons October 2011-April 2012.
Audio recordings and transcribed fieldnotes are filed at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University.

Image credits

All photographs by Märit Simonsson except:

Fig. 1: Richard Meier: Il Museo dell’Ara Pacis, ed. Giovanna Crespi (Milano: Electa S.p.a. 2007), 109. The image has been retouched.
Fig. 11: Palazzo Doria Pamphilj museum brochures. The image has been retouched.
Fig. 12: Archivio Arti Doria Pamphilj and Vasari Roma, in Guide succinct de la Galerie Doria Pamphilj (Rome: Arti Doria Pamphilj S.r.l. 1997), 21.
Fig. 14: Photo by Roberto Schezen, in Palazzi di Roma, eds. Fabio Benzi & Caroline Vincenti Montanaro (1997) 3rd edition, (Verona: Arsenale Editrice Srl 2010), 210. The photo has been retouched.
Fig. 15: Società Arti Doria Pamphilj, in Il Palazzo Doria Pamphilj al Corso: e le sue collezione, ed. Andrea G. De Marchi (1999), 2nd edn. (Firenze: Centro Di 2008), 51.
Fig. 17: Palazzo Massimo museum brochures. The image has been retouched.
Fig. 28: http://www.centralemontemartini.org/collezioni/percorsi_per_sale (04-10-2014). The image has been retouched.
Fig. 38: MAXXI museum brochures. The image has been retouched.
Fig. 41: Photo by Hufton + Crow Photography. Courtesy of Fondazione MAXXI
Fig. 42, 44, and 45: Photos by Simone Cecchetti. Courtesy of Fondazione MAXXI.
Literature


*Art and Authenticity*, eds. Megan Aldrich & Jos Hackforth-Jones (Farnham: Lund Humphries in association with Sotheby’s Institute of Art 2012)


Bourdieu, Pierre & Darbel, Alain & Dominique Schnapper, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public* [*L’amour de l’art: les musées d’art*]


Cadario, Matteo & Giustozzi, Nunzio, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (Verona: Electa 2008)


Ehn, Billy, Museendet: Den museala verkligheten (Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag 1986)

Eriksen, Anne, Museum: En kulturhistorie (Oslo: Pax Forlag 2009)


Falk, John H. & Dierking, Lynn D., Learning from Museums: Visitor Experience and the Making of Meaning (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press 2000)

Farné, Mario, Visuell rumsperception [La percezione dello spazio visivo] (1972), Swe. transl. (Stockholm: Whalström & Widstrand 1974)


Foucault, Michel, “Of Other Spaces” (1967), Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in

Frykman, Jonas, Berörd: Plats, kropp och ting i fenomenologisk kulturanalys (Stockholm: Carlssons 2012)


Harman, Graham, Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing (Chicago: Open Court 2007)


Insulander, Eva, Tinget, rummet, besökaren: om meningsskapande på museum (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet 2010)


Lundberg, Erik, *Arkitekturens förmågspråk studier över arkitekturens konstnärliga värden i deras historiska utveckling*, vol. I (Stockholm: Nordisk rotogravyr 1945)


Timm Knudsen, Britta & Waade, Anne Marit, “Performatve Authenticity in Tourism and Spatial Experience: Rethinking the Relations Between Travel, Place and Emotion”, *Re-Investing Authenticity: Tourism, Place and Emotions*, eds. Britta Timm Knudsen & Anne Marit Waade (Bristol, Buffalo
Tuan, Yi-Fu, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press 1977)


