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'For Whom Was Built This Special Shell?' Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums, galleries and cultural centres.

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London Consortium, Birkbeck College, University of London

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of London,
January 2015

I, Rebecca Faulkner, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

_____ Date: _____

'For Whom Was Built This Special Shell?'
Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums,
galleries and cultural centres



THESIS ABSTRACT

Religious buildings have, for centuries, occupied a crucial position at the heart of our civic centres; anchoring communities through an emphasis on ritual, tradition and continuity. In recent years as urban neighbourhood perimeters shift in response to waves of immigration, and the cohesive congregations that supported them disperse, many buildings face abandonment or closure. In the last twenty-five years a number of houses of worship have been adapted into museums and venues for cultural exchange, aiming to honour and interpret the religious history of the building while promoting dialogue with a diverse local community.

This thesis explores the trend for adapting and converting houses of worship into museums and cultural centres. It assesses three unique sites as case studies: a former synagogue in London's East End, a functioning synagogue on the Lower East Side of New York, and a former Methodist church in Cape Town, South Africa, as well as emerging sites located in active Anglican churches in London and the south east. My thesis postulates that former sacred places can be re-animated by an arts group responding to the building's spiritual legacy; utilising it to demonstrate a powerful link between the existing community and its early congregants. I argue that multi-use buildings which promote secular cultural programming while continuing to house a congregation may appeal to members of the public who do not necessarily identify with mainstream museum culture. This presents the field of museum studies with a new model for the 'participatory' museum: a landmark building which can respond to the distinct needs of a multi-faith, 'multicentred' society. The analysis my thesis provides locates my work within at the intersection of theory and practice, and within broader developments in the disciplines of cultural, urban and museum studies, providing a socio-historical perspective on a new kind of museum. It is intended to be used as a *modus operandi* for adaptive use by religious buildings.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family - Adam Lubinsky and my daughters Isabel and Sophie for their love and inspiration, and for providing me with my sense of place.

In memory of Beverly Crouts-Knipe, for her passion, dedication and tireless commitment to South African heritage; and Bill Fishman, for sharing *his* East End with all of us.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the recent trend for adapting and converting houses of worship in urban areas into museums, galleries and cultural centres.¹ For centuries, religious buildings have occupied a crucial position at the heart of our civic centres; anchoring communities through an emphasis on ritual and tradition. In recent years, as urban neighbourhood perimeters shift in response to new waves of immigration, and the cohesive congregations that supported them disperse, struggling against tides of slum clearance, gentrification and a decline in regular attendance, many religious buildings face abandonment or closure. Some are demolished; others redeveloped as apartments and offices, or transformed into music venues, pubs and gallery spaces. Increasingly, congregations have adapted their programmes to reflect the needs of their constituents, and in order to address fundraising concerns have begun offering secular social activities in addition to faith-based events in a bid to enhance their appeal as venues for cultural exchange.²

In the last twenty-five years a number of urban houses of worship in North America and Britain have been transformed into museums and cultural centres that aim to honour and interpret the religious history of the building which houses them, while

¹ There is significant recent evidence, including surveys and reports I will reference later, to support the assertion that the adaptive use of urban religious buildings as museums and art centres constitutes a 'trend'. The appendix to this thesis lists the buildings of this type in London and New York, significantly, and highlights the dates that adaptive and shared use began. For the most part, the last twenty-five years has seen the emergence of many such institutions. The reasons for this are explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters. For the purpose of this thesis, I am looking predominantly at examples of this trend in North America and Europe, although as my South Africa case study illustrates, this is also a social phenomena in non-Western countries.

² See appendix for details of sites that cross-programme in this way.

promoting dialogue with a diverse local community. These are buildings that, for the most part, have been deconsecrated, and can therefore no longer strictly function as places of worship, yet there are some examples where the congregation has remained – leasing a portion of the building for a length of time to a secular arts group. Multi-use buildings such as these are often forced into existence in order to rescue a redundant sacred space, or in order to raise funds or fulfil grant requirements. But there are instances where a congregation is genuinely interested in diversifying their audience and broadening their community. In this thesis I will argue that these adaptive sites may appeal to members of the public who do not necessarily identify with mainstream museum culture³, thus presenting the field of museum studies with a new model for the ‘participatory museum’⁴ - a sacred building which can respond to the disparate needs of a multi/non-faith, ‘multicentred’⁵ society.

Using unique sites as case studies – a former synagogue in London’s East End; a functioning synagogue on the Lower East Side of New York; a former Methodist

³ I will discuss how art museums are attended and by whom, in contrast with how religious buildings are used by their communities in greater detail in later chapters.

⁴ Nina Simon’s *The Participatory Museum* (2010), which was published in print, electronically and online is a practical guide for museum professionals working with community members and visitors to make cultural institutions more dynamic, relevant, essential places. Throughout my thesis I will refer to the ‘participatory museum’ as the umbrella term for ‘community’ or ‘neighbourhood’ museums.

⁵ In *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentred Society*, (New York: The New Press, 1997) artist and theorist Lucy Lippard refers to ‘multicentred values’, writing: ‘The notion of multicentredness is an extension of the often-abused notion of multiculturalism. Each time we enter a new place, we become one the ingredients of an existing hybridity, which is really what all “local places” consist of’. pp.5-6.

church in Cape Town, South Africa; and an active Anglican church in central London,⁶ my thesis explores the role that these houses of worship have played for successive generations of immigrants in the neighbourhoods in which they are situated. By examining the role sacred place plays in diverse city centres (all the buildings are located in neighbourhoods renowned for mass immigration and urban unrest), I explore the tensions which arise over the oppositional meanings, values and uses associated with these buildings in three countries where religion has a specific and distinct relationship to the state. My thesis postulates that sacred places can be re-animated by arts groups who respond to a building's spiritual legacy; utilising it to demonstrate a powerful link between the existing (often immigrant) community and its early congregants. I argue that a more radical model - the multi, or shared use building which promotes secular cultural programming while continuing to house a congregation (as is, for now, the case at the Museum at Eldridge Street, my New York case study), may appeal to a broad cross-section of the public. My methodology includes archival research, extensive responses to relevant literature, field research at my case study sites, and an analysis of data taken from recent surveys and reports.

Part I of my thesis is built around a cross-disciplinary analysis of space and place, situating my work within broader developments in the fields of cultural studies and critical theory. In delineating the role that sacred place has played throughout the

⁶ See Appendix I for further information about why these particular case study sites were chosen.

modern era, I reference the extensive body of work which exists on place and locale, in particular responding to phenomenologist Edward E. Casey and geographer Doreen Massey, in addition to focusing on a number of pertinent theological texts which consider the changing nature of Judeo-Christian attitudes to sacred place. By accumulating data from English Heritage, the National Churches Trust, and Jewish Heritage UK, as well as from independent bodies such as Partners for Sacred Places (USA) and Art and Christianity Enquiry (UK) I hope to provide an overview of how religious buildings are currently used, and by whom.

Part II, which focuses on three case studies, draws significantly on the divergent histories of Jewish immigration to London and New York, and the experience of slave descendants in Cape Town. While my thesis references the reuse of urban religious buildings by various faith groups, it does not address attitudes towards sacred place in the Muslim faith. Islam, which has its own specific interpretation of sacred place, is not a religion in decline in Britain, the United States or South Africa. In fact as chapter one of my thesis illustrates, many of the abandoned churches and synagogues in London and New York are being converted into mosques to cater to a growing Muslim community. The growth of Islam, and subsequent lack of redundant religious buildings, has informed my decision to focus on Judeo-Christian attitudes to sacred place, and explore the plethora of synagogues and churches which are currently being adapted or serve as multi-use venues.

Beginning my case studies in London, from where I researched and wrote the majority of the thesis, I focus on the historically significant East End neighbourhood of Spitalfields, and 19 Princelet Street, a Georgian townhouse with a concealed synagogue built in the back garden. I examine the contemporary significance of this 'hidden' religious space, and question whether it is possible to create a meaningful 'participatory museum' from a house which has always, and continues to refute definition. My second case study is the Museum at Eldridge Street, housed in a functioning synagogue on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. I have recently returned to New York to complete my thesis, having lived there ten years ago, from 1997 to 2003, during which time I worked at the Museum (formerly the Eldridge Street Project) as a curator and arts programmer. The Museum's mission – to restore a ruined house of worship to its former glory - and its attempts to reposition the synagogue as a significant cultural venue in a neighbourhood which has witnessed dramatic demographic changes, illustrates that the complex multi-use model is harder to sustain because of conflicts that inevitably arise over how the building should be interpreted, and for whom.

The District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa is a world-renowned heritage site commemorating a diverse community forcibly removed during apartheid. It is housed in a former Methodist church where activists and residents gathered and worshipped, and is staffed by ex-congregants. I have spent extensive periods in Cape Town, in 1996, and again in 2008, where I travelled there on a research fellowship.

The inclusion of a 'non-western' site was crucial to my thesis; to illustrate that the adaptive use of religious buildings is not simply a recent phenomenon in the United States and Britain, (although this is where the majority of my examples originate⁷). Two complimentary and historic neighbourhoods (London's East End and New York's Lower East Side) are contrasted with an area of Cape Town which, although similar in its history of diversity, provides a starkly distinct portrait of a society, religion and culture ravaged by the apartheid regime. Examining the resonance of a neighbourhood that no longer exists, my Cape Town case study questions whether the success of the Museum is attributable to an emergent 'memory-culture', as well as to the building's non-conformist religious history.

Returning to London for Part III of the thesis, my final chapter explores a series of emerging sites, notably St George's, Bloomsbury, a beautifully restored Anglican church in central London with a small but dedicated congregation. Required by funders to develop a series of public programmes and secular activities, the Rector and staff have considered how this church could function as an active site for worship, a museum dedicated to the building's architectural history, and a venue for cultural exchange. Emerging sites such as St Georges, the recently closed Wallspace at All-Hallows-on-the-Wall, and other Anglican examples across the UK, provide the framework to discuss the rise in popularity of non-traditional gallery and exhibition spaces. I compare the use of Anglican churches in London and the South-East with

⁷ See Appendix for details.

initiatives to create holistic partnerships between religious groups and arts organizations in Philadelphia and Chicago, arguing that this model could be reproduced to the benefit of a vast number of churches with ancillary space to spare. My final chapter will offer examples of participatory heritage sites and museums by way of contrast with my case studies.

The breadth and scope of my thesis encompasses adaptive sites that interpolate a middle ground between the sacred and secular. These buildings fuel a debate concerning the ‘appropriate’ nature of art and cultural programming in places of worship, while also addressing a contemporary anxiety with regard to the social, historical and architectural functions of such iconic sites in an age which, it can be argued, has witnessed the demise of ‘place’.⁸ Can structures with such a rich and unambiguous history of spirituality and ritual practice successfully function as secular museums, catering to a broad spectrum of visitors with little knowledge of, or interest in the building’s previous purpose? If the adapted synagogues and churches in our urban centres are interpreted as cultural venues, unmoored from the limitations of nostalgia, sectarianism and artefact, yet retaining a crucial link to a past otherwise undiscovered by new waves of residents, then perhaps they can form the prototype of a new participatory museum model; attracting a broad audience through the building’s vernacular language, and the values that it implies.

⁸ Edward E. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1997), p.xiv.

This assessment of the function and uses of former religious buildings comes at a crucial time for the field of museology. Fifteen years ago, museum studies theorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett wrote that ‘a new generation of museum professionals is proactively addressing the stewardship of cultural property, its presentation and interpretation in museums’.⁹ The intervening years have witnessed innovations in museum-community relations stemming, for the most part not from large institutions, but from organisations once considered marginal: children’s museums, history museums, community, neighbourhood, local, ethnic and eco-museums, all grappling with notions of engagement and participation. Across Britain and North America there are increasing examples of successful small-scale museums that have nurtured a loyal audience from within their local constituency.¹⁰ In this thesis I will argue that one of the more significant and potentially successful ways in which cultural property can be repositioned and disseminated, as part of this ‘new museology’, is through the emergence of former religious buildings as secular, ‘participatory’¹¹ museums. I conclude by reiterating that religious buildings, both adaptive and shared use, in the urban centres I have described, are vital community

⁹ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, Berkeley, CA and London: The University of California Press, 1998, p.165.

¹⁰ For further cross-referencing, refer to literature on The Museum of Chinese in America (www.mocany.org - formerly the Chinatown History Project) and the Brooklyn Children’s Museum in New York, (www.brooklynkids.org) as well as the Ragged School Museum in London (www.raggedschoolmuseum.org.uk). *Museums and Their Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* edited by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) offers a useful overview of the emergence of such museums in north America. Nina Simon’s *The Participatory Museum* (2010) provides excellent examples of current trends in museum-community engagement in Europe and North America.

¹¹ In her 2010 book *The Participatory Museum*, exhibit designer and museum consultant Nina Simon argued that there were new efforts taking place within small ‘community museums’ to make cultural institutions more dynamic, relevant, essential places. Her book, which is written as a practical guide, defines a participatory cultural institution as ‘a place where visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content’. From the preface to the e-book edition, March 2010.

assets, and are currently being used extensively for purposes beyond worship. I will propose that the transformations occurring within these buildings invite the very practice of 'participation' that museum experts such as Simon are advocating for.

The analysis my thesis provides locates my work within at the intersection of theory and practice, and within broader developments in the disciplines of cultural, urban and museum studies, providing a socio-historical perspective on a new kind of museum. It is intended to be used as a *modus operandi* for adaptive use by religious buildings.

PART 1

Rebecca Faulkner
'For Whom was Built This Special Shell?' Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums, galleries
and cultural centres
Part I Chapter 1 *(Re)placing the Sacred*

When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate, and pyx in locked cases,

And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?
Or, after dark, will dubious women come
To make their children touch a particular stone;
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some
Advised night see walking a dead one?
Power of some sort or other will go on
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;
But superstition, like belief, must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone?

from *Church Going*
Philip Larkin, 1954.

CHAPTER 1
(Re)placing the Sacred:
Understanding the role of religious buildings in the modern era



Rebecca Faulkner
'For Whom was Built This Special Shell?' Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums, galleries
and cultural centres
Part I Chapter 1 *(Re)placing the Sacred*

‘We are immersed in it and could not do without it. To *be* at all – to exist in any way is to be somewhere and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. We are surrounded by places; we walk over them and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced. How could it be otherwise?’¹

Edward Casey

‘The spaces of religion are synchronically dynamic because at any time they are overlapping, co-existent, in parallel with other spaces, and because they are intentionally in tension, being made up of multiple, contested, real, and imagined sites and relations’.²

Kim Knott

For more than two millennia, space and the places that fill it have preoccupied scholars from Aristotle, Locke and Newton to Heidegger, Bachelard, and Foucault. Since the 1980’s, the specific relationship between space and place has been considered in Western social and cultural theory, and human geography³, as is evident in the works of phenomenologist Edward E. Casey, and geographers Yi-Fun Tuan, and Doreen Massey. In his seminal work, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, Casey argued that a rich tradition of ‘place-talk’⁴ has been mostly forgotten in our modern epoch, resulting in the downgrading of place as a modification of space; ‘an impoverished second cousin of (Time and) Space’.⁵ In agreement, cultural theorist Arturo Escobar has written that ‘Since Plato, Western philosophy – often times with the help of theology and physics – has enshrined space as the absolute,

¹ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p.ix.

² Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis*, (London & Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2005) p.23.

³ See Kim Knott’s introduction to *The Location of Religion*, p.1 and Tim Cresswell, ‘Theorizing Place’ (*Thamyris/Intersecting - Place, Sex and Race, Mobilizing Place, Placing Mobility: The Politics of Representation in a Globalized World*, Issue 9, 2002) p.12.

⁴ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p.x.

⁵ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p.xiv.

Rebecca Faulkner

‘For Whom was Built This Special Shell?’ Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums, galleries and cultural centres

Part I Chapter 1 (Re)placing the Sacred

unlimited and universal, while banning place to the realm of the particular, the limited, the local and the bound'.⁶ Historian and architect Dolores Hayden suggests that place 'is one of the trickiest words in the English language: it carries the resonance of homestead, location, and open space in the city, as well as position in a social hierarchy'.⁷ For Marxist geographer David Harvey, place has 'an extraordinary range of metaphorical meanings rendering it conceptually abstract, ubiquitous and multi-layered'.⁸

How do we understand and define place? Places, argues cultural geographer Tim Cresswell, 'are all spaces that people have made meaningful⁹; they are 'concepts that have helped people to think about their social, cultural and physical experience; their relationships to people, things and the cosmos'.¹⁰ These places, symbolic, and often deeply personal, can provide a retreat from the 'space' and pace of a globalized world. In *For Space*, geographer Doreen Massey muses on the elusiveness of place, arguing for '[Places] not as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and

⁶ Arturo Escobar, 'Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localization', (*Political Geography*, Issue 20, 2001) p.143.

⁷ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press, 1995) p.15.

⁸ David Harvey, 'From Space to Place and Back Again: Reflections on the Condition of Post-Modernity', in *Mapping the Future: Local Cultures, Global Change*, Eds. Jon Bird et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), p.4.

⁹ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) p.7.

¹⁰ Knott, *The Location of Religion*, p.11.

time'.¹¹ And yet, as I will explore later in this chapter, place traverses ambiguous territory: essentialised and parochial yet open and ongoing.¹²

Casey's *The Fate of Place* explores the vast expanse of interdisciplinary work on place and its importance, from the narratives of creation and the classical interpretations of Plato and Aristotle, which he contrasts with what he determines to be an 'erasure' of place as witnessed in Western Modernist and Postmodern theories of space and place. Casey's aim, to 'thrust the very idea of place once more into the daylight of philosophical discourse',¹³ is vital to my analysis of the buildings, streets, neighbourhoods and communities in our city centres which define, root and locate us. Could a renewed sensitivity to place, such as that which Casey championed, benefit both the growing number of religious buildings in decline *and* a secular community with a desire to recapture a rootedness to locale? By exploring the importance of place, specifically religious place, historically, socially and philosophically, and by reasserting the significance of place as advocated by writers such as Casey, Massey and Marshall Berman, I hope to shed some light on the emerging trend of adapting sacred buildings for use as museums, galleries and centres for cultural exchange.

¹¹ Doreen Massey, *For Space*, (London: Sage Publications, Ltd. 2005) p.131.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p.xi.

Religious places, be they buildings, shrines, cities or geographic regions have tremendous significance in both historical and contemporary contexts. Theologian Philip Sheldrake writes that 'place is space that has the capacity to be remembered and to evoke what is most precious'.¹⁴ Biblical or 'storied' places (Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Mecca) inscribed with meaning, form the core of a sacred geography that connects them to shrines, churches, synagogues and mosques throughout the world.¹⁵ Acts of pilgrimage within these networks of places¹⁶ are, for many, a crucial component of religious observance, one where the narratives of association and memory reflect the 'elusive', yet pervasive presence of God¹⁷. Yet the intrinsic value of sacred buildings themselves has been debated for centuries. It has been argued that since the Reformation, certain Christian sects have placed less emphasis on the building,¹⁸ underscoring the importance of the community and the individual in

¹⁴ Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory & Identity* (London: SCM Press), 2001, p.1.

¹⁵ In *The World is a Wedding*, A.M. Allchin refers to 'a geography of holy places, places whose power persists through centuries of indifference and neglect, to be revealed again [...] places which display the potential holiness of all this earth'. A.M. Allchin, *The World is a Wedding*, (London: DLT, 1978, p.82)

¹⁶ For example, the Western Wall (often referred to as the Wailing Wall) of the Temple Mount in East Jerusalem, the only remaining portion of the original Temple, is a key site in the Jewish faith. Also known as *Haram as-Sharif* (the 'Noble Sanctuary') it is the sacred centre of Islamic Jerusalem, containing both the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa mosque. The Dome of the Rock, built in the late 7th century, enshrines a large stone from which Muslims believe the prophet Mohammed ascended. The most important Christian sacred sites in Jerusalem are the Church of the Holy Sepulchre believed to contain the two most revered sites of Christianity: the hill where Jesus was crucified and the tomb where he was buried and rose from the dead. Information taken from www.sacredland.org accessed on 22 August, 2007 and also from W.D. Davies' *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity & Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Sheffield: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1994). In addition to Biblical sites, cathedrals, tombs, shrines and museums all play a crucial role in defining a sacred geography of places.

¹⁷ Kim Knott quotes Belden C. Lane's *Landscapes of the Sacred*, referring to 'God's elusive presence'. Knott, *The Location of Religion*, p.96.

¹⁸ In *A Christian Theology of Place*, John Inge argues that the Reformation 'separated theology from the material', in contrast with the medieval period where locality was a vital component of world view

religious observance. The tenets of Judaism stress that sanctity is derived in the *minyan* – the quorum of men gathered for prayer, whether in a house, shop front or place of worship; and in the observance of the Sabbath and the holy days of the Jewish calendar, therefore de-emphasising the building as the locus of spirituality.¹⁹

A contemporary Western understanding of sacred place is complicated by many factors, including the specific relationship between church and state, heritage and preservation practices, and consecration decrees. In undertaking a detailed analysis of religious buildings that have been ‘adaptively used’ as museums, galleries and cultural centres, it is important to first ask how this modification or shared use impacts their status and significance as places of worship.²⁰ As spiritual anchors, frequently located at the geographical, visual and historic centre of towns and villages, religious buildings have provided their immediate communities with an intimate, unambiguous sense of place. As Dr. Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage noted, “They are also of course frequently the most beautiful buildings in their locality displaying craftsmanship in wood, stone and metalwork of a

and helped to sustain a ‘spiritual geography’. Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, (Burlington, VT and Hampshire: Ashgate Press, 2003), p.88.

¹⁹ I shall discuss in greater detail from page 55.

²⁰ By status I am referring to both the designated status of historic preservation trusts, such as English Heritage and the National Trust in Britain, or the Landmark Building’s Trust in the U.S.A., and also their status in the public imagination, as icons of memory. For example, historian Hasia R Diner refers to the Eldridge Street synagogue on New York’s Lower East Side as a building that ‘always was sacred [...] The restoration gave it a double sanctity, one by virtue of its dedication in 1887, the other by virtue of American Jewry’s need to have a physical embodiment of its founding narrative. The sacred became more, and differently, sacred’. To be discussed in greater length in Case study II. See Hasia R. Diner’s *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America*, (Princeton, NJ & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000) p.114

Rebecca Faulkner

‘For Whom was Built This Special Shell?’ Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums, galleries and cultural centres

Part I Chapter 1 (*Re*)placing the Sacred

quality that few secular buildings can aspire to. Their artistic worth is almost as important as their social and historic value".²¹ This notion of beauty, centrality and permanence can be contrasted with attitudes to the function of religious buildings in the modern era. Is it still possible to define what these buildings really mean today, and to whom? In spite of a divergence of opinion, it can be asserted that sacred places - churches, synagogues, cathedrals and mosques - whether providing the seat of an encounter with God, functioning as the locus of parish life, an historic architectural landmark or a Larkin-esque 'special shell'; remain pivotal places within communities, distinctive 'nodes'²² that enable many of us to navigate the environments in which we live, albeit for a divergence of reasons.

In this opening chapter I will argue that what I term 'shared use' (where a congregation shares the building with a secular organisation) and 'adaptive' sites (a deconsecrated religious building operating as a museum, for example) can effectively reactivate religious buildings as signifiers of multcentred, secular urban life. As the prelude to a detailed analysis of three adaptive or shared use religious buildings in three different continents, this chapter will draw on the arguments of aforementioned phenomenologists and urban geographers, as well as offering a

²¹ Excerpted from a speech by Dr Simon Thurley, Chief Exec of English Heritage, on 11 September 2003 at the annual conference of Diocesan Advisory Committees (DACs), and reprinted in the Ecclesiological Society's report 'How do we keep our parish churches?' printed in 2004.

²² In the 1960's and 1970's, urban planner Kevin Lynch suggested we could understand the complex social geography of cities by encouraging people to create 'mental maps' identifying their 'nodes', 'boundaries' and 'districts'. These cognitive maps provided striking images of inequality in the individual experience of navigating the city. See Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1960). Historian Bill Fishman produced a striking 'mental map' of his personal East End, when I interviewed him in December 2005.

cross-disciplinary examination of place and in its importance in Western cultural thought by close reading of contemporary critical theory, philosophical inquiry, and psychological and theological writing on place. In presenting a case for the adaptive use of religious buildings as locations for art and cultural practice and the transmission of multcentred values it will be crucial for me to ask how important the bricks and mortar of these buildings are, and to whom. Is it the buildings themselves that are of primary significance, or do they function as symbolic reminders of lost places; markers of a community that (often) no longer exists. Can a religious building ever be completely de-sanctified, recognised and adapted as anything other than a built signifier of sacred rituals and traditions? Can buildings such as these function successfully as secular museums, and if so, should they still be regarded as holy places? What is the distinction between a church and a museum, or are museums our modern churches? Can such sacred sites hold appeal for a broad (non/multi-religious) audience, once again acting as gathering places within a community? And ultimately, can these buildings be used to cultivate what geographer Doreen Massey refers to as a 'progressive sense of place,'²³ becoming porous, non-static sites free from an essential identity; places defined not only by their internal religious history, but broadened and mediated by the events that continue to occur around and within them?

²³ In her essay 'Power-Geometry and Progressive Sense of Place' (*Mapping the Future: Local Cultures, Global Change*. Eds. Jon Bird et al. London: Routledge, 1993) geographer Doreen Massey argues in support of a 'progressive' understanding of place and identifies place as an 'event' rather than a 'secure ontological thing rooted in notions of the authentic', p.66.

In her essay 'Negotiating conceptions of "sacred space": A case study of religious buildings in Singapore', geographer Lily Kong argues that while individuals relate on a personal level to sacred places, the state invests a different set of material concerns in its treatment of religious buildings. She writes:

'The state takes a functionalist approach to religious places setting aside sites for churches, temples and mosques as they would for housing, schools, public recreational facilities [...] At the same time the state periodically demolishes and relocates religious buildings to make way for public projects, a reflection of how pragmatism, efficiency and orderliness are emphasised over other values, such as the sacred meanings which adherents invest in religious places'.²⁴

Britain, North America and South Africa, the three countries under discussion in this thesis, all present differing examples of the relationship between church and state.

While the United Kingdom has a constitutional recognition of an official state religion, the United States has a separation of church and state, codified in the First Amendment. Prior to the establishment of a new constitution in post-apartheid South Africa in 1994, the country was proclaimed a 'Christian state'. The new South African constitution is considered one of the most progressive in the world, guaranteeing freedom of religion, belief and opinion; permitting religious observances in state and state-aided educational institutions; permitting the State to subsidize parochial schools, and prohibiting discrimination based on, for example, gender, race and sexual orientation by the State and by non-State organizations,

²⁴ Lily Kong, 'Negotiating conceptions of 'sacred space': A case study of religious buildings in Singapore', (*Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp.342-358, 1993) p. 346.

including religious institutions.²⁵ The specific relationship of the church to the state in each of the three case studies presented here, has a significant bearing on how religious buildings are kept, cared for, funded and regarded as places of significance.

As this thesis will demonstrate, attachment to place - homes, neighbourhoods, religious buildings or landscapes - has been explored across a range of disciplines spanning cultural geography, anthropology and environmental psychology. Place attachment theory²⁶ posits that human responses to place and mourning for 'lost' places are akin to a child's object relations (the attachment to and process of separation from her/his mother).²⁷ We are reminded in David M. Hummon's essay 'Community Attachment' that places can range in scale and significance, from the smallest object, to the largest geographic region; and a 'sense of place' refers to ones' 'subjective perceptions of environments'.²⁸ Recent writing on topophilia, or 'place-love'²⁹ and 'place-memory'³⁰ illustrates the human capacity to connect with the built environment and thus with oneself. By contrast, contemporary examples of topocide – the deliberate annihilation of place - explore what geographer Douglas

²⁵ See the South African government's constitutional documents, available at <http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/index.htm>

²⁶ See *Place Attachment*, Irwin Altman & Setha M. Low eds (New York: Plenum Publishing, 1992.)

²⁷ Louise Chawla's 'Childhood Place Attachments' in *Place Attachment*, Irwin Altman & Setha M. Low eds (New York: Plenum Publishing, 1992) p194.

²⁸ In David M. Hummon's 'Community Attachment' in *Place Attachment*, p.87

²⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (Minneapolis, MN & London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1977.)

³⁰ See Hasia R. Diner's *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America*. Princeton, (NJ & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: The University of California Press, 1998.)

Porteous describes as 'deleterious effects on impacted social groups [that] can readily lead to the destruction of places ranging in size from a home or a neighbourhood to a village or a small town'.³¹ For Bachelard, place is everything, providing the individual with an opportunity for intimate self-exploration, or 'topoanalysis', by examining ones' own personal history through localised places of significance.³² And yet 'place' and 'home' as universal concepts are problematised by race, class and gender. Where these homes/places of importance are located is of enormous significance. For many people living in cramped, congested, homogenised urban centres, a sense of place and one's relationship to it is contested, non-linear and complex, bound up with what David Harvey refers to as 'the flow of capital determining how the individual mediates her/his environment'.³³ A yearning for a diversity of places beyond what Casey suggests is 'the overwhelming architectural and commercial uniformity of many cities'³⁴ cannot simply be attributed to reactionary impulses or nostalgia³⁵. Everything that is lost in the erosion of place – 'identity, character, nuance, history'³⁶, to quote Casey, is actively sought in the spaces that replace it. The need to recreate place can be witnessed in numerous instances in a variety of locales throughout history, from the destruction of the huge

³¹ I will explore the phenomenon of topocide in my case study concerning District Six in Cape Town, South Africa. See 'Topocide: The Annihilation of place' by Douglas Porteous, from *Qualitative Methods in Human Geography* edited by John Eyles & David M. Smith, ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 1988) pp75-6.

³² Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969).

³³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) p.108.

³⁴ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p.xiii.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

swathes of the south Bronx at the hands of city planner Robert Moses in the 1960s, to the erasure of District Six in Cape Town during the apartheid era.³⁷

Modernity & Place

‘Modernity is cut off from the past and continuously hurtling forward at such a dizzying pace that it cannot take root, that it merely survives from one day to the next: it is unable to return to its’ beginnings and thus recover its powers of renewal’.³⁸

Jürgen Habermas defined modernity as ‘the epochal new beginning that marked the modern world’s break with the world of the Christian Middle Ages and antiquity [that] is repeated, as it were, in every present moment that brings forth something new. The present perpetuates the break with the past in the form of a continual renewal’.³⁹ Modernity, with its origins in the Renaissance and the emergence of modern science, brought with it the ‘discovery of ‘truths’ and ‘facts’, or rather claims for the possibility of objective truths about the world and ‘Man’s’ place in it’.⁴⁰

Industrialisation and the advent of modernism (both the modernism of art and culture and the modernisation of the urban environment and economics) throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a tremendous impact on how place, specifically sacred place, was experienced, written about and lived in

³⁷ Both examples will be discussed at greater length in Case Studies 2 and 3, respectively.

³⁸ From *Alternating Current*, Octavio Paz, translated from the Spanish by Helen Lane (New York: Viking, 1973) p.161-2.

³⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism*, (Cambridge, Polity) 1989, p.48.

⁴⁰ Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-modern world*, (London & New York: Routledge) 1992, p.7.

Western societies. Modern industrialised nations' 'rationalisation of space' (Le Corbusier referred to the 'taking possession of space' as 'the first proof of existence',⁴¹) purported a radically different experience of the urban environment, and the new technologies of the machine age generated a built style which favoured pure geometrical forms and introduced materials such as iron, glass and steel, rejecting the decorative motifs of classical architecture and rendering traditional design obsolete⁴². By prizing the dynamism of a thriving economy that could 'endlessly create the world anew',⁴³ the modern nation state encapsulated the freedoms of urban life with its grand architectural visions, while simultaneously redefining places as sites where power was exerted. Modern architectural ideals, argues historian William Curtis, grew out of

'laissez-faire economic development, technological pragmatism and chaotic urbanisation, [...] and throughout the late 18th and the early decades of the 19th century, cities as diverse as Paris, Vienna, London, New York and Chicago were expanded and mobilised by new railway networks while simultaneously structured and modified by city grids in North America and the sweeping vision of Baron Georges Haussmann in Paris'.⁴⁴

These new found freedoms in design and planning emboldened architects to dream of 'vast open spaces, cheap and flexible construction systems, and incredibly light

⁴¹ From Le Corbusier's 'Ineffable Space' in *Architecture Culture: 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology* by Joan Ockman with Edward Eigen, Eds., (New York: Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, 1993) p. 66.

⁴² William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd. 1982) p.34.

⁴³ From *'All that is solid melts into air': The Experience of Modernity* by Marshall Berman, (London, New York: Verso, 1983) p.288.

⁴⁴ Curtis, *Architecture since 1900*, p.34.

structures housing enormous numbers of people'.⁴⁵ Modernists wanted to 'break with the messy dirty polluting nineteenth century industrial city' and create a 'new universal space'.⁴⁶ However, state power exerted by the development of the modern city was felt both in the built environment – pushing the poor elsewhere, and also in the daily lives of the working classes, enslaved to the machine that was bringing growth, light and greenery to the very urban environment that was ejecting them.⁴⁷ In his book *Recombinant Urbanism: Conceptual Modeling in Architecture, Urban Design, and City Theory*, urban designer Grahame Shane argues that despite the emphasis on freedom and universality, the utopian modernist aesthetic promised by Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, among others, was distinctly at odds with the 'grim reality of design [...] manifest in countless, utilitarian, inner-city urban renewal projects.'⁴⁸

The mid-to-late twentieth century can thus be characterised as a period of fierce antagonism between the modernist doctrine of Le Corbusier, Gropius, et al. and later in the century, Robert Moses, all of whom believed that planning and technological advancements could combat all human ills, (creating a 'heaven on earth' through mass-production methods, vast highway expansion and high-rise housing blocks) and those who resisted (and on occasion, prevented) the forward march of urban

⁴⁵ David Graham Shane, *Recombinant Urbanism: Conceptual Modeling in Architecture, Urban Design, and City Theory*, (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2005) p.110.

⁴⁶ Shane, *Recombinant Urbanism*, p.110.

⁴⁷ In my New York case study I will expand on the experience of urban life for the working poor at the turn of the 19th century.

⁴⁸ Shane, *Recombinant Urbanism*, p.111.

economic modernity in all its forms; Jane Jacobs in New York,⁴⁹ Dan Cruikshank in Spitalfields, and the residents of District Six and many other communities like it, in South Africa. For architectural critic Reyner Banham, writing in the 1960s, the ‘fixed top-down canon’ of these formal architectural ‘devices’ revealed the ‘frozen nature of Modernist design approach’.⁵⁰

Sacred ‘heterotopias’

In Michel Foucault’s 1967 essay ‘Des espaces autres’ (‘Of other spaces’) he refers to modernity as the ‘epoch of space not time’,⁵¹ arguing that contemporary space has not yet lost its ‘sacred characteristics’ while our lives are still governed by ‘unrelenting opposites’ (public/private space, family/social space, cultural/utilitarian space, etc. with the sacred falling just outside these binaries.⁵²) Instances where these uniform spaces are ruptured, or subverted by what he termed ‘heterotopias’, (in contrast with utopias, which he defined as ‘sites with no real place’) these ‘other places’ stand apart by virtue of their disparate existence within reality: cemeteries, or state controlled hospitals and prisons, for example, or ‘places of crisis’, (ritual baths, or *mikvahs*) representing arrangements that are ‘other’ within society, and ultimately standing as ‘a contestation of the space in which we live’. Foucault argued that every heterotopia is different from the places around it, but is nevertheless

⁴⁹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York & Toronto: Vintage Books, Random House, 1963). See Case Study 1 for further background on Jane Jacobs.

⁵⁰ As quoted in Shane, *Recombinant Urbanism*, p.111.

⁵¹ Michel Foucault’s ‘Of other spaces’ (‘Des espaces autres’) [1967], (*Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986) pp.22-27.

⁵² Ibid.

locatable within a familiar geographic reality.⁵³ While not strictly heterotopic spaces, it could be argued that many urban religious buildings that are reused for secular purposes are dislocated from their previously defined 'place function', and are operating as porous, non-static 'countersites'. Edward Casey interrogates Foucault's 'heterotopology' by arguing that in order to 'make a difference in the social fabric, a heterotopia must possess a focus for the application of force. This focus is found in the marginal location of the heterotopia itself'.⁵⁴ Can the adaptive use of religious buildings, even the centrally located parish church, transform the proscriptive space of religious encounter into a place of possible multiplicities? I will discuss this notion at length in my first case study, 19 Princelet Street, where I posit that the blurring of religious and domestic zones within the built fabric of a nineteenth century house and synagogue is an example of transformation within and around a previously static sacred space.



The exterior (left) and interior (right) of Le Corbusier's chapel Notre Dame du Haut at Ronchamp, France, completed in 1955. The chapel represents a departure from his earlier principles of standardisation and machine aesthetic, and is a unique, sculptural response to the physical surroundings.

⁵³ Foucault, 'Of other spaces', 1967, p.24.

⁵⁴ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p.300.

Modernism's remains

While the design and fabrication of civic, industrial and commercial buildings during the modern period in Britain drew upon the height, scale and grandeur of medieval churches and Gothic cathedral,⁵⁵ (George Gilbert Scott, for example, who designed churches, hospitals and railway stations in like manner) twentieth century architects and planners rejected what was perceived as the conservative neo-Gothic style in a bid to look forward, not back. Representing the functional, abstracted, and notably secular space of modernity had an impact on the design of religious buildings, as was noted by Nikolaus Pevsner, champion of the Gropius aesthetic, who wrote in 1936:

‘[Yet] the character of the new buildings is entirely un-Gothic, anti-Gothic. While in the thirteenth century all lines, functional though they were, served the one artistic purpose of pointing heavenwards to a goal beyond this world, and walls were made translucent to carry the transcendental magic of saintly figures rendered in coloured glass, the glass walls are now clear and without mystery, the steel frame is hard, and its expression discourages all other-worldly speculation. It is the creative energy of this world in which we live and work and which we want to master, a world of science and technology, of speed and danger, of hard struggles and no personal security, that is glorified in Gropius’s architecture’.⁵⁶

However, as Kim Knott argues in *The Location of Religion*, modernist architects and planners were unable to eradicate ‘traces of an earlier Christian order from the landscape entirely; rather they built around and between its remains’.⁵⁷ The changing condition of Western societies during the late-modern period impacted

⁵⁵ See Peter Ackroyd’s comments on the profusion of Gothic architecture in nineteenth century London, in *London: The Biography*, London: Vintage, 2000, pp. 580-81, and also Nikolaus Pevsner’s *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, revised edition 1960, p.19 on George Gilbert Scott and the revival of Gothic architecture.

⁵⁶ Pevsner, 1960, pp.216-17.

⁵⁷ Knott, *The Location of Religion*, 2005, p.46.

how places associated with religion were experienced and understood. The reasons for this shift are manifold: One cannot expect the needs of congregation to be the same today as they were a hundred years ago.

A twenty-first century experience of space, religious or otherwise, connotes many things: the expanse and freedoms of virtual space - unsentimentalised and mobile; the possibilities born of a fragmented, deterritorialised subjectivity; and the homogenisation of a 'global village', which creates, according to Michael Northcott a 'depthless, decentred world in which the human identification with locality, place and neighbourhood is often fractured and undermined'⁵⁸. 'Place, roots and authenticity are hardly the favoured characteristics of postmodern theorists',⁵⁹ writes Tim Cresswell in his essay 'Theorizing Place', and for good reason: If fixity is an illusion in the theoretical worlds of Deleuze and Guattari⁶⁰ and Paul Virilio,⁶¹ then the landscapes of mobility open to 'nomads' and travelers pursuing flight and speed and traversing borders both virtual and real are preferable to a 'sedentarist

⁵⁸ In 'A Place of Our Own?' by Michael Northcott, in Peter Segewick (ed.) *God in the City: Essays and Reflections from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Urban Theology Group*, (London: Monwbray), 1995, p.122.

⁵⁹ Cresswell, Tim, 'Theorizing Place', p. 15.

⁶⁰ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Nomadology: The War Machine*, (New York: Semiotext(e) 1986.)

⁶¹ See Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (New York: Columbia University Press Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1986.)

metaphysics'⁶² which seeks to 'locate people and identities in particular spaces and within particular boundaries'.⁶³

Theorist Marc Augé, in a nod to Foucault's 'other spaces', identifies 'non-places' as the mobile spaces of these travellers, and imbues the ephemeral, temporary space of airport lounges and shopping malls with a significance usually reserved for icons of a more anchored society (museums, cathedrals etc.)⁶⁴ In spite of what can be identified as a contemporary Western theoretical privileging of space over place, routes over roots; Cresswell determines that this "'nomadic metaphysics'" has consigned the idea of place to a marginal position in the theorisation of society and culture [...] replacing a longstanding distaste for, and suspicion of mobility, with an overly general celebration and romanticisation [of it]'. By decontextualising and, in many cases, eliminating difference, the mobility trope suggests that we are 'always-already travellers in the same postmodern universe';⁶⁵ that we have similar access to the speed and movement of the virtual age, and more importantly, that we all benefit from its global currency. Cultural theorist Janet Wolff writes:

The problem with terms like 'nomad', 'maps' and 'travel' is that they are not usually located and hence (and purposely) they suggest ungrounded and unbounded movement. But the consequent suggestion of free and equal mobility is itself a deception, since we don't all have the same access to the road'.⁶⁶

⁶² Liisa Malkki, 'National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity Among Scholars and Refugees' (*Cultural Anthropology*, Issue 7.1, 1992.)

⁶³ Cresswell, 'Theorizing Place', p. 15.

⁶⁴ Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, translated by John Howe, (London and New York: Verso, 1995.)

⁶⁵ Cresswell, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Janet Wolff, 'On the road again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism' (*Cultural Studies*, Volume 6, 1992) p.28.

Thus the universalising assumptions bound up in the evocations of 'nomad' ignore the politics of difference in much the same ways as notions of place and home have been used to smooth over difference. It is for these reasons that geographers and philosophers, such as those previously referred to, influenced by the phenomenological school, in particular by the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty,⁶⁷ have, in recent years returned to notions of place and locale as a means of 'formulating a new terminology for the politics of location'.⁶⁸ David Harvey suggests that since the 1970s, urban locales that once had a secure status have found themselves vulnerable:

'Old places have to be devalued, destroyed or redeveloped while new places are created. The cathedral city becomes the heritage centre; the mining community becomes a ghost town...gentrified neighbourhoods arise on the frontiers of capitalist development or out of the ashes of de-industrialised communities. The history of capitalism is punctuated by intense phases of spatial reorganisation'.⁶⁹

Place, asserts Harvey is a 'form of fixed capital which exists in tension with other mobile forms of capital'.⁷⁰ Tim Cresswell writes of Harvey's analysis that 'the tension between the fixed and the mobile produces cycles of place investment and disinvestment which contribute to an unstable process of uneven development across the globe'.⁷¹ In *The Condition of Postmodernity* David Harvey argues that modern western cities have been experiencing 'the threat of time-space

⁶⁷ Martin Heidegger explores the notion of 'the gathered place' as the scene of 'the disclosure of Being', in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row) 1971, p.89.

⁶⁸ Knott, *The Location of Religion*, p.31.

⁶⁹ David Harvey in *Mapping the Future: Local Cultures, Global Change*, p.7.

⁷⁰ Cresswell, p. 15.

⁷¹ Ibid.

compression'⁷² wherein rapid urban growth, displacement of peoples and geographic 'stretching out' of social relations, results in the loss of identity and the acceleration of time, thus eroding the distinctiveness of place.

As a response to Harvey's analysis, theologian John Inge suggests that the impact of 'place erosion' is being felt directly in the decline in church attendance in Britain in the last thirty years and the subsequent neglect and disrepair afflicting church buildings. Contrary to what Inge identifies as the current position adopted by Christian theology⁷³, he argues that religious buildings must *not* simply be viewed as receptacles for worship, that although 'God relates to people in places, the places are not irrelevant to that relationship, but, rather, are integral to divine human encounter'.⁷⁴ For Inge, the function of holy places is to root believers in their faith and to remind them of the presence of God *everywhere*. Deepening this line of enquiry, professor of theology Philip Sheldrake posits that 'a [Christian] theology of place must maintain a balance between God's revelation *in the particular* and a sense that God's place ultimately escapes the boundaries of the localised' (emphasis mine).⁷⁵ By arguing in support of place as sacred by association, but resisting what he refers to as the 'conservationist movement's misled efforts to preserve churches

⁷² David Harvey *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) p.41.

⁷³ Inge claims that contemporary theology is predominantly immersed in the 'norms of modernity' – with holy places subordinated to ethics. *A Christian Theology of Place*, pp. 28-32.

⁷⁴ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, p. 58.

⁷⁵ Philip Sheldrake *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity*, (The Hulsean Lectures, 2000, London: SCM Press) 2001, p.30.

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as museums,⁷⁶ John Inge reveals a necessary willingness to see the church adapted and reordered to reflect the contemporary needs of the Christian community.

Today, in what has been referred to as ‘post-Christian’ Britain,⁷⁷ the significance of both the urban and the village church is open to reevaluation. The ethnic and racial make-up of Britain’s cities has continued to change since the 1950s, with some of the key alterations taking place in the past ten years, as the result of waves of immigration, urban regeneration and gentrification.⁷⁸ Attendance at churches throughout the UK has declined significantly. Figures from Church of England churches show that regular Sunday attendance has dropped by 40% overall in the last thirty years, when 3.5% of the population (roughly 1.6 million people of all ages) worshipped in an Anglican church on a Sunday.⁷⁹ By 2001 that proportion had declined to 1.9% (940,000 people), suggesting that two thirds of those attending church (61%) are concentrated in just one fifth (21%) of church buildings.⁸⁰ According to the recently published UK 2011 census report, Christianity remained

⁷⁶ Inge refers to this aspect of preservation as ‘idoltrous, attachment to buildings as buildings, rather than buildings as sign and sacrament’. Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, p. 122. This stance is not dissimilar to Kim Knott’s critique of aspects of English Heritage’s practice of listing and grading of buildings of historical significance. Deeming many of these practices potentially conservative and inhibiting, she argues they ‘continues to favour the survival of the public face of historic Christianity, thus shackling local church communities with expensive programmes of conservation and sometimes curbing innovative spatial renewal’. Knott, 2005, p.47

⁷⁷ Roy Strong, *A Little History of the English Country Church*, (London: Vintage Books, 2007,) p.7

⁷⁸ The 2011 UK census findings support this statement, asking people what year they arrived in the UK. It shows that of the 13% (7.5 million) of residents in England and Wales in 2011 who were not born in the UK, just over half (3.8 million) arrived between 2001 and 2011. Source: UK census, 2011, Office of National Statistics.

⁷⁹ From *How do we keep our Parish churches?* A report by The Ecclesiological Society written by Trevor Cooper (reproduced with kind permission of The Ecclesiological Society, London: 2004) p.18.

⁸⁰ *Ibid* page 23.

the largest religious group; 59% (33.2 million). However, this is down 13 percentage points since 2001 when 72% (37.3 million) identified themselves as Christians.⁸¹

As I will explore later in this chapter, this is significant for many reasons, and relevant to my research in that it links the decline in regular attendance with the large number of underused churches across the UK and thus the rise in cases of adaptive building use. If a small number of churches now serve the majority of churchgoers, and the demand for alternate spaces for local use increases, particularly in urban centres, then many of the underused churches across the UK have the potential to contribute and appeal to communities beyond their immediate constituents.

Auras and traces

In *A Little History of the English Country Church*, Roy Strong describes the extraordinary hold that parish churches have on the English imagination: 'People seem instinctively attracted to the crumbling stone and lichen, to the overgrown churchyards and to the topsy-turvy of ancient headstones'.⁸² He is correct in his estimation: people *do* like to visit old churches and their ruins, in much the same way as they visit historic houses, to roam the grounds, admire the architecture and horticulture, perhaps pause to observe religious artefacts and a consider the social history and ritual practice that they may not be familiar with. Like Inge, Strong

⁸¹ It is also interesting to note that Christians are the only group to have experienced a decrease in numbers between 2001 and 2011 despite population growth. The second largest response category in 2011 was "no religion". Taken from the 2011 UK census report, Office of National Statistics.

⁸² Roy Strong, *A Little History of the English Country Church*, (London: Vintage Books, 2007,) p.7.

argues forcefully that these churches are not museums: 'As long as one Christian remains to say a prayer within its walls, a church is not a museum'.⁸³ However, Strong does concede that the religious landscape of England has changed. The experience of church-going is not as central to people's lives as it once was. And thus, for many occasional visitors of the Larkin variety, a church is akin to a museum; a 'thin place',⁸⁴ provoking similar polarities in response: intimacy and distance; concentration and distraction. Both contain elements of the material/tangible as well as the ephemeral/auratic. By comparison, museums are often referred to using religious terminology, as 'cathedrals of culture, where citizens enact civic rituals at shrines to art and civilization'.⁸⁵ Do these modern, secular cathedrals, awash with 'spiritual aura',⁸⁶ render the (art) object in question 'unapproachable', and therefore scared?⁸⁷

In his influential 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Walter Benjamin introduced the concept of authenticity in relation to the mechanical visual reproduction of art works. Arguing that 'even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and

⁸³ Strong, 2007, p.10.

⁸⁴ Travel writer Eric Weiner invokes Celtic myth in his exploration of pilgrimages to 'thin places', "locales where the distance between heaven and earth collapses". Weiner argues that thin places are not limited to religious and spiritual sites, including certain parks and bookstores to his subjective rosta. (Eric Weiner 'Where heaven and earth come closer', *New York Times* Travel Section, 11 March 2012.)

⁸⁵ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 1998, p.138.

⁸⁶ Chris Arthur, 'Exhibiting the Sacred' in *Godly Things: Museums, Objects & Religion*, edited by Crispin Paine, (London & New York, Leicester University Press, 2000) p.13.

⁸⁷For a more detailed exploration of this concept, see Graeme Gilloch's *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations*, (Malden, MA & Cambridge: Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002) p.184.

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space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be',⁸⁸ Benjamin posited that the reproduction emancipates and alters the original, causing the 'aura of the original to wither in the age of technological reproducibility'.⁸⁹ Benjamin saw this withering of the aura as symptomatic of a fundamental shift occurring beyond the realm of 'art' and attributable to the modern condition.⁹⁰ In her recent essay '*Benjamin's Aura*', critical theorist Miriam Bratu Hansen dissects Benjamin's fascination with the 'auratic quality' that manifests itself in the art object: 'the unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be'.⁹¹ Although skeptical of its mystical overtones and elusiveness, Benjamin returned repeatedly to the concept of aura throughout his writing ('A Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', 1936, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', 1939.) In his unfinished work *The Arcades Project*, he discusses the motif of 'contemplative distance' with regards to aura.⁹² Many argue that sacred sites retain a spiritual aura long after they have been abandoned - neglect and ruination imbuing the buildings with a powerful auratic value.⁹³ De-sanctified religious buildings (a synagogue with no torah scrolls in the Ark; a Methodist church with no active congregation) are still considered sacred by virtue of their history and significance for a community. Yet religious law often impedes or rules against the practice of using sacred buildings for secular purposes.

⁸⁸ Walter Benjamin *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p.220).

⁸⁹ Bratu Hansen, Miriam, 'Benjamin's Aura', (*Critical Inquiry*, Issue 34, Winter 2008) p.15.

⁹⁰ Walter Benjamin, 1968, p.220.

⁹¹ Bratu Hansen, 'Benjamin's Aura', p.15.

⁹² Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (Rolf Tiedemann ed. Cambridge, USA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. p.314, 2002).

⁹³ See Christopher Woodward's *In Ruins* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2001) for a discussion of the Western fascination with ruins.

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Christianity and Place

‘Divine places, without gods, with no gods, are spread out everywhere around us, open and offered to our coming, to our going, to our presence, given up or promised to our visitation, to frequentation by those who are not men either, but who are there, in these places: ourselves, alone, out to meet that which we are not, and which the gods for their part have never been...other tracks, other ways, other places for all who are there’.⁹⁴

Christianity is a religion of place, and beyond place: ‘of *this, here and now*, and at the same time more than ‘this’, a pointer to elsewhere’.⁹⁵ The status of sacred places in the Christian faith has always been controversial, with a divergence of views pre-dating the Reformation. Place in this context can be interpreted as referencing the ‘holy cities’ (Jerusalem and Rome,⁹⁶) the built history of worship (church buildings, cathedrals and shrines) and the Body of Christ, in the form of Eucharist,⁹⁷ which, for many Christians is evidence of God’s direct intervention – the ultimate designation of ‘place’ existing everywhere. For Christians, the relationship of the individual to holy places and ‘the holy city’ (Jerusalem) raises major theological and spiritual questions. What, for example, is the role of places associated with Christ? Are they locations of historical significance alone, or do they have a deeper function, an ‘inherent quality that makes them holy’?⁹⁸ The intrinsic holiness of place/object has a long history in

⁹⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. P. Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 149.

⁹⁵ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 2001, p.30.

⁹⁶ Catholics would consider Rome as the centre of faith, with the Pope as God’s representative of Christ.

⁹⁷ The Eucharist is one of the Christian sacraments commemorating the action of Jesus at his Last Supper with his disciples, when he gave them bread saying, 'This is my body', and wine saying, 'This is my blood'." From Matthew 26:26-8 in the New Testament.

⁹⁸ Locations of fundamental importance to Christians include the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (the empty tomb) and the ‘Upper Room’ - or the room of the Last Supper, where it is

the Pagan tradition, where great importance was given to living on the threshold or boundary between the real and spiritual worlds. Once a locale has been determined, what is the function of sacred objects and places? In his 2006 text *House of God: House of the People of God*, Robin Gibbons identifies four functions of sacred space: a centre or reference point; a meeting place ('an interchange between the divine and the human'⁹⁹) a microcosm; (or 'imperfect copy of the heavens'¹⁰⁰) and 'an imminent transcendent presence'.¹⁰¹ This notion of multiple, elusive meanings; of transformation and conversion, is witnessed in what Michel de Certeau terms the 'event' of Jesus Christ.¹⁰² The particularities of this 'event', postulates de Certeau, 'permits the placed nature [...] of all subsequent discipleship'.¹⁰³ And yet, as Sheldrake argues, Jesus' 'place' is also marked by absence, the empty tomb being the obvious example (see footnote 94 at the bottom of this page). 'He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said...indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee'.¹⁰⁴ Therefore this discipleship demands *a place, and an elsewhere*; fixity and movement.

believed Christ shared his last meal with his disciples. (Every time Christians gather to share the Eucharist they are in fact re-creating the events which took place in 'Upper Room'.) See P.W.L. Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places? Christian Attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the Fourth Century*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) p.viii, for more.

⁹⁹ Robin Gibbons, *House of God: House of the People of God: A Study of Christian Liturgical Space* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006) pp.4-6.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² In 'How is Christianity Thinkable Today?' in Graham Ward (ed.), *The Postmodern God*, (Oxford: Blackwell) 1997, p.142.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 28:6-7, *The New Testament: the Authorised King James Version*, (London: Everyman Library Classics) 1998.

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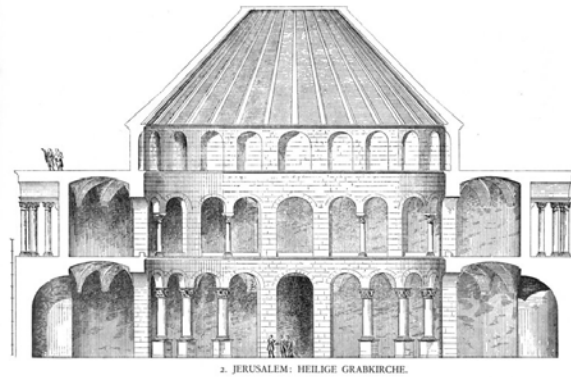
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During the first and second centuries, the focus on the temple as sacred object was replaced, for Christians, by the person (Christ) as sacred. This stood in marked contrast with the dominant Pagan tradition, which emphasised the construction of shrines and identified gathering places for prayer, and also to Judaic practice, which invested ultimate sacredness in the Temple. Persecuted by the Romans until 312, Christians worshipped in secret, in private homes (or 'house churches'). As no one building was the locus of worship during the Apostolic age,¹⁰⁵ the significant relationship was that of the community, where Christ was ever-present. Unlike early Judaic practice, the division of life into sacred and profane¹⁰⁶ did not exist in early Christian worship, as it was 'Christ the person' which was to replace the Temple as the focus of worship.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ The Apostolic age refers to the period of the Twelve Apostles, dating from the crucifixion of Jesus and the Great Commission in Jerusalem until the death of John the Apostle (c. 115) in Anatolia. From conversations with Revd. Alan Walker.

¹⁰⁶ *Pro fanum* meaning 'before' or outside the Temple.

¹⁰⁷ From conversations with Revd. Alan Walker.



The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem. Image taken from [Georg Dehio/Gustav von Bezold: Kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes](#). Stuttgart: Verlag der Cotta'schen Buchhandlung 1887-1901, Plate No. 9, from [wikimedia.com](#)

The Middle Ages (commonly dated from the fifth to the sixteenth centuries) saw a change in the identification of the church (building) and thus required that Christianity deal with the meaning of place. Consecration rites,¹⁰⁸ devised in the eighth and ninth centuries to set apart land or buildings for God to bless and thus keep them safe, were a reaction to the 'medieval habit of looking for the devil everywhere in nature'.¹⁰⁹ The presence of relics of the Martyrs¹¹⁰ in order for a building to be consecrated often meant that the land surrounding the church (significantly the burial site) was also consecrated, and thus not meant for secular usage. As Europe became rapidly Christianised and the church was legalised, so sacred spaces were conceived of as 'havens of security'. Pagan buildings were converted into Christian churches, an adaptive reuse in order to fulfill a 'missionary' view of the continuity of sacred place.¹¹¹ New churches built under Constantine were

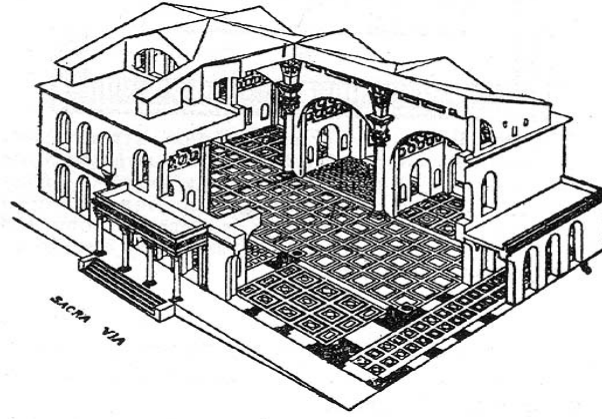
¹⁰⁸ Also known in Catholicism as 'dedication' rites.

¹⁰⁹ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, p.38.

¹¹⁰ Those killed for their Christian beliefs, like Christ.

¹¹¹ Thanks to the Rev. Alan Walker for explicating much of this for me.

designed on the Basilica model¹¹² (see below) taking on the attributes of a Pagan temple and performing a civic and public role.



A reconstruction drawing of Basilica Maxentius, Rome from wikimedia.com

Medieval Christians, no longer a minority in pagan society, identified the church building as the central gathering place within the town or village; the primary location for the community to meet for worship, business or leisure. The place of the church was beginning to be considered in sacred terms through a relational understanding of the 'sacramental encounter' that occurred between a person and God in a particular place.¹¹³ The divine, 'previously considered coextensive with

¹¹² Literally meaning 'the hall of the king', in architectural terms 'basilica' originally signified a secular public building in ancient Rome, with 'basilica' deriving from *basileus*, an Oriental monarch in the Greek tradition after the conquests of Alexander the Great. The basilica was originally the throne room, typically a large rectangular structure which boasted a vaulted ceiling, an open hall and a raised platform at one or both ends, in which the *basileus* showed himself to the people. The line of pillars down the building drew the eye to the end which the people faced, and where the apse-like structure focused attention on those who stood in front of it. The Bishop would have taken the place of the *basileus* in the Christian basilicas. See Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, p. 116.

¹¹³ Inge, p.87

infinite space', writes Casey, 'is now *spaced out into places*, the very places we inhabit in daily life'.¹¹⁴

As interpreted by theologians, the sacramental encounter established both a sense of sacred time (in the form of the Sabbath) and sacred space. This space - the church building – was increasingly rooted to its particular locale, blessed by the sacramental encounters that occurred within it and consecrated to the land it stood on, which, in turn, connected it to a particular geography. The notion of the parish church was thereby fixed in relation to the local village or the particular place in which it was built. According to the aforementioned 2004 report commissioned by The Ecclesiological Society, 'the location of about 6,000 churches had been fixed within one hundred and fifty years of the Norman Conquest of 1066. A further 4,000 (approx) had their site chosen over the next three hundred years'¹¹⁵. During this period the church would have had so many differing functions, including non-ecclesiastical, for in many villages and towns it would have been the only large meeting place of its kind. John Inge suggests that these 'centres of specific significance, the meanings of which may be rooted in the physical setting or objects and activities, [...] are a property of human intentions and experiences'.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Casey, 1997, 341, (emphasis Casey).

¹¹⁵ From *How do we keep our Parish churches?* A report by The Ecclesiological Society written by Trevor Cooper (reproduced with kind permission of The Ecclesiological Society, London: 2004) p.23.

¹¹⁶ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, p. 79.



The Abbey at Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, during the floods of July, 2007, illustrating its central location within the parish community. The Abbey was consecrated in 1121 and built on the highest ground in the heart of the parish. During the floods in 2007 which killed three people, injured many and left hundreds homeless, the church was 'a beacon for local people escaping rising water levels'.¹¹⁷

Until the Reformation, church buildings were highly valued and were given grand architectural expression in the Baroque and Gothic Revival periods. The division of the church, post-Reformation, resulted in widely contrasting approaches toward the buildings and their usage. The Catholic attitude, inherited from the Middle Ages, viewed the church as the 'house of God'. This stood in marked contrast with non-conformist beliefs, which saw the church building as a necessary provision for worship, essentially a preaching house and gathering place, but did not believe that sacredness could be contained in the material. In spite of these contrasts in attitude and usage, as late as 1851 it was said that people would not walk more than a mile to church, which continued to greatly influence the pattern of building in rural areas¹¹⁸. The interior structuring of church buildings, which began post-Reformation,

¹¹⁷ (See <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=42537>)

¹¹⁸ From *How do we keep our Parish churches?* 2004, p.23.

was galvanized in the Victorian age, with pews fixed in place and the alter conceived of as a separate, holy place.

In *The Secular Use of Church Buildings*, J. G. Davies reminds us that it has been common practice since the reformation for the church to host a variety of secular events, from the performance of music (most notably opera) and plays, to the sale of goods.¹¹⁹ Understanding the ways in which churches in England have been and are used, Davies argues, will enable us to discuss the relationship of the sacred to the secular, and thus 'clarify our interpretation of the unity or disunity of the two'.¹²⁰

Secular use of sacred place

According to the 2011 National Churches Trust survey, the UK's 47,000 Christian places of worship (of which about 16,000 are Church of England buildings) represent 'one of the largest networks of actual and potential community buildings'.¹²¹ These numbers compare favourably with the 12,000 post offices, 10,000 village halls, 52,000 pubs and 4,500 social clubs around the country.¹²² Like post offices and Town Halls, churches are facing continued pressures, with 1,000 Methodist churches closing between 1990 and 2000,¹²³ and the Church of England shutting 250 buildings

¹¹⁹ See chapter 6 'Secular Activities in Post-Reformation Churches' in J.G. Davies' *The Secular Use of Church Buildings*, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1968) pp.154-204.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p.vii.

¹²¹ The National Churches Trust survey, *How the United Kingdom's church buildings are maintained, funded, managed and contribute to their wider communities'*, published by the National Churches Trust, 2011, p.37.

¹²² Data from the National Churches Trust survey, part IV. Community Activities, pp. 37-8.

¹²³ From *How do we keep our Parish churches? A report by The Ecclesiological Society* written by Trevor Cooper (reproduced with kind permission of The Ecclesiological Society, London: 2004) p16.

in a similar period.¹²⁴ The findings of the survey concluded that 8 in every 10 Anglican church buildings in the UK is currently being used for a variety of purposes other than regular worship.¹²⁵ The survey concluded that the more urban the church building, the more likely it is to promote secular activities; the more rural the church, the more likely that the non-prayer based activities will be organized by the congregation. In the majority of cases cited, initiatives included leasing out a portion of the church building for continuous non-secular use (childcare facilities, for example), as well as occasional hire by third parties for temporary usage including concerts and events. Public attitudes appear to support the adaptive use of religious buildings: according to The Ecclesiological Society's 2004 survey, 75% of British adults think church buildings 'should be used for activities other than worship'.¹²⁶ The findings report that 'one in six adults (17%) attended a concert or theatrical performance in a place of worship; (in 2003) approximately eight million people, roughly the same number who attend performances in London's West End'.¹²⁷ It is important to note that of the social activity reported in churches throughout the UK, a vast number take place in ancillary spaces such as church halls, and *not in the church building itself*.

¹²⁴ Ibid. Although this is only 2% of buildings, and by comparison, 250 pubs close each year, and 600 rural post offices closed between 2000 and 2002.

¹²⁵ Ibid. Out of 9,000 participants who responded to the survey.

¹²⁶ From *How do we keep our Parish churches?* 2004, p.37.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Judaism and Place

Judaism is frequently presented as a religious culture centred on the text (Torah and Talmud) and the ways in which its deliberations and regulations govern the practices of everyday life. The destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem by the Roman legions of Titus in A.D. 70, (following the reconstruction of the first Temple under Herod the Great beginning in 20 B.C.) and the subsequent dispersal of the Jewish people throughout the Roman Empire gave rise to the creation of the Talmud¹²⁸ as a means of communication and governance throughout the diaspora. According to Mitchell Schwarzer in his essay *'The Architecture of Talmud'*, the Talmud was substituted for the fallen Temple, reproducing its many architectural features in a binding legal code (such as an emphasis on observing thresholds between the realms of sacred and profane,) and was as much a means of identifying sacred time as sacred space. The gradual shift came about as a result of political and financial pressures, and it repositioned the Jewish faith from centralised Temple ritual to individual and congregational worship, study and practice. 'Holiness' could no longer be located in a single, pivotal place but was 'carved into the rhythms of daily life'.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Hebrew for 'instruction' but referring to the Book of Laws drawn up by rabbinical scholars. The 'Babylonian' Talmud or *Talmud Bavli*, was completed in the 6th century A.D., and the process of using it, referring to it and building on it happened gradually, century after century, until it developed an iconic status. This process of growing by accretion is as important to the development of Talmud as the original document. The Babylonian Talmud - generally referred to as 'the Talmud' - is distinct from the 'Jerusalem' Talmud (which was completed in the 4th century in Israel and was written in Aramaic). The Babylonian Talmud became the more commonly used Book of Laws and was first printed in the 16th century in Italy. Thanks to Rabbi David Dunn Bauer for his assistance and explication of Talmudic law.

¹²⁹ Mitchell Schwarzer, 'The Architecture of Talmud', *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, (Vol. 60, No. 4, December 2001), p.475

For Abraham Joshua Heschel, a significant twentieth century Jewish theologian, and a pre-eminent Hasidic rabbi and social activist who emigrated from Nazi-occupied Germany to New York, the notion that God is present in the universe – in space rather than in time, in nature rather than history, suggests God is perceived as a ‘thing not a spirit’.¹³⁰ Heschel, while interested in Jewish mysticism (which, it must be stated, does not adequately represent mainstream Jewish intellectual views), saw in human nature’s reliance on place/thing ‘our blindness to all reality that fails to identify itself as a thing, a matter of fact. This is obvious in our understanding of time, which being thingless and insubstantial, appears to us as if it has not reality’.¹³¹

In his pivotal text *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Heschel presents the Jewish faith as a ‘religion and an architecture of time, aiming at the sanctification of time with the Sabbaths as our great cathedrals [...] and our Holy of Holies is the Day of Atonement’.¹³² This aspect of mystical rabbinic scholarship affirms Judaism, specifically the Hebrew Bible, or *Tanach*, as a religion fundamentally concerned with time rather than space. As Heschel interprets it, in the Bible ‘no thing, no place on earth is holy by itself’.¹³³

‘(The Bible) sees the world in the dimension of time. It pays more attention to generations, to events, than to countries, to things; it is more concerned with history than with geography. To understand the teaching of the Bible one must accept its

¹³⁰ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1951), p. 4.

¹³¹ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, p. 5.

¹³² Heschel, p.8.

¹³³ Heschel, p.80.

premise that time has a meaning for life which is at least equal to that of space; that time has a significance and sovereignty of its own'.¹³⁴

Following the destruction of the second Temple, Jews were no longer able to express themselves or their religious observance through grand architecture but nevertheless retained a vivid memory of it. In spite of Jewish belief in God's incorporeal, infinite nature, the need to possess a permanent, earthly place where they could honour God was crucial. Synagogues were built and their membership grew, but they were not sacred places of worship like the Temple - they were typically small, multi-purpose buildings and had few requirements beyond the need for storage and the reading of sacred texts. With no central authority, congregations faced with aesthetic decisions in synagogue design often incorporated a variety of styles for social and political reasons. These architectural choices reflected the shifting position of the Jewish community within society at large and also the wealth, nationality and level of religious observance of the congregation. Art historian Carol Herselle Krinsky posits that the synagogue can be seen as a 'setting for the Jew's own conflicts over integration and separation'.¹³⁵

In pre-1830s Europe, Jews incorporated folk art styles found in secular Christian buildings within the interior of the synagogue, yet the façades were often wrought in a plain, unobtrusive vernacular style and were concealed at the building's rear.

¹³⁴ Heschel, pp.6-7. It is, however, important to note here that Heschel's opinions were not uncontested, and that *The Sabbath* was written in 1951, shortly after the founding of Israel and in the midst of considerable religio-political discussions about the issues of 'chosenness' and the 'promised land' (from discussions with Rabbi Dunn Bauer).

¹³⁵ Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning*, (Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press and the Architectural History Foundation, New York, 1985), p.103.

Synagogue design post-1840 emphasised the congregation's heritage as well as the popular style of the period, with a combination of ornamental detailing and Byzantine and Islamic (or Moorish) influences lending interiors an experimental quality, while the use of the Romanesque style, comparable to but independent from Gothic, for the exterior 'provided an image for synagogues that suited Jews as well as Christians [...] and represented the status that many Jews sought for themselves'.¹³⁶

In the nineteenth century, European governments granted Jews increasing residential rights and so communities were able to express this new status architecturally, with the Tablets of the Law engraved into the building's façade and stars of David in the stained glass windows tracery. The tension between architectural style and identity dates from the period of Jewish struggle for emancipation in Europe, argues Dr Sharman Kadish in her essay 'Anglo Jewry and Synagogue Architecture':

'All over Europe, new-found Jewish confidence, underpinned by economic advancement, expressed itself architecturally in the building of monumental synagogues on the public street. From Berlin to Budapest, Paris to Rome and even as far away as St Petersburg, large-scale synagogues on prominent city-centre sites made their appearance, increasingly so after 1850'.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Herselle Krinsky, 1985, p.79.

¹³⁷ Dr Sharman Kadish, 'Constructing Identity: Anglo-Jewry and Synagogue Architecture, in *Architectural History*, Vol. 45. (2002), p. 390. Examples of 'monumental synagogues such as these include the Eldridge Street synagogue in New York and Berlin's Neue synagogue on Oranienburger Straße, which, at the time of its consecration in 1866 was the largest synagogue in Berlin and was largely destroyed by Allied bombing in 1943.



The restored Neue synagogue in Berlin



The Spanish synagogue, Prague, restored in the 1990s

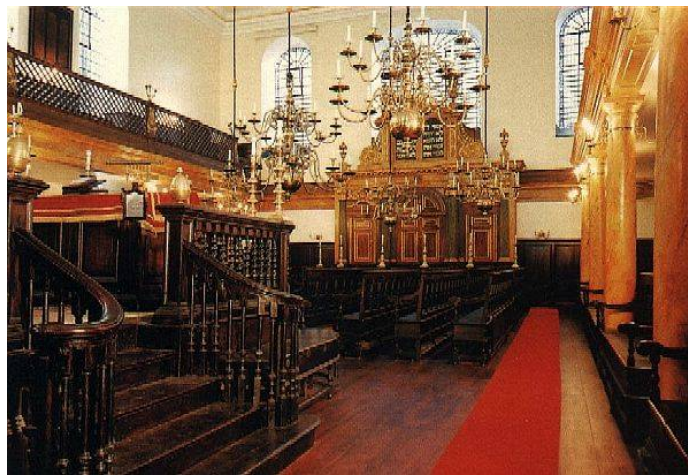
Though the Gothic style remained a dominant choice for many European and North American synagogue designs, orthodox Jews were anxious to assert their distinctiveness and avoid suggestions of religious assimilation to Christianity and were thus more likely to seek inspiration from secular Islamic buildings, thus drawing on Jews' 'supposedly eastern origins',¹³⁸ in combination with religiously neutral Neo-Classical optimism. It was not only architectural style that was reconceived during this period, but the liturgical arrangement of the synagogue space. While the emergence of the Jewish Reform movement¹³⁹ contributed very little in terms of the debate on style,¹⁴⁰ the reordering of the sanctuary space, seating arrangements and prayer practices was radical and distinct. The *bimah* (the reader's platform, traditionally located in the centre of the sanctuary, see image below) was moved to

¹³⁸Kadish, 2002, p.396.

¹³⁹ The Jewish Reform movement originated in Germany in the 1870s. In response to Enlightenment, and Jewish emancipation, reform-minded thinkers sought to change Jewish belief and practice.

¹⁴⁰ Kadish, 2002, p.396.

the eastern wall, oriented toward Jerusalem, and integrated with the Ark. According to Kadish, the 'modern rabbi was expected to address the congregation from the pulpit in the vernacular [not in Hebrew, as had been the case]. This was an innovation based directly on Protestant church practice'.¹⁴¹ Women and men were no longer obliged to sit apart, separated by a *mechitza*. The introduction of a choir, often behind the Ark, in addition to, or in place of a cantor, as well as organ music and fixed pews, also lent many reform synagogues a church-like quality.



Bevis Marks synagogue, showing the *bimah* in the centre of the sanctuary and the Ark on the eastern wall.

¹⁴¹ Kadish, 2002, p.396.



Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim reform synagogue in Charleston, with the bimah and Ark together on the eastern wall and the pews fixed in place.

In central and western Europe in the period immediately following the First World War, synagogues of 'dramatic form and overwhelming mass'¹⁴² were designed and built as a means of recovering a sense of stability. A combination of separatist and assimilationist styles was prevalent; asserting the need for the creation of a new identity in a 'modern, open society'.¹⁴³ According to Herselle Krinsky, during the modern era Jewish culture was 'advanced not by monumental building but by rabbi-led practices that took place within synagogues, houses of study, homes, public spaces, fields and businesses'.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Herselle Krinsky, 1985, p.93

¹⁴³ Kadish, 2002, p.390.

¹⁴⁴ Schwarzer, 'The Architecture of Talmud', p.477.

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The Dollis Hill synagogue in north-west London, built 1936-38. Now Torah Temimah Primary School (image, English Heritage website)



Livorno's dramatic and centrally located synagogue, built in 1961 replaces the 16th century one that was destroyed during World War II.

The post-war years witnessed the creation of the state of Israel and relative economic prosperity, resulting in confident and renewed synagogue building in Britain, North and South America, South Africa and Australia. The re-establishment of Jewish communities in Germany in recent years has led to the building of new houses of worship and the restoration of synagogues destroyed during World War II.¹⁴⁵ Herselle Krinsky describes most contemporary synagogue design as 'reticent' in appearance,¹⁴⁶ retaining a stable sense of its original meaning as a modest house of learning, assembly and prayer. Dr Sharman Kadish, scholar and founder of Jewish Heritage UK, contends that contemporary synagogue design 'reveals a deep-seated insecurity about Jewish identity in Britain'.¹⁴⁷ Arguing a case that extends beyond the 'reticence' described by Herselle Krinsky, Kadish compares the 'indifferent

¹⁴⁵ The aforementioned Neue synagogue in Berlin was largely destroyed by Allied bombing in 1943, but was reopened as museum and Jewish community centre in 1995.

¹⁴⁶ From a lecture she delivered at the Museum at Eldridge Street, April 22, 2007.

¹⁴⁷ Kadish, 2002, p. 405.

quality' of present day synagogue building in Britain with the modernist experimentation in design that has taken place in Israel and the United States:

'The destruction of the synagogues of Germany and Austria on *Kristallnacht* [9 November, 1938] had a psychological impact on the Jewish world that resonated far beyond the immediate damage caused to life, limb and property. It was an assault on one thousand years of Jewish material culture in Europe, and [...] has had a profound effect on the development of synagogue architecture in the post-war world. Purpose-built Holocaust museums, not grand 'cathedral synagogues', have become the contemporary architectural expression of Jewish identity'.¹⁴⁸

She continues:

'The 'cathedral synagogue' [style] was physical testimony to the optimism of the emancipation era, an optimism cruelly shattered by the experience of the Holocaust. [...] The single storey suburban brick box [style] has become ubiquitous. Its virtues are functionality and economy. But behind it, I believe, lies a psychological return to rootlessness, to the portable tradition of the biblical tent sanctuary, called in Hebrew the *Mishkan*'.¹⁴⁹

Dr Kadish founded Jewish Heritage UK in 1997 on the premise that the synagogues of Britain have been largely neglected by mainstream architectural history. The mission of the organization is to record and research what Kadish refers to as 'the vanishing architectural heritage of the Jewish communities of Britain and Ireland',¹⁵⁰ and since 2004, Jewish Heritage UK has been professionally tasked with protecting Judaism's material cultural heritage in Britain; covering synagogues and cemeteries, as well as artefacts, archives and ritual objects.¹⁵¹ Today, the Jewish community in Britain numbers 267,000, down from an estimated 450,000 in the 1950s.¹⁵² 'Outside

¹⁴⁸ Kadish, 2002, pp. 386-7.

¹⁴⁹ Kadish, 2002, pp.404-5.

¹⁵⁰ Kadish, 2002, p.386.

¹⁵¹ See Jewish Heritage UK's website for further information <http://jewish-heritage-uk.org/about>

¹⁵² Statistics provided by Jewish Heritage UK

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north London and north Manchester, smaller Jewish communities around the country are vanishing. Dwindling communities such as these lack the resources to care for their sacred sites, and suburbanization has led to the redundancy of historic synagogues and cemeteries in urban centres'.¹⁵³ Dr Kadish is keen to discuss the number of synagogues on the Jewish Heritage UK's 'At Risk' register, and though she pointed me toward landmark and listed former synagogue buildings that are now being used as flats and offices, there were very few examples of notable adaptive use, and none operating as shared use sites. The New synagogue in Chapeltown, Leeds, which closed in 1985, was purchased by the council and reopened soon after as the Northern School of Contemporary Dance. It retains no link to its built and social history, and it appears there are few examples of British synagogues which do, with the exception of the Manchester Jewish Museum, housed in a former Spanish and Portuguese synagogue.



(L) The Northern School of Contemporary Dance, formerly the New synagogue, Leeds
(R) The Manchester Jewish Museum

¹⁵³ <http://jewish-heritage-uk.org/about>

Heritage production, representation and loss

‘Modern tourism has been compared to the religious pilgrimages of old, with today’s travelers substituting “secular saints” for former religious heroes and creating secular tourist pilgrimage itineraries around sites and places linked with these people’.¹⁵⁴

Ruth Ellen Gruber

‘We are all pleading with history, begging not to be forgotten’.¹⁵⁵

Fred Gorman

The field of museum studies has benefitted in recent years from a growing body of work exploring the politics of tourism and the value of ‘heritage industries’.¹⁵⁶

Heritage, argues Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett ‘gives buildings [...] a second life as exhibits of themselves. Locations become museums within a tourism economy’.¹⁵⁷

For all the obvious benefits of exhuming, conserving and adapting buildings, neighbourhoods and ways of life, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is well aware of the pitfalls.

It is important to reiterate, as she does throughout the essays in *Destination Culture* that the process of landmarking and preserving leaves its own traces.¹⁵⁸ The

extensive restoration project that resulted in the ‘completion’ of the Eldridge Street synagogue on New York’s Lower East Side (my second case study) was sensitive to

the impact of such conservation practices. The decision to leave areas in the sanctuary unfinished; a section of peeling paint remaining and exposed beams

¹⁵⁴ Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: The University of California Press, 2002, p.133-4.

¹⁵⁵ Fred Gorman, *The Secret City: Woodlawn Cemetery and the Buried History of New York*. New York: Random House, 2004, p157.

¹⁵⁶ See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, 1998, and Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*, 2002.

¹⁵⁷ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998, pp.150-1.

¹⁵⁸ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p.156.

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standing in deference to the building's past life, is sensitive and evocative; showcasing the space as a 'heritage palimpsest.'¹⁵⁹ Yet the process also enacts a self-conscious performance of conservation, laying bare the tools with which a breathtaking restoration was achieved. Moments such as these remind us that the preservationists' tools are of historic consequence. Their traces shape a narrative that is not yet complete.

Another factor significant to the adaptive use of synagogues and the conservation of Jewish cemeteries, but worth considering in response to restoration projects in religious buildings in general, is a degree of fascination and romanticisation with what is perceived as a 'familiar exotic'; a 'pseudonostalgia for stereotypes',¹⁶⁰ (both cultural and religious) which can inform the way in which a religious building is perceived and used. While historian Ruth Ellen Gruber's research explores philo-Semitism and the guilt, ambivalence and 'museumizing' of Jewish culture in Europe post World War II, (focusing primarily on Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic) there are valuable points to be taken from her argument that a necessary balance between display and remembrance must be achieved. All of my case study sites are tourist destinations. They all aim to present, represent and disseminate narratives of loss, diaspora, rupture and change. And while only the Eldridge Street synagogue is

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. Kirszenblatt-Gimblett refers to reused space as such, but is responding to Michel de Certeau's articulation of the pluriform meanings of space. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Translated by Steven Rendall, Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA & London: The University of California Press, 1984) p.201.

¹⁶⁰ Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press) 2002, p.9.

in active use as a place of worship, all the sites use their religious histories as an aperture through which to tell broader stories about immigration and dispersal. Though small, and not afforded national museum status, all these adaptive buildings are 'destinations'; significant itineraries in a broader geographic constellation of 'sites of memory'. How then do the sites in question resist hackneyed tropes, (the great American immigration narrative) or position themselves within broader historical moments? (The apartheid era, the Battle of Cable Street, etc.) As repositories of so many divergent narratives, (sacred and secular) how do museums such as these avoid universalizing sentimentality? And where does the religious history fit, if at all?

Turn almost any corner in London's East End or on New York's Lower East Side and a tapestry of religious life emerges. Former synagogues now home to Buddhist or temples dot the streetscape, a dormant church is used as a mosque; the adaptive use of sacred space is everywhere. Look closer at the tenement buildings or the restored Georgian townhouses of London and evidence of centuries and layers of immigrant life is evident; in the fading stars of David, the old Hebrew signs or French Huguenot street names. In urban areas such as these, many former religious buildings stand empty for a period, are occupied temporarily by an arts group, host the occasional late night rave, or are converted into plush apartments or offices.

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Often these sites were built on side streets, like Bevis Marks¹⁶¹ and Sandy's Row¹⁶² synagogues, both in East London, and the Eldridge Street synagogue on New York's Lower East Side, or, in the case of 19 Princelet Street (my first case study) or 17 Wilkes Street, erected in the back garden of a town house. '*Un espace cache*', (a hidden space) as historian of French synagogue architecture Dominique Jarrassé termed it; these enclosed sanctuary spaces are 'tucked away from public gaze',¹⁶³ and for a reason. Religious spaces such as these, 'discreetly placed, deferential to the reality of a potentially hostile environment',¹⁶⁴ often hide interior decoration of breathtaking skill and craftsmanship behind plain façades. Conversely, the Buitenkant Street Methodist church in Cape Town, known as 'freedom church' by the predominantly 'coloured' congregation, was originally a warehouse building converted to accommodate a growing community of residents in the racially mixed inner-city area known as District Six. These buildings and the hidden histories they represent stand in marked contrast to the commissioned Hawksmoor or Wren churches; iconic landmarks that represent what was the dominant Anglican religious culture. Such examples of sacred space denote power, security and authority; the

¹⁶¹ Bevis Marks synagogue is the oldest in Britain and has been in continued use since it opened in 1701 on Bevis Marks Street in the City of London. The original congregants were comprised of Spanish and Portuguese Jews. Taken from the synagogue's website www.bevismarks.org.uk

¹⁶² Sandy's Row synagogue is the oldest Ashkenazi synagogue in London (the main building is over 250 years old), and the last remaining synagogue in Spitalfields. From the Sandy's Row website: <http://sandysrow.org.uk/>

¹⁶³ Quoted by Dr Sharman Kadish in 'Constructing Identity: Anglo-Jewry and Synagogue Architecture, in *Architectural History*, Vol. 45. (2002), p. 387. See Dominique Jarrassé's *Synagogues: Architecture and Jewish Identity*, (Paris: Adam Biro Books, 2001).

¹⁶⁴ Foucault, 'Of other spaces' ('Des espaces autres'), 1967, p.26.

‘absolute’ or ‘monumental’ space of the cathedral, wrote Lefebvre, is ‘beautiful [and] imposing in [its] durability’.¹⁶⁵

As this chapter has shown, religious places - grand cathedrals or converted chapels, still retain a tremendous hold on the collective imagination. The transformations that have occurred within these places – spatial ruptures, multiple occupancies, decay and renewal – illicit strong responses. Adaptive sites such as the ones I will describe in detail in the forthcoming case studies, can effectively reactivate dormant religious buildings; inviting visitors to actively engage with them, not as historic relics, but as community ‘nodes’, or ‘participatory museums’. In this way, sacred buildings that were once anchors in neighbourhoods that have undergone significant change can continue to be a locus of multcentred, secular urban life; places defined not only by their internal religious history, but broadened and mediated by the events that continue to occur around and within them.

Through the case studies contained within the next three chapters, I will seek to demonstrate that the religious places are ‘synchronically dynamic; made up of multiple, contested, imagined and real sites and relations’.¹⁶⁶ My case studies co-

¹⁶⁵ From Henri Lefebvre’s, *The Production of Space*, quoted in Neil Leach, ed. *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, (London and New York: Routledge), 1997, p.139.

¹⁶⁶ Knott, *The Location of Religion*, p.23.

exist, often in tension with the cityscape that surrounds them, on the fringes of neighbourhoods which have undergone rapid change. They are 'heritage palimpsests', Foucauldian heterotopias; often 'driven by the desire to accumulate and represent everything'.¹⁶⁷ Whether they achieve this, and what is lost, or gained in the process, is one of the key questions posed by my research.

¹⁶⁷ Foucault, 'Of other spaces' ('Des espaces autres'), 1967, p.26.

Part 2: Case Studies

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'For Whom was Built This Special Shell?' Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums, galleries
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Part II, Chapter 2

Chapter 2

'Dust in the air suspended:'¹

The search for identity at 19 Princelet Street



¹ T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 'Little Gidding', (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company,) 1943, p.33.

‘The revolutions of history, economic mutations, demographic mixtures lie in layers within it, and remain there, hidden in customs, rites and spatial practices. This place, on its surface, seems to be a collage. In reality, in its depth, it is ubiquitous’.

Michel de Certeau²

‘No more than a breath between there and not there’.

Paul Celan³

Built as a Georgian townhouse in 1719 in the Spitalfields district of London’s East End, 19 Princelet Street has been home to Huguenot weavers, Irish immigrants and Eastern European Jews, who in 1869 erected a small synagogue with a hidden entranceway in the garden behind the house. Over one hundred years later, having survived the slum clearances of the 1950s, the sweeping gentrification of the 1970s and ‘80s and a precarious existence on English Heritage’s ‘Buildings At Risk’ register, the Spitalfields Centre is now working to promote the historic house as the first Museum of Immigration and Diversity in Europe. The museum promotes Open House events and educational outreach, and caters to a diverse audience, encompassing members of the large Bangladeshi and Somalian communities from within the borough of Tower Hamlets.

19 Princelet Street is a beacon for many who celebrate its vision of a multcentred East End. The Spitalfields Centre, the charity that owns and operates the building,

² Certeau, Michel, de, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.201.

³ Quoted in Rachel Lichtenstein’s & Iain Sinclair’s *Rodinsky’s Room*, (London and New York: Granta, 1999), p.133.

has a large team of volunteers, an active Board and a passionate and committed Chair of the Trust. The house itself is a nineteenth century palimpsest,⁴ having undergone continuous change and erasure, much like the neighbourhood that surrounds it. In its present incarnation it remains precariously under-funded and ruinous; open to the public for only ten days a year.

This case study will detail how the Spitalfields Trust fulfils its mandate to ‘preserve 19 Princelet Street [and] create a permanent exhibition and educational resource telling the stories of many diverse peoples and cultures’.⁵ Through a combination of archival research and field work, I hope to illuminate some of the dramatic spatial shifts the building has undergone in its’ transition from house to house of worship to museum; arguing that the materiality of its’ built history of modification and rupture could be utilised to a greater degree in order to reflect the Trust’s ‘immigration narrative’, thus enhancing it’s potential as a participatory ‘community’ museum.

As the culmination of my field research, (time spent volunteering on public open days in 2007, as well as documented interviews conducted with Trustees and volunteers, visitors and local historians) this case study will explore how the house is

⁴ For a further illustration of a Spitalfields ‘palimpsest’, see Peter Ackroyd’s account of ‘St Mary’s Spital’, where lie the stratified remains of buildings from Roman to Victorian times and where ‘the levels of the centuries are all compact, revealing the historical density of London’. *London, The Biography*. (London: Vintage, 2000, p.778). De Certeau writes of place as a ‘palimpsest’ in *The Practice of Everyday Life* and writes that ‘science is only able to know fully the most recent text’. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.201.

⁵ From the 19 Princelet Street website www.19princeletstreet.org

being used, by whom, and to what ends. By focusing on a domestic dwelling which contained a thriving religious community, I hope to assess the power ‘hidden spaces’ such as these exert over our collective imagination. By assessing this distinct museum environment, my case study will shed light on the impact an adaptive building such as this can have on its immediate community. How is the site’s history disseminated, and for whom? To what extent can genuine participation and engagement with the house and its contents be encouraged and executed?

‘Reservoir of Fantasy’: Spitalfields and the East End ‘imaginary’



The façade of 19 Princelet Street



Boys playing street games in a Whitechapel Alley

The quiet streets just east of Spitalfields market, nestled between the chrome and glass of Bishopsgate’s office and retail developments and the bustle of restaurant hawkers on Brick Lane have been pivotal in a ongoing debate concerning the significance of place and preservation in a corner of the city frequently subject to the constraints of urban myth-making. This section of the East End – ‘shaped by the

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divisions of class, ethnicity, race and gender',⁶ is deeply inscribed in the psychogeography⁷ of the area; marking Spitalfields as the 'symbol of the city's dark side'⁸. As sociologist John Eade writes in *Placing London*, the East End appears as 'fundamentally different from the rest of London';⁹ in the words of historian Bill Fishman it is 'a reservoir of constant fantasy, to be drawn upon, with profit, by both religious and secular salesmen'.¹⁰

Situated in the heart of Spitalfields, modest eighteenth century terraced houses clustered around the artery of Commercial Street form a designated and architecturally distinctive conservation area. The emblematic housing stock between Hanbury and Fournier Streets evoke both the prosperity and decay that typifies East End folklore. Bisecting the thoroughfares of Brick Lane and Wilkes Street is Princelet Street, a striking terrace of Georgian houses boasting recently restored ornate shutters and polished brass doorknockers. Like much of Spitalfields, the houses on Princelet Street are a combination of gentrified homes and

⁶John Eade, *Placing London: From Imperial Capital to Global City*, (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2000) p.124.

⁷ I refer here to the term as defined by Situationist Guy Debord in 1955 as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals' (from the essay 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography' by Guy-Ernest Debord, reproduced on the website www.library.nothingness.org/articles, accessed 7 November 2007), and also to Iain Sinclair's body of work based on the pedestrian exploration of the urban and suburban landscape. See Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London*, (London: Granta, 1998); Peter Ackroyd's *London: The Biography* (London: Vintage, 2000); and Merlin Coverley's *Psychogeography* (London: Pocket Essentials, 2006).

⁸ Eade, *Placing London*, p.124.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ William Fishman, *East End 1888: Life in a London Borough Among the Labouring Poor*, (London: Five Leaves Publications, 1989) p.1.

gallery/boutique/workshop spaces. Blue plaques, one honouring Miriam Moses, the 'first female mayor of Stepney'; another a tribute to Anna Maria Garthwaite 'designer of Spitalfields Silks' form a parenthesis at the western ends of the street, lifting the eye skyward as we pause to consider the dual roles that heritage and gentrification are playing in the 'grand imaginary narrative'¹¹ of this iconic London neighbourhood.

Numbers 18 and 19 Princes Street¹² were built in 1719 by architect Samuel Worrall and its earliest residents were Huguenot¹³ immigrant and master silk weaver Peter Abraham Ogier and his family.¹⁴ The five-floor house was originally used as a conventional workplace for the spinning and weaving of silk, and it was located in what became an economically successful neighbourhood which 'benefited from the skill, hard work and prosperity of immigrant workers, and from the religious persecution in France which had driven them out'.¹⁵ In 1826 the Ogier family moved on and the

¹¹ Phil Cohen, 'Out of the Melting Pot, Into the Fire Next Time: Imagining the East End as City, Body, Text', *Imagining Cities: Scripts, Signs, Memory*, ed. Sallie Westwood & John Williams, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 77.

¹² The street and thus the synagogue was renamed Princelet Street in 1892 in accordance with a new post office rule declaring that only a few of the many Princes Streets in London could remain named as such.

¹³ French Calvinist Protestants.

¹⁴ The history of 18 and 19 Princelet Street is taken from Samuel C. Melnick's meticulous survey of the Princelet Street Synagogue, *A Giant Among Giants: A History of Rabbi Shmuel Kalman Melnick and the Princelet Street Synagogue*, (Edinburgh, Cambridge & Durham: The Pentland Press Ltd., 1994), and by permission from The Spitalfields Centre archive and 19 Princelet Street website www.19princeletstreet.org.

¹⁵ From 'Towards a History and Politics of Diasporas and Migration: A Grounded Spatial Approach', a paper presented by Kim Knott at *Flows and Spaces*, the Annual Conference of the Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographers, (London, 30 August-2 September 2005, p.7) Available online at www.diasporas.ac.uk. The large-scale influx of French weavers and merchants after the 1685

house was modified as lodging quarters for the new arrivals of Irish and then Eastern European Jewish immigrants. By the mid 1850s, the workshop garrets had been moved to the attic and rear garden, and the living quarters expanded on the second floor and street level. New residents used the house for a variety of trades: Mary Ellen Hawkins ran an industrial school; Isaiah Woodcock was a carver and gilder.¹⁶ In 1869, the Loyal United Friends Synagogue (founded by the United Friends Friendly Society which had fundraised for a larger premises) effected the most radical change to the building when it purchased the land at the rear of 18 and 19 Princes Street and erected the Princes Street synagogue at the back of the house where the expanded workshops had been located.¹⁷ The garden was excavated to provide a vestry comprising a *beis medrash* and kitchens. The main sanctuary was hidden from view but was accessible through the house on street level, and the women's gallery could be reached via the existent stairway to the living quarters. Folding doors were fitted on both ground and first floors so that the front rooms of the house could accommodate additional members. A skylight and stained glass windows increased the building's natural light, and the aesthetic detailing included an azure ceiling decorated with gold stars.

revocation of the Edict of Nantes (which declared Protestantism illegal) made Spitalfield 'world famous for its figured silk and brocade', (Eade, 2000, p.126).

¹⁶ Information provided by the Spitalfields Centre.

¹⁷ On nearby Wilkes Street, a synagogue known as the Warsaw Lodge was also erected in the garden of the property, at number 17. It closed in 1947.



The basement kitchen area of 19 Princelet Street

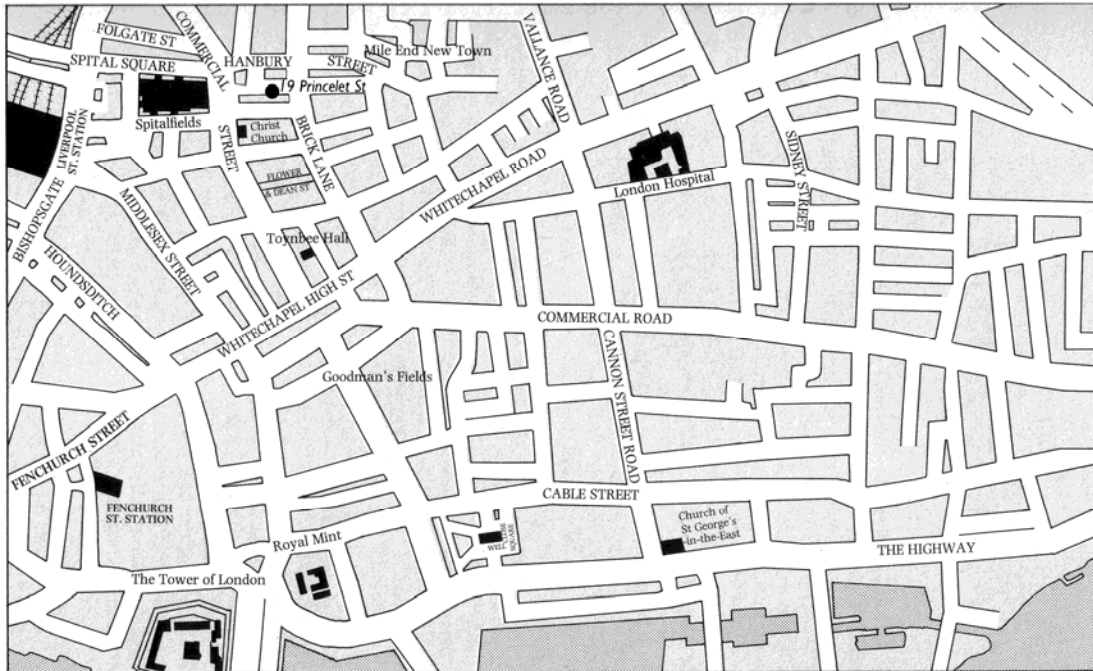
By 1881 Spitalfields had been firmly established as the Jewish centre of the East End, with 15,000 Jews constituting over 95% of the population of this relatively small district. In the words of historian Bill Fishman, 'Spitalfields was the East End's East End: the heart, for many, of the 'old' East End, where things began and ended'.¹⁸ 77% of Russian and Polish Jews in London lived in the East End districts comprising what was then Whitechapel, St. Georges' in the East and Mile End Old Town, increasing to 82% by 1891,¹⁹ and there were over forty active synagogues within these few square miles.

In *Children of the Ghetto: A Study of a Peculiar People*, Israel Zangwill evokes the boisterous, emotive prayer service in a small East End synagogue during this period:

¹⁸ Interview with Bill Fishman, London, 7 December, 2004.

¹⁹ V. D. Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England, 1850-1950*, (London: C.A. Watts & Co. Ltd. 1954), p.97.

‘They enjoyed themselves in this *shool* of theirs: they shouted and skipped and shook and sang, they wailed and moaned and they were not the least happy when they were crying. But if they did not always understand what they were saying they always meant it. If the service had been more intelligible it would have been less emotional and edifying. There was not a sentiment, however incomprehensible, for which they were not ready to die or damn’.²⁰



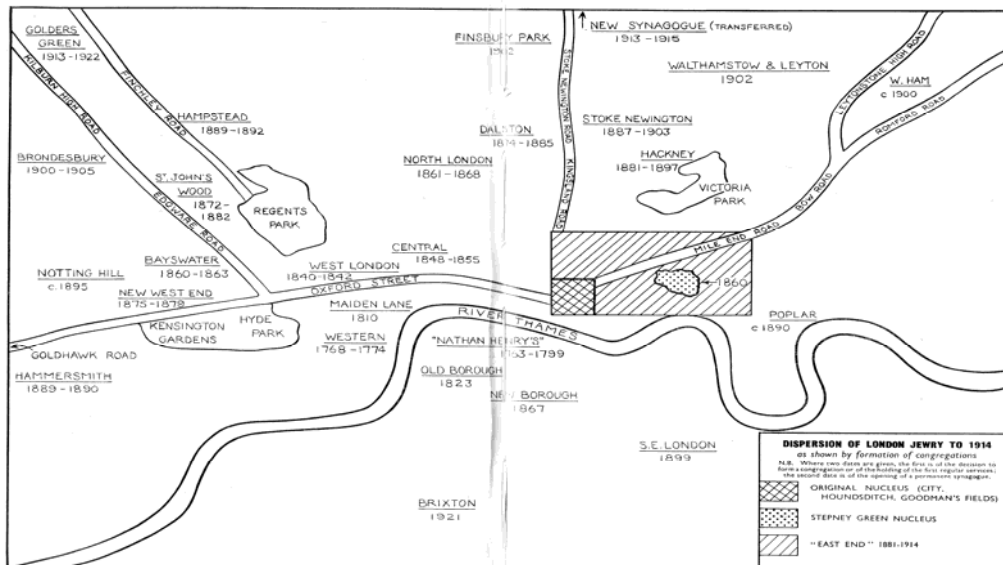
Map of the ‘heart’ of the East End, showing Princelet Street in the upper left corner.

V.D. Lipman’s *Social history of the Jews of England* estimates that between 1880 and 1905 (decades defined by waves of emigration from Russia and Poland), anywhere between 2,000 and 5,000 Jewish immigrants arrived in London each year.²¹ The tremendous concentration of Jewish immigrants to the East End (by 1903 it is estimated that the population numbered anywhere from 140,000 to 150,000) inflamed ethnic tensions between established immigrant groups (among them the

²⁰ Israel Zangwill, *Children of the Ghetto: A Study of a Peculiar People*, edited with an introduction by Meri-Jane Rochelson (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1998), pp.182-3.

²¹ Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England*, p.94. During this period the Jewish population of Britain rose from roughly 65,000 in 1880, to between 250-300,000 by 1914.

Irish and the Dutch), resulting in the widespread belief that the Jewish East-End was becoming a 'national problem'.²² Aware of the ramifications these tensions produced, the United Synagogue Association encouraged the resettlement of many of the East End's Jewish residents to the city's suburbs as well as nationwide, initiating the inevitable dispersal of what had been a vibrant and close-knit community.



Map showing the dispersal of the Jewish population from the East End, 1948

During the period of rapid population growth in the late eighteenth-hundreds, the Princelet Street Synagogue benefited from large attendance by primarily Polish Jews. It is estimated that attendance for *Pesach* services stood at two hundred by the turn

²² For a more detailed analysis of inter-ethnic tensions in the East End at the turn of the last century, see Bill Fishman's books *East End 1888*, *East End Jewish Radicals 1874-1914* and *The Streets of East London*.

of the century,²³ high for a small synagogue. Yet the building itself was suffering from its proximity to what was, by then, a decaying two hundred year-old house in urgent need of repair. By 1891 the roof had become so dilapidated that architect Lewis Solomon of the Federation of Synagogues, declared the building unsafe. Following its refurbishment it was reopened in 1893.

Although the building survived the bombing raids of the Second World War (the remnants of blackout paint used on the synagogue's roof is still visible today), by 1945 the collective Jewish population of Bethnal Green, Stepney and Poplar numbered no more than 30,000.²⁴ By the inter-war period, Spitalfields was displaying signs of relative prosperity. Second and third generation Jewish immigrants were continuing to move north, seeking 'economic and social opportunities in the outer suburbs'.²⁵ The combined effects of 1950s post-war 'slum clearances';²⁶ the increasing pace of emigration out of the East End and the conversion of dwellings into shops and offices (as local trade began to shift from garment to retail) resulted in Spitalfields ceasing to be a significant residential area for London's Jewish community.

²³ Melnick notes that a 1903 London-wide survey of religious establishments revealed total attendance at sixty-five synagogues throughout the capital (thirty-eight of them in Stepney and the City of London) numbered 26,612 (Melnick, *A Giant Among Giants*, p.92).

²⁴ Lipman, p. 165.

²⁵ Eade, 2000, p.127.

²⁶ The extensive rebuilding of the East End which took place after the Blitz, also encompassed a 'logical re-siting programme to get rid of depressed housing'. In 1944 a Greater London Plan, commissioned by the then London County Council (LCC) recommended the development of a ring of eight new satellite towns outside the Home Counties, where 300,000 Londoners would be encouraged to settle. See *The East End: Four Centuries of London Life*, by Alan Palmer, London: John Murray Publishers, 1989.

In 1969, 19 Princelet Street's last lodger, the reclusive scholar David Rodinsky, mysteriously disappeared, leaving behind a room full of memories and residue.



Rodinsky's room, 19 Princelet Street

Once unlocked, 'Rodinsky's room', as it became known, revealed itself as the paradigm of the 'unhomely' house;²⁷ dirty, damp and squalid, with buried histories and ephemera awaiting the archival skills of artist Rachel Lichtenstein and urban chronicler Iain Sinclair.²⁸ As architectural theorist Anthony Vidler surmises in his collection of essays entitled *The Architectural Uncanny*, within these *unheimlich* abodes 'only those on the margin would feel at home'.²⁹ For Rodinsky, like many of the city's less fortunate new arrivals, the house on Princelet Street functioned as a personal and spiritual refuge; disquieting and isolating, but a sanctuary nonetheless.

²⁷ See Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge MA and London: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²⁸ Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* (London and New York: Granta, 1999).

²⁹ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p.20.

Having remained empty for over a decade,³⁰ 19 Princelet Street was purchased for £150,000 in 1981 by the Spitalfields Trust, a local group comprised of preservationists and social historians. The Spitalfields Centre for the Study of Minorities was established soon after in order to rescue the derelict house and synagogue and explore the site's relevance as a Grade II* listed building.³¹ Tassaduq Ahmed, a local Bangladeshi-born man who died in 2001, and Rabbi Hugo Gryn, whose roots were in Eastern Europe, took the first steps to form a registered charitable trust that could move forward the work of turning a decaying building into a museum of immigration and diversity.³²

This collaboration between a Bangladeshi man and an Eastern European Jew is indicative of the building's historical and symbolic potential. By the 1970s, Spitalfields was becoming the centre for a growing immigrant population of Bangladeshis, many of whom found work in the garment industry located in those same premises which centuries earlier had housed Huguenot weavers, then Jewish tailors. The charity, which is an independent non-profit, has received limited capital funding from English Heritage and hopes to launch the site as Europe's first Museum of Immigration and Diversity, but due to its fragile state the building can only be

³⁰ The last record from the shul's minute-books indicate that a marriage took place in 1953. Information taken from the Spitalfield's Trust.

³¹ 19 Princelet Street has been given historic status as a Grade II* listed building. This denotes that it is a significant building, worthy of national interest.

³² See the obituary in <http://www.19princeletstreet.org.uk/tassaduq.html>.

opened for a few weeks each year. In a 2003 article in the Guardian newspaper, John Cunningham reported that:

‘Most of the £3 million the trustees are hoping to raise will go on restoring the four-storey brick dwelling and concealed synagogue. But before the house can properly fulfil its educational role, it needs to be structurally sound. The Trust have approached the Heritage Lottery fund, but the grant application - which the trustees are only now compiling - will, they say, cost tens of thousands of pounds in fees for specialised reports from surveyors, architects and engineers. And that money is not there.³³

During the open days the public is invited to visit and ‘experience’ the many narratives of movement and adaptation that the building has witnessed. The house is so fragile that capacity is limited to forty.

The New Statesman’s Sebastian Harcombe intoned evocatively:

‘Metal struts support sagging ceilings; rooms are piled high with rotting furniture; and the galleried Victorian synagogue greets visitors with weeping, bubbling plaster walls, tarnished metal chandeliers and lists of its long-dead congregation painted in gilded, faded Hebrew’.³⁴

Yet though the condition of the building dictates visitor numbers, it is also the main reason that people are drawn to it. A visit to Princelet Street ‘captures the imagination by feeling colder, smelling different, having peeling paint’,³⁵ suggests the Director and Chair of Trustees Susie Symes, further articulating the extent to which the ruinous ‘auratic’ value of the building plays a crucial part in its continued appeal.

³³ From John Cunningham’s article ‘Never-Ending Story’, (Society section, *The Guardian*, Wednesday 9 July, 2003).

³⁴ Sebastian Harcombe ‘What’s in Number 19 Princelet Street?’ *The New Statesman*, 26 September 2005. See the 19 Princelet Street website for details.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

In 'Negotiating conceptions of a 'sacred space'', Lily Kong explores the ways in which individuals relate to sacred places, objects and sacred 'energies'.³⁶ She writes:

'These sacred centres are places where one's god(s) may be found and where one may undergo a sacred experience, including a gamut of emotions from serenity and protection to fear and a sense of being overwhelmed'.³⁷

This is precisely the response that 19 Princelet Street hopes to elicit in its visitors, although there has been no religious activity in the building for over half a century.

'Capturing the imagination' by prohibiting photography or raised voices as visitors explore the building, heightens the sense that we have entered a sacred or 'other' space, a Foucauldian 'heterotopia'.³⁸ The serene and protective tone that is struck on the threshold of 19 Princelet Street is strangely at odds with a museum that is so dedicated to the material history of its immediate community, and to broadly welcoming the commotion of Spitalfields through its doors. Although it is the case that the fragile state of the building currently necessitates such visitor behaviour, I suspect that practices such as these shall continue once the structural stabilisation finally takes place. The stillness succeeds in instilling in the visitor a reverential tone without needing to draw attention to a ruinous hidden sanctuary and the religious history it implies. It evokes the 'sacredness' of place without needing to prioritise one religious history over another.

³⁶ Kong, 'Negotiating conceptions of 'sacred space': A case study of religious buildings in Singapore', (*Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp.342-358, 1993) p. 346.

³⁷ Kong, 'Negotiating conceptions of 'sacred space': A case study of religious buildings in Singapore', p.345.

³⁸ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.26.



Suitcases and Sanctuary exhibit at 19 Princelet Street

Suitcases and Sanctuary, a permanent exhibition created in 2000, utilises the ground floor and basement of the house and encompasses the work of nine and ten year-olds from six local primary schools in response to workshops at the site. With a grant of £12,000 for outreach work from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and assistance from actors, poets and local historians, pupils conjured the stories of arriving immigrants from the past 300 years.³⁹ Throughout the front living area and within the former sanctuary of the synagogue, poetry fragments, drawings and hopes for the future are displayed on the walls and within old leather suitcases, helping to tell the story of the many inhabitants of the house. Visitors are encouraged to fill out a luggage tag, examine the contents of hastily packed belongings and listen to the building's history as narrated by students at makeshift audio kiosks.

³⁹ Information provided by the Spitalfields Trust and taken from the article 'Never-Ending Story' by John Cunningham in the Society section of *The Guardian*, Wednesday 9 July, 2003.



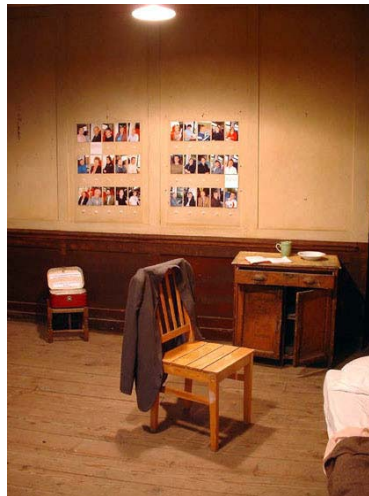
Visitors listening to the audio kiosks

Santosh Stride, one of the young people who created the installation, and now a volunteer, explained how, using Yiddish folk tales, she and her classmates (most of whom are Bangladeshi) created poems, stories and a film exploring the persecution of the Jews. Guided by poets, actors and musicians, the pupils worked with materials from another culture's history: Roman Catholic students explored the story of Bengali immigration while Somalian children created a film detailing the effects of the Irish potato famine.⁴⁰

Leave to Remain, a series of three contemporary art interventions in the upstairs of the house, was conceived by Bosnian artist and curator Margareta Kern as an accessible medium for generating discussion concerning the representation and marginalisation of the refugee community in Britain. Originally staged at the ACAVA Central Space in London as part of Refugee Week in 2003 it later transferred to 19

⁴⁰ Information provided by the Spitalfields Trust and taken from the article 'Never-Ending Story' by John Cunningham in the Society section of *The Guardian*, Wednesday 9 July, 2003, and discussions with Santosh Stride at 19 Prinzelet Street, 9 September, 2007.

Princelet Street where it has remained ever since. Located in the second floor bedroom area of the house, *Leave to Remain* comprises three installations. Bosnian artist Suzana Tamamovic's 'People tell me to cheer up, it could be worse' features found objects and furniture organised to represent the sparse, temporary lodging of an immigrant newly arrived in London. The unmade bed and empty suitcase conjure a predictable scene of a life half-lived - the paltry, melancholy existence of a man (perhaps Rodinsky's better-kempt successor?) on Vidler's margins. Tibetan artist Gonkar Gyatso's 'Soft Touch', a sculptural work, explores the painful truth about seeking asylum in Britain; and Margareta Kern's 'Standard Class Options' is an interactive photographic project inviting the viewer to challenge her/his own preconceptions regarding current attitudes toward foreign settlement in the UK.



Suzana Tamamovic's 'People tell me to cheer up, it could be worse' (L)
Gonkar Gyatso's 'Soft Touch' (R)

The Museum welcomed the installations as a 'demonstration of the power of place combined with the power of people to give something to the wider society, however much they themselves have suffered and lost'.⁴¹ While the work is engaging, especially for the student groups who visit frequently, it is not site-responsive, but presents a universalized snapshot of the experience of immigration and exile. Although one is encouraged to linger, it doesn't take long to survey the contents of these exhibits, to read the wall text encouraging us to interpret the empty spaces in the picture frames, or prompting us to 'listen' to the building. The unfinished sentence in the cheap textbook diary; shabby clothes hanging lifelessly on a wooden chair - material ephemera of poverty and self-doubt. But for a museum deeply concerned with visitor participation, the objects on display are static and makeshift; producing passive consumption not active engagement.

How could these exhibits at 19 Princelet Street offer visitors a more genuine, active engagement with social objects/artefacts in the house? By way of contrast, the Minnesota Historical Society, which has a comparably tiny budget for exhibits, took a different approach in its *Open House: If Walls Could Talk* exhibition, which opened in 2006. The exhibition tells the stories of fifty families who lived in a single house on the East Side of St. Paul over 118 years. Designers used photos and audio recordings to embed personal narratives of residents directly into artefacts (equivalent to the

⁴¹ From the Leave to Remain website <http://leavetoremain.org/exhibition/exhibition.htm#museum> accessed on 24 October, 2007.

suitcases or furniture at 19 Princelet Street). Everything from the dishes to the furniture tells stories. In summative evaluation, researchers found that visitors engaged in high levels of conversation about their connections to the exhibition, with the average visitor relating personal histories to at least three objects on display.⁴² By making common household objects personal and active, *Open House* successfully encouraged people to share their own experiences while visiting. While 19 Princelet Street has the tools and the means to make the connections between artefacts and disparate immigrant narratives, there are few consistent attempts made to truly engage visitors in conversations about their own experiences.

The most arresting moment within the building occurs not as we observe the stage sets of immigrant dwelling (not dissimilar to the recreated tenement apartments at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York⁴³) but as we exit the upstairs bedroom. As we stand below Rodinsky's garret, we hover for a moment, in a strange instance of spatial mimicry, on the threshold between what would have been a typical Georgian living space, before stepping down into the women's gallery of the

⁴² Taken from *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon, online and ebook edition. Chapter 4, case study of the Minnesota Historical Society's *Open House: If Walls Could Talk* exhibition, 2006.

⁴³ The Lower East Side Tenement Museum (www.tenement.org) is a series of apartment houses which focus on America's urban immigrant history through the recreation of rooms where poor families lived at the turn of the last century. The museum is a major tourist destination; as Hasia Diner writes – 'Visitors can come in, smell the accumulated mustiness of almost 150 years [...] They can see the apartments and hear the stories [...] of poverty, illness, death and desertion. They can feel the cramped discomfort of the miniscule rooms in which entire families ate, slept and worked. [...] They come to experience for a moment "what it was like" and, no doubt, also to allow them to offer a sigh of relief that they have "made it"'. Diner, *Lower East Side Memories*, pp.115-118.

former synagogue. The gallery, fragile and dust-laden, only able to accommodate a handful of people at once, is an architectural incongruity, blurring the traditional conventions of Georgian and Victorian domestic architecture; English and Eastern-European design and, most notably, acting as a spatial bridge from the religious to the domestic.



The women's balcony

For many orthodox Jews, the separation of men from women during prayer is necessary to ensure congregants are more focused and less frivolous. However, at 19 Princelet Street, the *mechitza* becomes an extension of the second floor bedroom. In his essay 'Architectural Hints of a Post-Colonial London', architect Sunand Prasad reflects on London's monocultural built environment, and the obstacles preventing new immigrants from seeking a more culturally specific housing style. The adaptation of existing models becomes, Prasad argues, one of the few ways to transform and assert control over Eurocentric domestic interiors:

Rebecca Faulkner
'For Whom was Built This Special Shell?' Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums, galleries and cultural centres
Part II, Chapter 2

‘What does change, of course, is the use of space. So inside their dwellings, Bengali, Somali or Turkish households practice *pardah* – the differentiation of the men’s domain from the family and women’s domain – within virtually unmodified London terraced houses built during the eighteenth century’.⁴⁴

While I am not arguing that the invisible border between house and synagogue functions as a strict example of post-colonial architectural design, it represents a practical use of domestic space that is both remarkable and uncanny. Acting as a powerful liminal zone bisecting the domestic and sacred functions of the building, this intertwined threshold of rest and prayer propels both the installation, but more importantly, the building itself beyond listed building/historic museum status toward an identity that is complex, suggestive and unique. It forces us to recognize that 19 Princelet Street has always been an adapted space; not because student art work and installations instruct us to view it as such, but because of its built history of modification. Thresholds such as the bedroom/gallery are arresting, provocative, ‘heterotopic’ spaces; unsettling to the visitor with their spatial incongruities or ‘shocks’. The jolts that are experienced upon entering the former sanctuary, which opens up dramatically through the dimly lit corridor of the house, (evoking what geographer Kim Knott refers to as ‘the encounter with one’s own personal and family history of migration, and the opportunity to stand in an imaginative space of exile’,⁴⁵) are indelibly woven into the fabric of a visit to 19 Princelet Street. And yet

⁴⁴ Sunand Prasad, ‘Architectural Hints of a Post-Colonial London’, *AA Files: The Journal of the Architectural Association School of Architecture*, 49 (2003), p.25.

⁴⁵ Kim, Knott, ‘Towards a History and Politics of Diasporas and Migration: A Grounded Spatial Approach’, (Conference paper available online at www.diasporas.ac.uk, p.10).

visitors' attention is too frequently diverted elsewhere, urging us to observe the overused 'immigrant experience' trope. In one of the downstairs rooms a mirror has been placed in a large suitcase, displaying text only visible from a certain vantage point, which reads: 'All of us are immigrants'.



Suitcases and Sanctuary exhibit

The essentialism of statements such as these, which, though accurate and relevant is also simplistic and misleading, is reiterated throughout the building, in spite of the presence of a shared history of dwelling, praying and working, made manifest in the very bricks and mortar. This process of overstatement and explication is one of the unfortunate stumbling blocks that 19 Princelet Street appear to succumb to in their quest for a unique museological pedagogy. For while it strives to be 'the very antithesis of the typical national or regional museum in which history and knowledge, cultures and societies must be present through their physical remains, their relics',⁴⁶ the desire to keep the building frozen in time – the archetypal relic - save for structural work; something that is observed reverentially, sits awkwardly

⁴⁶ Knott, p.10.

with ambitions to make it relevant and engaging for a rapidly changing local community.

By way of contrast, the Anne Frank Museum in Amsterdam's ongoing exhibit *Free2choose* is a very simple interactive film situated within one of the most famous 'sites of conscience' in the world.

Visitors to the exhibit vote on their stance on issues related to freedom and human rights. 'It is one room, with a long, semi-circular bench with cushions and space for about 30 people to sit and stand. Every few feet on the bench, there is a small voting box about the size of a light switch with two buttons on it, one red and one green. The visitors on the bench face a large projection screen that plays a fixed loop. First, a one-minute video clip presents an issue (for example, whether students should be allowed to wear headscarves to school). Then, a statement pops up: 'Students should be allowed to wear religious symbols in school'. Visitors see a ticking countdown and are told to vote by pressing either the green (yes) or red (no) button on the voting box. At the end of the countdown, the results are shown for both 'Visitors Now' and for 'All Visitors' (meaning all visitors to date)'.⁴⁷

The exhibit features web technologies of the kind that were emerging in the mid-2000s and harnesses them to produce similar results as 'liking' and 'sharing' on social media platforms. It is user friendly, anonymous and does not require any creative skill or aptitude to participate. It is striking how the aforementioned photography installation, *Standard Class Options* at 19 Princelet Street, attempts to question visitor assumptions based on race, class and gender in much the same way as *Free2choose*, but with no coherent approach to evaluating responses.

Nina Simon assesses the *Free2choose* exhibit in *The Participatory Museum*, writing:

⁴⁷ *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon, online and ebook edition. Chapter 3, case study Free2choose exhibit at the Anne Frank Museum.

'Free2choose is powerful because it introduces social tension. When I voted in the minority, I felt that I was in the minority not just conceptually but physically, in that crowd, in real-time. Because the room was often full, I found myself looking for people "like me" in the crowd. But I had no way to identify them in the faceless group of button-pushers. And that's where the social dimension of *Free2choose* falls short. There is no component to the exhibition that highlights the specific selections made by individuals in the room, and no vehicle to incite conversation among differing groups. Even though you are densely packed in a room with other people expressing opinions about important issues, you don't turn to your neighbour and start talking. The stigma is too great, and there is not enough scaffolding to help you cross the social barriers. You vote and see the results, but the voting mechanism is not a social object that mediates and motivates engagement with others. And so, even though you are all together in the same room, grappling with tough issues, you will never launch into group discourse'.⁴⁸

Simon's response to the exhibition at the Anne Frank Museum is useful in understanding what an embrace of current technologies could do for 19 Princelet Street. It also reminds us of the complexities of 'creating scaffold to help cross social barriers' at historic sites. As she points out:

'Not everyone would want to go to the next level and have a conversation with strangers, but based on their conversations with companions, it was clear that some visitors [at the *Free2choose* exhibition] were deeply engaged and did want to talk about the results. In an international city like Amsterdam, in a museum focused on one girl's extreme story that has touched the whole world, there is an enormous opportunity to go to the next level and facilitate cross-cultural discussion. As it stood, I had an interesting time comparing the results from different groups in my head. But I didn't understand why those groups were different, and I didn't gain more insight into how different people think about complicated human rights issues. I wanted more than just a fun interactive experience: I wanted to understand the other people in the room. It would have made for an extraordinary and unique experience in line with the overall mission of the Anne Frank House'.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon, online and ebook edition. Chapter 3, case study Free2choose exhibit at the Anne Frank Museum.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Eat/Work/Pray

'No area in Britain has been more written about, more exploited as a source and site for the projection of public anxieties about proletarian combination or sexual promiscuity, the state of the nation or the degeneration of the 'race'.⁵⁰

Tower Hamlets today is a borough in social, economic and cultural transition. It comprises 'Asian supermarkets, old churches, council housing and gap-toothed street-scapes',⁵¹ and in spite of the British National Party's electoral success in nearby Isle of Dogs in 1993, it 'projects an air of solidarity and inclusion'.⁵² Brick Lane lies at the eastern end of Princelet Street, and boasts a veritable smorgasboard of curry houses and bagel shops, as well as countless boutiques and nightclubs, private and subsidised housing, with the Truman Brewery (a mainstay of the white working class community in the 1950s, and today a vibrant hub for creative businesses, galleries and shops) at its centre. Now a tourist destination, this thoroughfare has, for many years, inspired writers wishing to celebrate the rhetoric of inclusivity.⁵³ On the corner of Brick Lane and Fournier Street the Great London Mosque, a gathering point for many East End walking-tours, reflects the area's long history as a 'melting pot', and also exposes a 'frontier between the (Bangladeshi) residential sector [...]

⁵⁰ Phil Cohen, 'Out of the Melting Pot, Into the Fire Next Time: Imagining the East End as City, Body, Text', *Imagining Cities: Scripts, Signs, Memory*, ed. Sallie Westwood & John Williams, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 77.

⁵¹ From Piaras Mac Éinrí's 'An Irishman's Diary' in *The Irish Times*, (14 July 2007), available on the [19 Princelet Street website](#).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See Rachel Lichtenstein's *On Brick Lane* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2007); Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (London: Black Swan, 2003) among others.

and an increasingly gentrified, wealthy extension of the City'.⁵⁴ Built in 1743 by the Huguenots, it was later used by Methodists until the burgeoning Jewish community converted it into the Spitalfields Great Synagogue, or *Machzike Adas*, with an adjoining Talmud school, in 1897. The post-war influx of Bengali immigrants resulted in the building's final transition in 1976, and it remains the *Jamme Masjid*, or Great London Mosque, serving Brick Lane's Sylheti Bangladeshi community.⁵⁵



The Jamme Masjid (Great London Mosque)

In the mid-1980s, the management committee of the mosque decided to refurbish the interior to accommodate the growing congregation. Plans were made to replace the dilapidated gallery, dating from the building's consecration, with a mezzanine floor and to dispense with the panelling (see Eade, 1996 & 2000). As John Eade

⁵⁴ Eade, *Placing London*, 2000, p.129.

⁵⁵ Information on the Great London Mosque provided by www.portcities.org.uk/london

describes in *Placing London*, the work which was undertaken received no public approval and was ‘roundly condemned by local conservationists [...] who criticized the brutal treatment of a material heritage’.⁵⁶ What should be conserved and how it must be done was exposed as a deeply contentious issue, and the ensuing debate concerning the ‘philosophy of restoration and repair’⁵⁷ revealed, according to Eade, the far more complex issue of

‘...whether Islam could be accommodated within a domesticated vision of a multi-cultural inner-city. The elimination of the gallery and paneling appeared to be a rejection of a Judeo-Christian past. A boundary was now firmly established between the Islamicised interior and the building’s outward appearance, which retained much of its original character’.⁵⁸

The condemnation of the structural modification that took place at the *Jamme Masjid* speaks directly to Prasad’s lament concerning the obstacles preventing new immigrants from transforming Eurocentric domestic interiors (see my reference on page 94). No such modification has taken place at 19 Princelet Street since 1869, when the garden was converted into a hidden synagogue, and yet by linking the two, (perhaps through a temporary exhibit detailing the shifts in the built history of religious and domestic interiors in Spitalfields) a parallel need for adaptive space for prayer, work and living becomes apparent in the lives of immigrants arriving in the East End. Both the *Jamme Masjid* and 19 Princelet Street are frequently referenced as local ‘multicultural’ landmarks; buildings which have witnessed the layering of

⁵⁶ Eade, p.158.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

peoples, religions and histories, but what is not made apparent are the ruptures to this apparently seamless 'melting pot' chronology – the attempts to, covertly in some instances, alter historic buildings; make them functional, culturally relevant places, perhaps at the expense of historic preservation.

The instances of manufactured inclusion rhetoric at 19 Princelet Street and subsequent attempts to assert the equal importance of multcentred histories diminishes the impact of the explicit architectural details I have referred within the building, resulting in the specific histories of flux they represent disappearing as quietly as David Rodinsky. The Museum of Immigration and Diversity aims to preserve 19 Princelet Street and interpret it for future generations, proposing that the building stand as a buffer against attacks on multiculturalism. Implicit within this mission, however, is the assumption that a shifting local immigrant community (currently comprised of primarily Bangladeshi and Somalian residents, but home now to a growing number of Kosovar Albanians, Russians and Lithuanians) will find the transformations that occurred within 19 Princelet Street relevant to their own histories of adaptation and movement. I believe this claim is made on tenuous grounds. By promoting 19 Princelet Street as a universalising symbol in the complex layered history of Tower Hamlets, the Museum conflates the multi-faceted experiences of urban dwelling for recent immigrants with the history of predominantly European émigrés over one hundred and fifty years ago.

London has been sustained by over two thousand years of arrivals and adaptations by immigrant groups, and it is vital that museums such as 19 Princelet Street assert this and forge links between new arrivals and established communities within Britain. Each new arrival's experience of migration, settlement and history in the East End is distinct and non-linear, much as each occupation and modification of a family house and place of worship is discontinuous and compromised. Exploring the visible ruptures in the spatial environment could illicit a more sustained conversation regarding experiences of place than the conjuring of shared memories, particularly if the aim is to conceive of 19 Princelet Street as a conduit for interpreting history, not a mausoleum for preserving it.⁵⁹ A unique breakage occurs within the fabric of 19 Princelet Street; a shift in response to the changing demands and shocks of immigrant life. In order to engage visitors fully, the building needs to be repositioned as having a continuous and fluid role to play within the community; not simply an historical artifact, an inert oddity in an already eclectic, often polarised neighbourhood.

Thresholds and Borders

Active outreach and participation are crucial components in identifying an audience for 'community museums' such as 19 Princelet Street, the Museum at Eldridge Street and the District Six Museum, in much the same way as efforts to reform the urban

⁵⁹ In his essay, 'Valéry, Proust, Museum', Theodor Adorno argues that 'Museums are the family sepulchres of works of art. They testify to the neutralisation of culture'. *Prisms*, (p.175). Exploring Paul Valéry and Marcel Proust's musings on the 'museum experience', Adorno writes that the 'shock' of the museum is that we 'put the art of the past to death' (p.177).

housing design process can and must incorporate the specific requirements of minority ethnic groups. It is pertinent that Sunand Prasad highlights the level of autonomous control that such groups have exerted in the recent (and often local) design of religious and community buildings:

‘The many temples that have been built constitute a distinct architectural corpus that could provide insights into how communities reproduce the imagery and accommodation needs of an essential aspect of culture’.⁶⁰

As a series of pertinent essays have recently highlighted, there is an invaluable role that community engagement plays in the formation of successful ‘participatory’ community museums.⁶¹ In considering how cultural diversity is collected, exhibited and disseminated, many of these new museums, for example, the Museum of Chinese in the Americas in Lower Manhattan; the Brooklyn Children’s Museum, and the Ragged School Museum in East London, aim to resist the limits of nostalgia by engaging in activities that constitute a conversation; to ‘gain [a] more integrative and inclusive community history [that] can help to counter the sense of marginalisation and disempowerment’.⁶² This notion of a ‘conversation’ between the museum and its constituents, achieved in part by sharing the exhibition-making and programmatic processes, is very much a goal of the Trustees and volunteers at 19 Princelet Street.

⁶⁰ Prasad, ‘Architectural Hints of a Post-Colonial London’, p.27

⁶¹ See Steven D. Lavine’s essay ‘Audience, Ownership and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities’ in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, edited by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington, DC & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) and *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, edited by Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe, (Cambridge, MA & Oxford: Blackwell Publishers/The Sociological Review, 1996), amongst others.

⁶² Steven D. Lavine ‘Audience, Ownership and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities’, (p.149).

The problem for the Museum, as with many others of its size and scope, is, as museum professional Steven D. Lavine points out, 'the habits of the past easily turn dialogues into monologues'.⁶³

In his essay detailing the creation of the Chinatown History Project (now the Museum of Chinese in America, or MoCA, in New York), John Kuo Wei Tchen writes of the complexities of creating what he terms a 'dialogic' museum: 'a new type of dialogue-driven museum exploring the previously unexamined roles of Chinese New Yorkers, non-Chinese New Yorkers and tourists to New York's Chinatown'.⁶⁴ Tchen argues that the history of New York's Chinatown is as much about New York and the development of an American identity as it is about Chinese-Americans. This is very similar to the East End identity on display at 19 Princelet Street; celebrating a vibrant immigrant history as well as both the discord and harmony that communal living provokes. It is for this reason, suggests Tchen, that museums such as MoCA can and must balance the presentation of its own communities' history with a 'larger-scale understanding of why and how life has become the way it is'.⁶⁵

In the case of 19 Princelet Street, attempting to adequately represent the histories of its neighbouring streets comes at the expense of raising sufficient funds to stabilise

⁶³ Lavine. 'Audience, Ownership and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities', p.144-5.

⁶⁴ John Kuo Wei Tchen. 'Creating a Dialogic Museum: The Chinatown History Experiment'. In *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, edited by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington, DC & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992, p.286).

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.295.

the building and keep it open so local residents can see it for themselves. Volunteer and Trustee Philip Black told the *Guardian* newspaper that has been 'shocked by the reaction of some high-profile figures who have said to him that 'it would be much easier for you to raise the money if this project were not multicultural'.⁶⁶

'Black argues that a host of small, single-theme museums flourish in London - including some with an ethnic focus. Major cities in other countries, including Sydney, Boston and New York, have set up museums of immigration, apparently without the problems London is having. The Tenement Museum in New York found it easy to get financial backing, says Black, "because many Americans think of themselves as having just come off the boat". By contrast, he reckons that "the British are not so comfortable with the concept of themselves as immigrants - that's the nub of the problem".⁶⁷

Though there may be truth to Black's claims, 19 Princelet's Street's problem with fundraising stems from the Trust's refusal to target donors from specific ethnic backgrounds, coupled with an unwillingness to emphasise one particular aspect of the building's history over another. Contrary to Black's comments about the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, and despite its emphasis on the multiethnic history of the building and the neighbourhood, Hasia Diner argues that 'the Jewishness of the building [the Tenement Museum] and its residents emerges despite the efforts of the staff to present the historically more accurate tale of what happened within its walls'.⁶⁸ Not only does the character of a building *emerge* according to its visitorship, the acknowledgment that people come in order to connect with their own pasts is significant; even if it is not these pasts alone which shape the museum's mission.

⁶⁶ John Cunningham's article 'Never-Ending Story', *The Guardian*, 2003.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Diner, *Lower East Side Memories*, p.118.

Towards a 'Participatory Museum'

'Museums negotiate a nexus between cultural production and consumption, and between expert and lay knowledge'.⁶⁹

Group visits organised by the volunteer coordinator at 19 Princelet Street cater to students of all ages and backgrounds from across the country. In May and June of 2007 I volunteered on a number of open days, observing some of these visits by secondary school students. My intention was to note the difference in how visitors were encouraged to engage with and respond to the building. During Museums and Galleries Week in May, Refugee Week in June, and on a variety of dates in September, 19 Princelet Street is open to the general public. I observed that while attendance fluctuated, with anywhere between 80 and 500 visitors on each occasion,⁷⁰ the majority of visitors were tourists, working professionals, students or retirees, and the vast number of them were white.

Between 7,000 and 10,000 people pass through 19 Princelet Street each year.⁷¹

Many visitors already know about the building and are curious for specific reasons: they have heard there was an old synagogue in the back garden; they knew

⁶⁹ From Sharon Macdonald's Introduction to *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, edited by Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe, (Cambridge, MA & Oxford: Blackwell Publishers/The Sociological Review, 1996) p.4.

⁷⁰ On Sunday 9 September 2007, as part of the Brick Lane Festival, 320 people visited 19 Princelet Street. On 16-17 September, as part of Open House weekend, over 1,000 people visited. Statistics provided by the Spitalfields Trust.

⁷¹ Statistics provided by the Spitalfields Trust.

something about Rodinsky's room, and may have even read the book; or they have heard a radio programme about the house. As all visitors have a designated route they must take – clockwise around the building – there are limits to any real sense of personal exploration and discovery. Many stop and exclaim as they cross the threshold into the sanctuary - the sense of absence is palpable; for some, particularly the American-Jewish visitors, this was the purpose of their visit. Some visitors pause on the stairwells to glance at the washbasins installed for ritual cleansing before prayer; others attempt to decipher the faded Hebrew and English memorial plaques. The majority of visitors diligently read the wall text, and pause respectfully in front of the suitcases, the video installations and kiosks. Few will fill out luggage tags or information sheets about their own 'journey' to Princelet Street, unless encouraged by an enthusiastic volunteer.⁷²

How many of these visitors will return to 19 Princelet Street more than once is unclear, but repeat attendance at historic sites, especially with so few programmes or events, is statistically low. (Falk, 2009) The largest and most consistent visitor groups to 19 Princelet Street are secondary school students on class trips. In June 2007, during Refugee Week, a group of students from Haverstock school in north-

⁷² In her book *The Participatory Museum*, (2010) museum consultant Nina Simon explores how cultural sites can improve their exhibits, even on a shoestring budget, by giving participants the tools to contribute to a well conceived, provocative and engaging visitor-created project. 'When I see poorly-made drawings in a visitor-created exhibit, I'm never motivated to pick up crayons and start colouring. But when I see something really unusual, surprising, or appealing, I'm more likely to be intrigued by the experience overall, which may inspire me to participate as well.' As Simon points out, contributory projects such as the luggage tags at 19 Princelet Street rely on visitors' contributions to succeed, thus 'generating both high risk and high institutional investment. If participants don't act as requested, the project can quite publicly fail'. Chapter 6, online and ebook version.

west London visited, the majority of them recent immigrants or children of asylum seekers to London. While they were boisterous and at times inattentive and bored, (as teenagers in museums often are) two of the Somalian students were visibly moved by the installation which utilises telephone kiosks so visitors can hear the stories of (Somalian) immigrants to London. Many of the students enjoyed deciphering text in their native language and engaged more freely with the interactive aspects of the exhibits.⁷³ But it was the student's engagement with the space that was the most noteworthy. In contrast to the often self-consciously awed response to the synagogue's sanctuary that I witnessed from many visitors on the public days I volunteered, ('conversation is louder than in church, softer than in real life',⁷⁴) many of the students were unaware that the space they were standing in had any religious significance and so were more casual in their appraisal of it.

As I have argued, the erection of a multi-use space for dwelling, working and praying is one of 19 Princelet Street's strongest features. Yet it is downplayed by Trustees and docents in an attempt to 'democratise' the space, and obscure 'difference'. Instead of drawing on the powerful links between the adaptation of the house as a space for prayer, and the impact of built modification within the community at large, the history of Jewish life is absorbed quickly and folded into the Huguenot, Somalian and Irish histories on display throughout the building. If the Museum were to

⁷³ John Falk's research into museum visitors and identity-fulfilment indicates that visitors select and enjoy museum experiences based on their perceived ability to reflect and enhance particular self-concepts. Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*, Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009.

⁷⁴ Adorno, *Prisms*, p.176.

prioritize the structural concerns *at any cost*, they could enable the building to be opened more frequently with rotating exhibits. Instead, the Board and its Director persist with minimal funds, no paid staff and precarious working conditions in their bid to exert control over the environment and its visitors.⁷⁵

During my weeks at 19 Princelet Street I talked with many of the volunteers about what they imagined the building would be like in the future, once the elusive £3 million has been raised. Almost all of them spoke of things ‘remaining the same’, a surprising attitude for a museum dedicated to a history of change and rupture. “Most people think there’ll be laminated stuff on the walls, bright lights and security staff, just like a big museum. But hopefully, it won’t be. In ten years’ time, it will be exactly the same - except that it won’t be falling down”,⁷⁶ a volunteer told the *Guardian* newspaper, implying that by having no lights, blue-tacked paper signs and no staff they are somehow sidestepping the ‘museum’ category, in spite of their choice of name. The Board does not plan to employ museum staff other than its volunteers – no educators, no programmers. It is as if the building is complete, and requires no further interpretation.

Inviting new immigrants to engage with the house and its history, while attempting to promote a broader conversation about structural modification as a way to assert ‘place-making’ in Spitalfields could result in a series of site-responsive exhibits borne

⁷⁵ See Appendix 1 for more detail on the problems involved in conducting research of this kind.

⁷⁶ John Cunningham ‘Never-Ending Story’, *The Guardian*, Wednesday 9 July, 2003.

out of visitor participation at 19 Princelet Street. In *Rodinsky's Room* Iain Sinclair writes: 'Immigration is a blowtorch held against an anthill. It can always be sentimentalised, but never re-created'.⁷⁷ For a museum honouring a history of 'immigration and diversity' to be a vital, relevant 'participatory' presence in the lives of local residents, as well as the many international visitors and well-heeled Londoners who flock during Open House London, a link to the past needs to be established. Not a universalized 'grand narrative', where the concept of immigration is understood as simply the movement of peoples and the occupation of a building by a succession of families from different backgrounds. But a past which emphasizes difference, loss and change, and reveals discrete yet significant spatial ruptures within a precious landmark building.

⁷⁷ Lichtenstein & Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room*, p. 67.

Chapter 3

A Secular Sanctuary:

Continuity and change at the Eldridge Street Synagogue



Rebecca Faulkner
'For Whom was Built This Special Shell?' Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums, galleries
and cultural centres
Part II, Chapter 3

‘Certain ideological conflicts which underlie the controversies of our day take place between pious descendants of time and tenacious inhabitants of space’.
Michel Foucault¹

‘God was out there...in the “shout in the street”’.
Marshall Berman²

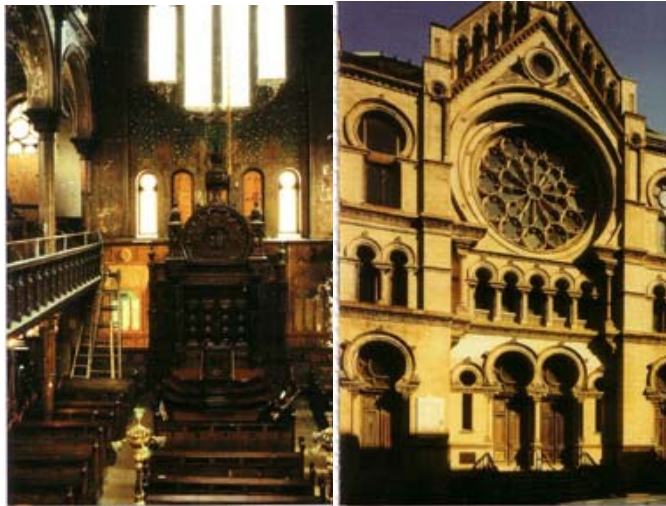
This thesis explores the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums through three case studies, the second of which focuses on the Museum at Eldridge Street (formerly the Eldridge Street Project) in New York City, a non-profit organisation that has, for the last twenty-five years, worked to restore the Eldridge Street Synagogue. Following a summary of the building’s history, this case study will outline the inception and development of the museum, detailing the evolving relationship between museum staff and the synagogue’s congregation, and will provide an overview of the museum’s programmes and events in order to assess the position the synagogue occupies within the ‘community’.³ My case study focuses on the years 1986 to the present, with particular attention given to the years 1999 to 2003,

¹ Michel Foucault’s ‘Of Other Places: Utopias and Heterotopias’, from *Architecture Culture 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology* by Joan Ockman, (New York: Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, 1993), p.420.

² Marshall Berman ‘*All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, (London and New York: Verso 1983), p.317. Berman is, in part quoting Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus from *Ulysses*, expressing the sentiment that the street is where ‘the totality of modern material and spiritual forces could meet, clash, infuse and work out their ultimate meanings and fates’. p.316.

³ In his defining text, *Keywords*, Raymond Williams explores the complexity of the word ‘community’ and describes the ‘difficult interaction between the original meanings of direct common concern with the emergence of various forms of common organisation’. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (Glasgow: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., Fontana, 1976) p.65-66. For Anthony P. Cohen the word expresses a ‘relational idea’ – similarity and difference – the opposition of one community to others, and can therefore be seen as representing the boundary between the two. See Anthony P. Cohen’s *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985) p.12. Given the fluidity of the term, for the purpose of this study I will be referring to the residents of the neighbourhood surrounding the synagogue –encompassing Chinatown and the borders of the East Village as ‘the community’, while acknowledging that this group is reflexive and non-static.

during which time I served as the Project's Programme Associate and Exhibitions Curator. By examining the nature of the relationship between the museum and the orthodox Jewish congregation, and through an analysis of the impact of the museum's outreach within the Chinatown community, this case study will assess the value of this multi-use building, questioning whether it fulfils its mandate to interpret the history of an iconic synagogue for a secular audience.



The interior and exterior of the Eldridge Street Synagogue, 1987

The Eldridge Street Synagogue on New York City's Lower East Side was built in 1886-87 as a house of worship for K'hal Adath Jeshurun with Anshe Lubetz, two separate congregations of immigrants originating from the region that now comprises Russia, Romania and Poland.⁴ The congregations were founded in New York in 1853 and amalgamated soon after, and were among the first Ashkenazi congregations in

⁴ Information provided by the Museum at Eldridge Street website, www.eldridgestreet.org

North America.⁵ Like many other Jewish immigrants to New York, the Eldridge Street Synagogue's earliest congregants first worshipped in tenements (multi-unit dwellings usually comprising four or more apartments), *shteibls*⁶ and former churches abandoned by previous residents who had prospered and moved on (predominantly German Jews and Irish Catholics). From its opening in 1887, the synagogue stood apart as a symbol of the religious freedom and economic opportunity sought by many immigrants to America. It is among the more significant remaining markers of the huge Jewish community that flourished on the Lower East Side from the 1850s to the 1940s. The congregation's members began to prosper and move away throughout the 1920s, leaving an abandoned sanctuary in need of urgent repair and a diminished *minyan* (an assembly of ten or more men necessary for Jewish prayer) that continued to gather for weekly *Shabbos* (Sabbath) services in the basement.

In 1986, the not-for-profit, non-sectarian Eldridge Street Project was established with a dual mission to restore the synagogue for worship and develop it as a cultural centre, in a neighbourhood that was rapidly becoming Chinatown. In recognition of

⁵ 'Ashkenazi' (the medieval Hebrew name for Germany) refers to Jews descended from the medieval Jewish community of the Rhineland who migrated eastward eventually settling in Germany, Hungary, Poland and Russia between the tenth and nineteenth centuries. The language of the Ashkenazi Jews was predominantly Yiddish, and although only 3% of the world's Jewish population was of Ashkenazi origin in the eleventh century, by 1931 they accounted for 92%, and today 80%. Jewish communities had settled on the east coast of the U.S.A. prior to the nineteenth century: in 1759 the Touro synagogue was erected in Newport, Rhode Island; its congregants were Sephardic Jews who had arrived as early as 1658 from Curacao. Sephardi Jews, as distinct from Ashkenazi, originated from the Iberian peninsula and were descendants of those subject to expulsion from Spain and Portugal in the 1490s. Thanks to Rabbi David Dunn Bauer for his clarification.

⁶ Storefront prayer and study houses.

the building's architectural magnificence and its role in American immigrant history the synagogue was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1996. This designation imbued the building with status as a significant national monument, and also guaranteed it state funding through the Landmark Trust.⁷ Priding itself on its location on the doorstep of Ellis Island; the 'immigrant gateway'⁸ to the United States, the Project runs a secular programme of concerts, literary events, lecture series, art installations and educational outreach, evoking themes of remembrance and renewal, and attempts to attract a more diverse audience from the immediate Chinese and Vietnamese community.⁹

In December 2007 the synagogue was officially re-opened; finally restored to its nineteenth-century glory, with the Project, in its new, official incarnation, renamed the 'Museum at Eldridge Street'. The Museum aims to preserve and maintain the

⁷ The Landmark Trust USA was established in 1991 to rescue historic properties in distress. The Trust practice 'conservative repair', and do not attempt to make the buildings they rescue 'as new', but allow the history of the building to direct their work. Information taken from the Landmark Trust USA website www.landmarktrustusa.org accessed 19 December 2007.

⁸ In her essay on the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to 'a defunct federal office [is] reborn as a shrine'. Ellis Island, she argues, is an 'aperture not a place'. 'Abandoned, the site became an evocative ruin. Restored, it has become a repository of patriotic sentiment and exemplar of institutional memory under the aegis of corporate sponsorship'. She is openly critical of this 'grand patriotic narrative of immigration', which is as selective as it is romanticised. 'However seductive the rhetoric that surround Ellis Island [...] is, memory is not reclaimed, it is produced'. I will explore this notion of 'memory culture' throughout this case study. (See page 9, and pages 177-187 of *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, 1998.)

⁹ In the years after the United States enacted the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, allowing many more immigrants from Asia into the country, the population of Chinatown exploded. By the 1980s, New York City's Chinatown had surpassed San Francisco's to become the largest enclave of Chinese immigrants in the Western hemisphere. Most current population estimates are in the range of 150,000 to 250,000 residents (some estimates go as high as 350,000 residents). It is difficult to get an exact count, as neighbourhood participation in the U.S. Census is thought to be low due to language barriers, as well as large-scale illegal immigration. Statistics provided by NYC & Company www.nycvisit.com

building as a 'symbol of contemporary, secular faith',¹⁰ with the congregation using the vast sanctuary on *Shabbos* mornings, High Holy Days and festivals,¹¹ and secular programming, including guided tours and concerts, continuing to take place in the building year-round.

Building roots

The turn of the twentieth century was a pivotal time for the Eldridge Street synagogue and the Jewish immigrants who founded it. Between 1881 and 1910 it is estimated that two million Jews arrived in America from Eastern Europe (though many arrived as early as 1850).¹² The majority of these immigrants fled the Tsarist pogroms in Russia,¹³ travelling from the region that then comprised Poland, Lithuania, Romania and the Ukraine before making the arduous journey in steerage from Hamburg to New York with hopes of a better life – wealth, prosperity and freedom from persecution. Historian Hasia R. Diner estimates that by 1910, half a million Jews had settled on the Lower East Side; by contrast, Vienna, one of the

¹⁰ See Edward Rothstein's article 'Return of a Long Dormant Island of Grace' which appeared in the Arts and Design section of the *New York Times*, December 1, 2007.

¹¹ Taken from information provided by Yosef Shoshani, Rabbi at the Eldridge Street synagogue, and from the congregations' website <http://www.manhattansynagogue.com>

¹² Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the life they made and found there* (New York: Schocken Books, Simon & Schuster, 1983) p. 58.

¹³ From 1825 to 1855, 600 anti-Jewish decrees were issued under Tsar Nicolas I, including the expulsion of close-knit communities from their villages and the censoring of Hebrew and Yiddish books. Most Jews resided at this time in The Pale - an area of about 386,000 square miles stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Under the reign of Tsar Alexander II the Jews fared slightly better, but his assassination in March 1881, for which the Jewish community were wrongly blamed, brought to an end the period of modest liberalism and resulted in a wave of anti-Jewish pogroms which swept southern Imperial Russia. By the summer of 1881 thousands of refugees were in flight from pogroms that had spread across the Ukraine. See Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, p.50.

largest Jewish centres in Europe, had a Jewish population of 175,000, and Chicago, about 100,000.¹⁴

Upon arrival in New York City, most new immigrants absorbed the shocks of urban life, and the trauma of flight from an oppressive but beloved homeland. Few returned to the 'old world'. These narratives of upheaval and resistance, assimilation and 'making good' are familiar tropes; canonising the Lower East Side into mythic status through images have come to represent the larger immigrant experience in New York, and across the USA. Diner describes the Lower East Side as 'the American Jewish Plymouth Rock';¹⁵ an 'immigrant way-station'.¹⁶ The Lower East Side is a neighbourhood that exists, if only in memory, as *the* location of Jewish authenticity, and has become, for many, a Jewish 'sacred space'.¹⁷ From the pungent odours of the pickle barrels and the raucous clamour of tenement living, urban dwelling as experienced by new arrivals to New York is the stuff of contemporary legend; immortalised in the literature of Henry Roth and Abraham Cahan; films such as *Crossing Delancey* and *The Jazz Singer*, and the Yiddish Theatre productions of the period.¹⁸

¹⁴ Hasia R. Diner, *Lower East Side Memories*, p. 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Diner, *Lower East Side Memories*, p.8

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See Henry Roth's novel *Call it Sleep*, Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*; films such as *Hester Street* and *The Jazz Singer* and the theatrical work of Jacob Adler and Boris Thomashefsky. See Bibliography for details.



Map of the Lower East Side from 1939 showing how the neighbourhood is divided into 'ethnic districts'.

Rebecca Faulkner
 'For Whom was Built This Special Shell?' Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums, galleries and cultural centres
 Part II, Chapter 3

While rooted in the realities of political activism, tremendous artistic and creative output, and the working-class struggle of marginalised subcultures, the ‘symbolic community’¹⁹ that the Lower East Side has become in memory bears little resemblance to the squalid, inhospitable network of streets that defined it in the last years of the nineteenth century. Yiddish writer Leon Kobrin wrote of the Lower East Side in the 1880s as

...a gray stone world of tall tenements, where even on the loveliest spring day there was not a blade of grass. The streets are enveloped in an undefinable atmosphere, which reflects the unique light, or shadow, of its Jewish inhabitants. The air itself seems to have absorbed the unique Jewish sorrow and pain, an emanation of its thousand years of exile. The sun, gray and depressed; the men and women clustered around the pushcarts; the gray walls of the tenements – all looks sad.²⁰

¹⁹ See Christopher Mele’s *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate and Resistance in New York City*, (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) for his assessment of the Lower East Side as ‘symbolic’ community.

²⁰ Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, p.72.



Shoppers and peddlars on Hester Street, circa 1890.

Kobrin's Lower East Side was the most densely populated district of Manhattan, with an estimated 700 inhabitants per acre by 1900.²¹ In *World of Our Fathers*, Irving Howe's definitive work charting the arrival of eastern-European immigrants to New York, he vividly evokes Lower Manhattan in the late nineteenth century: the 'wild' and 'inconceivable' machine age – the city a throng of market traders, sweat-shop apartments and crowded tenements. As new arrivals struggled to secure socio-economic status, a transitional identity was formed – a modern consciousness rooted partly in the traditions of homeland but adaptive to the styles and habits of

²¹ Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, p.69.

America. For many of the first waves of Jewish immigrants, the 1880s and 1890s were cruel, desperate years of poverty and hardship, but by 1912, Howe identifies a rise in the standard of living, and, in keeping with Abraham Cahan's protagonist in *The Rise of David Levinsky*, (a pivotal Jewish American novel of 1936 exploring the moral pitfalls of success) the emergence of a bourgeois culture on the Lower East Side.

Upon completion in 1887, the Eldridge Street Synagogue drew critical acclaim from New Yorker's impressed by its imposing Moorish, Gothic and Romanesque styles;²² dramatic stained-glass rose window; seventy-foot vaulted ceiling and elaborate Victorian brass work and hand-stenciled walls. Thousands participated in religious services in the building's heyday, from its opening through the 1920s. On High Holy days police were stationed in the street to control the crowds. Membership included the artist Ben Shahn; performers Eddie Cantor, Paul Muni and Edward G. Robinson, and scientist Jonas Salk.²³ Throughout these decades the synagogue functioned not only as a house of worship but as an 'agency for acculturation, a place to welcome

²² The synagogue's original architects, the German Protestant Herter Brothers, were well established in New York City in the 1880's specialising in tenement building design. The congregation paid approximately \$92,000 which comprised the purchase of three lots: 12, 14 and 16 Eldridge Street, and the construction of the building and architect's fees, and requested that the design of the building should rival the majestic cathedrals of Europe as well as the established German synagogues in uptown Manhattan. The wood for the Ark (*Aron Kodesh* in Hebrew – a receptacle, or ornamental closet used for storing the Torah scrolls) was imported from Italy, and the inclusion of 'Moorish' (Islamic) detailing such as horseshoe-shaped windows were included to identify the building as distinct from the Gothic cathedrals it also emulated. Information provided by permission of the Museum at Eldridge Street archives.

²³ The history of the synagogue's congregation is drawn from the minute books and archives at the Museum at Eldridge Street, as compiled and overseen by volunteer intern Bradley Bernstein in collaboration with the American History Workshop.

new Americans'.²⁴ For Jewish immigrants, many of whom came from close-knit Yiddish-speaking communities, membership of the synagogue bought them access to the larger world of New York City and beyond – a means to expand cultural and linguistic horizons as well as maintain ties with old traditions and rituals. Before settlement houses were established and long afterward, poor people came to the *shul* to be fed, secure a loan, learn about job and housing opportunities, and make arrangements to care for the sick.

Membership began to dwindle as congregants moved to other, more affluent parts of New York City, much as they did in London's East End. Immigration quotas limited the number of new arrivals, and the Great Depression affected the congregants' fortunes. By the 1950s, with the rain leaking in and the stairwells unsound, and without the resources needed to heat and maintain the main sanctuary, they were forced to worship in a smaller chapel (the *bes hamedrash*, or 'study room') in the building's lower level. The upstairs sanctuary remained empty for the next twenty-five years, until 1980. In 1971 when the building was in serious jeopardy it came to the attention of New York University history professor Gerard Wolfe, who led walking tours of the neighbourhood. He formed a volunteer organisation, the Friends of the Eldridge Street Synagogue, comprised of local Jewish residents, urban historians and architectural preservationists, to rescue the building, which was in a dire state of deterioration. The roof was on the verge of collapse, the foundation had

²⁴ From the Museum's website www.eldridgestreet.org

suffered severe structural damage, plaster and paint fell steadily, and one of two sets of interior stairs had collapsed. The Friends secured emergency funds from public and private sources, began the process of securing landmark designation, and organised the emergency stabilisation of the building's exterior, which was completed in 1984.

Once it became clear that the restoration would be a complex, protracted multi-million-dollar nationwide endeavor, the not-for-profit Eldridge Street Project was founded by preservationist Roberta Brandes Gratz, to see it through. A binding legal agreement was drawn up with the congregation, allowing the Project to begin fundraising and programming from the basement area of the synagogue, on the understanding that the utilities and overhead costs were covered and the congregation could continue to worship downstairs. The Project's mission was announced – to restore the site to its former glory and interpret it as a cultural and educational resource detailing the story of Jewish immigrant life through exhibitions, public programmes and outreach initiatives. As their early publicity materials attest to, it was hoped the Project would be a centre for 'historical reflection, aesthetic inspiration and spiritual renewal'.²⁵

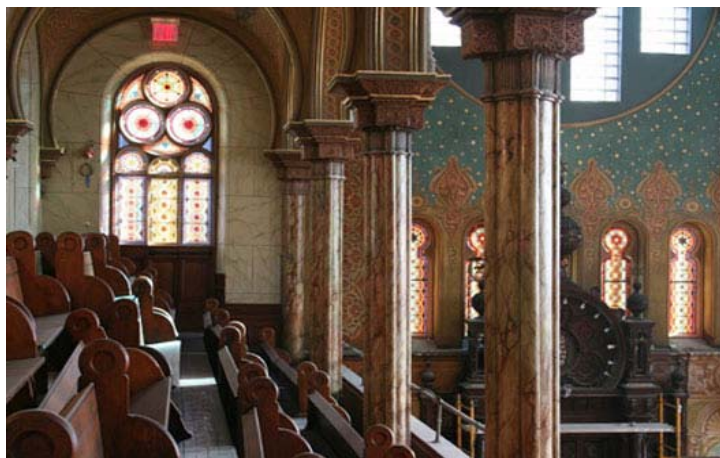
By the end of 1987 - the synagogue's 100th anniversary, the Eldridge Street Project had raised funds to begin the first phase of construction, which commenced in 1989. The combined efforts of a fierce fundraising campaign which generated \$20million,

²⁵ From the Museum at Eldridge Street's archival literature.

and a dedicated group of architects, engineers, staff and volunteers managing the programming, design and construction, saw a heating and ventilation system installed in the building in 2005, followed by an elevator, and a new roof proudly displaying restored finials.²⁶ On 2 December 2007, the 120th anniversary of the building's 1887 opening date, the newly incarnated 'Museum at Eldridge Street' 'rededicated' the synagogue in a ceremony involving congregants, Museum staff and members of the public. The meticulously restored sanctuary, with its elaborately ornamented mock-Turkish motifs, Moorish arches, painted stars and radiant skylights, is a reminder of the spiritual yearning the original congregation was surely evoking in 1887. Yet the deliberate traces of the congregation's less glorious history - the broken plaster of an old wall interrupting the restored stonework - a large window of glass bricks that was put in when the congregation could no longer afford to repair the stained glass - suggests a more complex history of adaptation, co-habitation and 'making do'. It is in these aspects of the building where the attempts to make space for old and new; secular and sacred, are uniformly visible.

²⁶ Finials are an architectural device, typically carved in stone and employed to decoratively emphasise the apex of a gable or any distinctive ornaments at the top, end, or corner of a building or structure. Information from the Museum's archives.

Sacred time, sacred place



View from the balcony of the synagogue, 2007

For the last twenty-five years the Project's visitorship has increased dramatically with annual attendance for tours and programmes numbering 16,000 in 2006, (approximately 8,500 participating in tours of the building and the rest attending educational and cultural programmes²⁷) with attendance increasing to approximately 30,000 in 2010.²⁸ In 2006, the Project reported a fifty-eight percent increase in participation by high-school groups in educational programmes at the synagogue since 2004. 1,189 kindergarten through twelfth grade (reception to year twelve) students from twenty-six schools from throughout the city and across the country participated in classes and workshops that foster an awareness of Jewish culture, neighbourhood and architectural history.²⁹ A local school teacher commented that "Through our visits each year my students have developed a deeper understanding

²⁷ Statistics supplied by the Museum at Eldridge Street's Annual Report, 2006 via their website.

²⁸ From Museum at Eldridge Street's 2010 Annual Report

²⁹ Ibid.

of our community and its diverse populations, and they have connected Jewish culture to their own Chinese, African-American and Hispanic heritage”.³⁰

Competitive grants from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts are renewed annually for the Museum’s literary and music series, and the success of the Egg Creams and Egg Rolls Block Party³¹ has cemented the role that programming and outreach plays as part of the Museum’s evolving mission.



Egg Cream and Egg Rolls Block Party, 2010.

Now, with the restoration complete, the Museum estimates four times the number of annual visitors, with public programmes greatly enhanced by the installation of a

³⁰ Quote from Arlene Grosdorf, second grade teacher at P.S. 1 School in Chinatown. Taken from the Eldridge Street Project’s 2006 Annual Report.

³¹ The Egg Rolls and Egg Creams Block Party is a street festival celebrating the culture, craft and cuisine of the neighbourhood’s eastern-European and Chinese communities, which takes place in and around the synagogue each summer, attracting over 2,500 visitors. It was voted the ‘Best New York City Block Party 2006’ by the Village Voice.

Family History Centre, where oral history workshops take place and genealogical information is be available. In the summer of 2008, under the guidance of the then Education Director, a five-day teacher workshop on ‘Immigration, Religion and Culture of New York’s Lower East Side’ took place, financed by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Public programmes, tours and educational outreach are now a permanent feature of the Museum. The installation of a new stained glass window by the artist Kiki Smith³² in 2010 has put the building on the map as a destination for contemporary art, as well as a centre for education, architecture, immigrant history and Jewish ritual. And the orthodox congregation remains, ever dwindling, but still worshipping every Friday and Saturday, as they always have done. How has this amicable co-existence been achieved?



Visitors centre, Museum at Eldridge Street

³² See pages 212-3 in Part III for more detail on the Kiki Smith/Deborah Gans window.

‘Serving your community is an on-going activity that requires clear policy and sufficient resources. It is also a reflection of an institution’s mission and its vision of its role as public educational institution’.³³

Mindy Duitz, former Director, Brooklyn Children’s Museum

Public programming at the Museum began in the late 1980s as a rather *ad hoc* affair, with an undefined need to ‘reach out’ to potential donors by offering tours and events which emphasised the building’s legacy and historical importance as an immigrant landmark. This was balanced by establishing a broader set of educational programming initiatives that would fulfil the criteria of state and city funding bodies, which could only support the Museum if they could be assured that they were not providing financial assistance to a religious group.³⁴ However, as programming at the Museum grew and developed throughout the 1990s it became clear that there were two specific groups who were not being catered to. By attracting visitors from the immediate ‘Chinese community’,³⁵ and also by appealing to a younger (often secular) Jewish audience who were moving into the cheaper (by Manhattan standards) housing in Chinatown and the Lower East Side, the Museum would be able to present itself as a both an anchor in a neighbourhood perpetually in flux, but also,

³³ Mindy Duitz, ‘The Soul of a Museum: Commitment to the Community at the Brooklyn Children’s Museum’. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*. Edited by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine. Washington, DC & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992, p. 242.

³⁴ The separation of church and state in the United States is a legal and political principle stating “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” Thomas Jefferson strongly advocated the separation of religion and state, which was enshrined in the Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution in 1802. Taken from the Bill of Rights, US Archives online.

³⁵ There is no such cohesive entity as ‘the Chinese community’ on the Lower East Side, and yet I refer to the predominantly Chinese local residents in this way to draw attention to the complexities of outreach and visitor profiles.

crucially, a building which could resonate with the needs and interests of a new, non/multi-religious audience. In 2001 the Museum, in collaboration with educators at the nearby Museum of Chinese in America, began to offer guided tours of the synagogue in Cantonese and Mandarin. Very few people from the ‘Chinese community’ expressed an initial interest in coming to the building, referring to it as the ‘old church on the block’, and why should they? Eldridge Street today is packed with Chinese shops selling everything from dumplings to discount house wares; internet cafes open and swiftly close; bridal boutiques are on the rise. Adjacent to the synagogue is a Buddhist temple, which hosts regular ritual blessings taking place on the pavement. The economic boom in China is evident in the plethora of more upscale Chinese-owned stores opening in neighbourhood.



Pu Zhao Si Buddhist Temple, 20 Eldridge Street, adjacent to the synagogue.

The synagogue is an anomaly – until recently it was often closed - much like 19 Princelet Street; its imposing façade standing in contrast to the activity on the street – a foreign oddity from a bygone era. How to make the Museum at Eldridge Street

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relevant for people without Jewish ancestry; no real interest in Jewish culture and architecture and possibly some suspicion that entering the building could be construed as an act of conversion (as a few Chinese store-owners expressed to us back in 2001) a challenge faced (and not adequately resolved, as I discussed in my previous case study) by the Museum of Immigration and Diversity at 19 Princelet Street, as well as many other small museums and heritage sites in urban centres. Unlike 19 Princelet Street, the Eldridge Street synagogue, remains, for some, a hugely significant marker in a neighbourhood imbued with both real and symbolic meaning. Tours of the Lower East Side are big business,³⁶ and the synagogue, along with the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, (which I discussed in my first case study) is one of the most popular stops along the way.

³⁶ Big Onion walking tours, one of the best known New York City tour groups, has been offering tours of the Jewish Lower East Side since 1991 as well as Chinatown history and immigrant history tours, among others www.bigonion.com



Welcome sign, Museum at Eldridge Street

Historian Hasia Diner identifies the post-Second World War period as the time when ‘touring the Lower East Side’ began in earnest, emerging in the late 1960s as a ‘powerful element in American Jewish culture’.³⁷ Diner continues:

‘The visited Lower East Side must be old. Old implies authenticity. A visit to the Lower East Side for American Jews provides a vicarious, temporary link to a sacred time in a sacred place’.³⁸

Diner’s examination of the forces of memory and myth-making at work on the Lower East Side are integral to an understanding of why the Eldridge Street synagogue is such an important Jewish-American landmark. Her analysis of the

³⁷ Diner, Hasia R, *Lower East Side Memories*, p.121

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.119.

‘sacred narrative’ of the Jewish Lower East Side stops short of a critique of the sentimentalised and often limiting aura of nostalgia that can blur any real understanding of the relevance of such landmarks. Three out of four Jewish Americans can trace their family roots back to the Lower East Side,³⁹ a statistic that helps explain why the neighbourhood resonates so deeply in the popular imagination.

And yet the synagogue itself is no longer representative of its immediate neighbourhood; like 19 Princelet Street it is not a barometre of place, insofar as it can no longer be identified with the place in which it is situated, in spite of its huge historical importance. By attempting to attract local residents and store-owners to the building, to re-situate it within Chinatown, and not just the time-capsule that is the Jewish Lower East Side, the museum hopes to make a crucial statement about the power of religious buildings as heritage sites with contemporary cultural relevance for New Yorker’s from all walks of life. And while tours of the building in Mandarin and Cantonese suffered from a similar problem as the aforementioned Egg Creams and Egg Rolls Block Party initially did, (they were annual, or seasonal concessions to a multicultural neighbourhood, and were not permanently woven into the fabric of the programming) the festival is now not only a crucial component of the Museum’s

³⁹ Information taken from the radio programme ‘Eldridge Street Synagogue Restoration Complete’, by Richard Hake (WNYC public radio, 2 December 2007).

summer programming schedule, but serves as a significant neighbourhood feature, attracting 9,000 visitors in 2011. In the words of Hanna Griff-Sleven, Director of Cultural Programs at the Museum, the festival is a “true New York Moment”. But specifically, she told me, “the Chinese community loves this event. The shopkeepers smile when I come with the city petition and welcome it. I am happy that the city seems to like it, but I am happier that the locals look forward to it, too”.⁴⁰

By 2000 the sense of ‘holistic’ programmatic continuity at the Museum was clear. The small education and programme department developed and produced successful public events aimed at diverse audiences; readings and the ‘Garden Cafeteria’ lecture series evoking the ‘salons’ attended by Isaac Bashevis Singer and others in the 1960s,⁴¹ featured authors such as Nathan Englander and Gary Shteyngart; jazz concerts and informal music sessions exploring the history of Chinese, Latino, Irish *and* Jewish roots in the area, as well as art installations by Christian Boltanski, and the aforementioned permanent stained glass window addition by Kiki Smith, helped to situate the Museum as a downtown arts venue, appealing to audiences beyond the Jewish community. However, events that were deemed ‘experimental’ were often vetoed by the congregation, and exhibits and

⁴⁰ From conversations with Hanna Griff-Sleven, March 2012.

⁴¹ The Garden Cafeteria at 165 East Broadway was one of the most storied places on the Lower East Side, in its day. Adjacent to the offices of *The Forvertz/ Forward Jewish Daily* newspaper, the cafeteria was a favourite of the paper's writers and poets, including Isaac Bashevis Singer. Information provided by the Municipal Arts Society <http://www.mas.org/viewarticle.php?id=1824>

installations in the sanctuary were subject to strictly adhered-to criteria.⁴² The congregation, often struggling to form a *minyan* for Friday and Saturday services, were both indebted to the Museum and also, understandably wary of what was going to happen to their building as fundraising efforts progressed. Many of the conditions placed on the programming were reasonable and borne out of respect for the legacy of the synagogue and the closely observed tenets of Judaism; yet on occasion the Museum staff struggled to assert themselves amidst what could be construed as isolationism.

The Egg Creams and Egg Rolls Block Party was the perfect occasion to bring people from within the local Chinese and Vietnamese communities to the synagogue to learn about the work being done by the Project and also to invite suggestions as to how to appeal to residents on a more regular basis. Much of the caution expressed by Chinese residents toward the building stems from cultural difference, suggested Ken Lo, New York Folklore Society Board member and consultant for the Chinese community at the Block Party. For many Chinatown residents, Sunday (the preferred day for the Block Party, as events are prohibited within the synagogue on Fridays and Saturdays in observation of the Sabbath) is a workday, leaving little or no time for leisure activities. Museum-going is not high on the list of preferred leisure activities

⁴² Women are forbidden from singing in front of men in orthodox synagogues, and so concerts featuring female voices were not possible. The programming department often got round this by staging 'women only' events. Similarly, art installations could not feature graven images (as it is forbidden in the Jewish faith), nudity or female voices, and so many artists created sound pieces, or abstract video installations in an effort to explore themes such as nostalgia, dislocation and identity.

for many Chinatown residents, preferring instead to gather with family, to cook, or to visit one of the city parks.⁴³ Encouraging return visits to museums is a challenge faced everywhere, from the biggest to the smallest cultural organisations. Because there was no permanent collection at the Museum, and, at the time I worked there, very few personal or 'active' objects on display, it was hoped that a combination of strong programming and the on-going restoration effort would provide enough enticement that people would continue to visit and witness the changes to the building.



Chinese martial arts display, Egg Creams and Egg Rolls Block Party, 2007.

⁴³ From conversations with Ken Lo, 2002.

A 'participatory museum'

As *The Participatory Museum* (Simon, 2010) reiterates, every museum has artefacts that lend themselves naturally to social experiences. 'It might be an old stove that triggers visitors' memories of their grandmother's kitchen, or an interactive building station that encourages people to play cooperatively. It could be an art piece with a subtle surprise that visitors point out to each other in delight, or an unsettling historical image people feel compelled to discuss'.⁴⁴

Simon argues that most social object experiences in museums are 'fleeting and inconsistent': 'For social object experiences to work repeatedly for a wide diversity of users or visitors, day after day, design tweaks can make an object more personal, active, provocative, or relational. Museums can be [...] challenging social object platforms, especially those in which visitors often already feel a little uncertain of how to behave'⁴⁵ (in a religious building for example). Simon describes a visitor-made exhibition centred on an iconic social object installed at the Boott Cotton Mills Museum in Lowell National Historical Park, Massachusetts in 2007.⁴⁶ *On the Road*, an exhibit celebrating the legacy of the Kerouac novel, featured the original typewritten manuscript for the beat masterpiece.

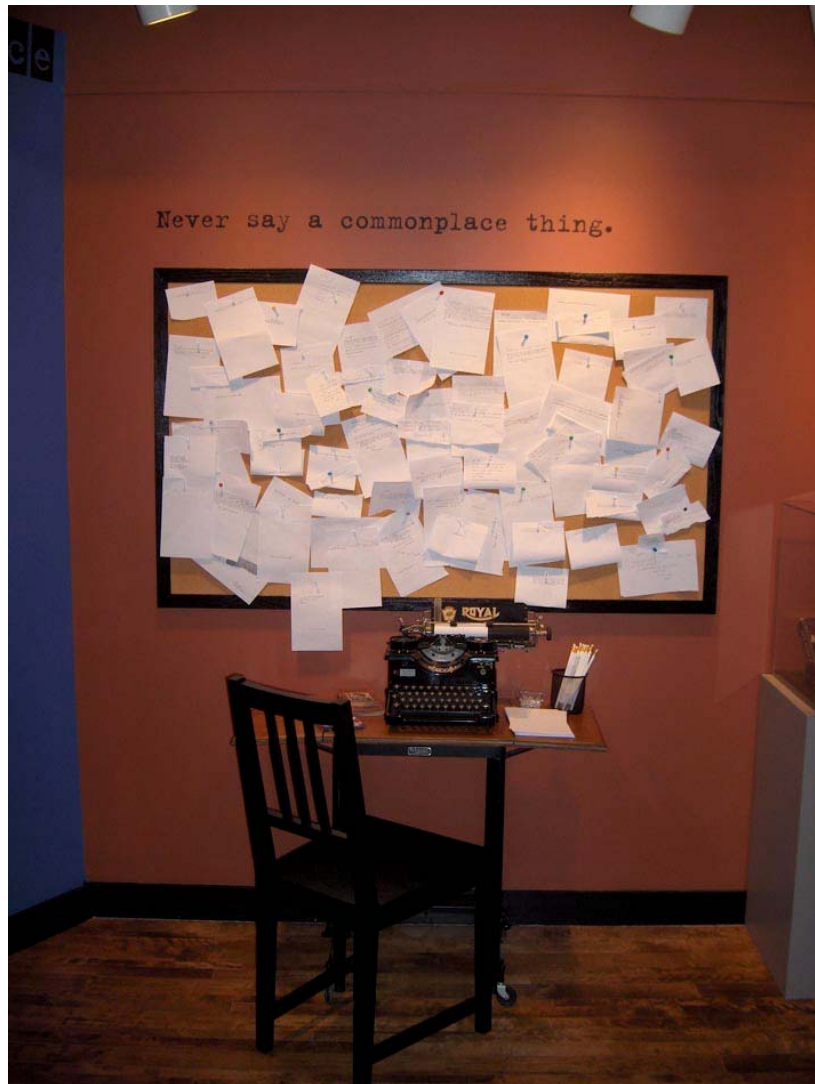
'Alongside the manuscript, the exhibition featured a talkback area in which visitors could contribute their own reflections. Instead of offering sticky notes and pens, the staff provided a desk with a typewriter (amazingly, donated by the Kerouac family)

⁴⁴ Simon, Nina *The Participatory Museum*, chapter 4 'Social Objects'. E-book and online edition, 2010.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Jack Kerouac was born in Lowell, Massachusetts.

and an evocative quote from Kerouac: “Never say a commonplace thing.” Visitors responded enthusiastically, generating over 12,000 messages at the typewriter in six months. Several wrote letters directly to Jack. Some wrote poems. The integrated design of the space invited visitors to extend their personal, emotional experience with the artefact to the comment station. This produced a powerful collection of visitor-contributed comments that enhanced the exhibition overall’.⁴⁷



The visitor comment station for *On the Road* allowed visitors to stay in the ‘emotional space’ of the exhibition while sharing their thoughts. Photo courtesy of Lowell National Historical Park.

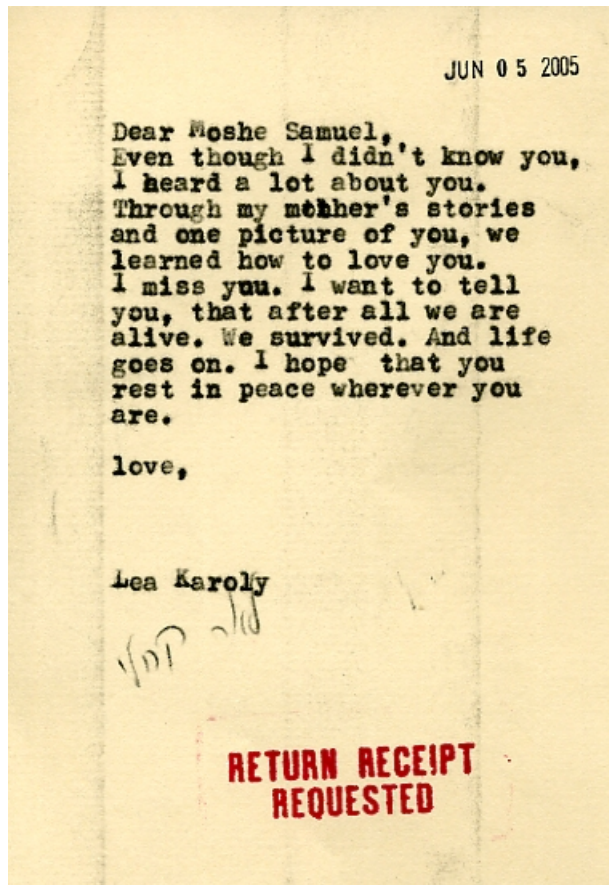
⁴⁷ Simon, Nina *The Participatory Museum*, chapter 4 ‘Social Objects’. E-book and online edition, 2010.

In 2005 the Museum hosted a successful exhibit pre-dating, but not dissimilar to the *On the Road* exhibit. *Writing Home*, by artist Sheryl Oring, explored the connection between place, language and memory, particularly with reference to the American immigrant experience. Although the typewriter used was not the ‘mythologized object’⁴⁸ of the Lowell National Historical Park exhibit, with its many cultural signifiers, it had resonance for visitors to the synagogue, as did the artist’s informal portable office and friendly ‘performance’ demeanour. Using carbon paper and a vintage typewriter, Oring invited participants to dictate letters to their ancestors. She then typed participants’ responses, gave the original to the interviewee, and kept a duplicate for her book.



Artist Sheryl Oring (seated) typing a visitor to the synagogue’s letter to a relative, June 2005. Photo credit: Kate Milford.

⁴⁸ Roland Barthes seminal text *Mythologies* (1957) described modern cultural phenomena - red wine, soap powder, detergent and wrestling, for example – and the meanings conferred on them. *A Barthes Reader*, (edited, and with an introduction by Susan Sontag, New York: Hill and Wang,) 1982.



Sheryl Oring's *Writing Home* letter.



Sheryl Oring's *Writer's Block*, 1999, exhibited at the Jewish Museum, Berlin.

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Published in 2006, each book features an original Polaroid photograph of the synagogue or the surrounding neighbourhood on the cover, and the inner pages are made from pages of a Yiddish dictionary, as well as a Chinese-language volume listing books permitted for publication by Communist censors between 1949 and 1979. Oring works with typewriters to explore the role of the writer in specific post-war climates of extremism: the Nazi's book burning in Bebelplatz in 1933; freedom of expression in the United States in the years following the September 11th terrorist attacks. Her typewriters are sculptural assemblages, 'collected and caged' to make symbolic statements about censorship and free speech.⁴⁹ Carbon paper is woven, reproduced and restructured, reminding the viewer of the written word's infinite permutations, and its power of endurance. Oring's project culminated in *Chain Letter*, a site-responsive paper sculpture installed inside the sanctuary of the synagogue. Two hundred and eighty-eight strands of hand-made paper chains constructed from texts in two languages (taken from the aforementioned Yiddish dictionary and the Chinese books,) reference 'some of the reasons that people left their birth places for new lives in America. By incorporating both Yiddish and Chinese texts, the work [...] alludes to the Lower East Side/Chinatown neighbourhood in which it was installed'.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ For more information see the artist's website <http://www.iwishtosay.org/index.php>

⁵⁰ Ibid.



Chain letter installed at Museum, June 2005.

Writing Home was well attended, with visitors responding to, and engaging with the building as a receptacle for a broad cross section of personal histories, memories and responses to the neighbourhood. It also demonstrated that a 'talk back area' such as the one created by Sheryl Oring, was far more effective in generating participation than a visitor book. Examples such as this only serve to underscore the benefits of nurturing a relationship between institution and audience, even during a temporary site-responsive installation such as the one described.

'Pious descendants of time'

In recent years stewardship of the congregation has repeatedly changed hands from the traditional orthodox minyan, to services being led by a Chabad-Lubavitch⁵¹ rabbi,

⁵¹ Chabad-Lubavitch, one of the largest branches of Hasidic Judaism, which originated in Poland and the Ukraine in the eighteenth century, is an ultra-orthodox practice that stresses extreme traditionalism and separatism.

and is currently lay-led. The synagogue's congregation grew in numbers between 2005 and 2007 as a result of the Lubavitch community's influence and zeal, but has since dwindled once more, and now numbers around fifty regular attendees. With a newly restored sanctuary that can comfortably seat two hundred, there has been concern among some of the Museum's Board of Director's and staff that the tenancy agreement with the congregation may need reappraisal. In 1986 the Project and the congregation drew up a legally binding Memorandum of Understanding which stated that the building would *always* be multi-use: that the non-profit could establish offices inside the synagogue; that fundraising and programming would continue after the restoration was complete, and that the congregation could use the newly renovated sanctuary for worship on Fridays and Saturdays and for Festivals.⁵² The relationship between these two groups has occasionally been strained, but is today generally cordial and cooperative, with the congregation maintaining their private rituals in the building's basement area and the secular office space which the Project leased from the congregation (which, since 2003, has been located offsite so the basement excavation could begin) transformed into the *bes hamedrash* on Friday afternoons when staff left early so as not to overlap with the preparations for *shabbos* services.

⁵² Information provided by the 'Memorandum of Understanding between K'hal Adath Jeshrun with Anshe Lubtz and the Eldridge Street Project, Inc.', 28 October, 1986. Kindly reproduced by the Museum at Eldridge Street staff.



The *bes hamedrash*, (house of study), Eldridge Street synagogue

Notwithstanding the occasional dispute, the congregation rarely intervenes in the business of the Museum, as they pay the utility bills and, as former Executive Director, Amy E. Waterman puts it, “had it not been for the Project’s intervention, the Eldridge Street Synagogue would not be standing today”.⁵³ Congregant Tova Bookson ecstatically informed me at the synagogue’s re-dedication ceremony in December 2007, “We got our miracle!” The then acting rabbi Yosef Shoshani very passionately declared to me in interview that “the light is so beautiful in the morning and it such a pleasure to pray surrounded by such an exquisite and beautiful structure, a true *mikdash me’at* (miniature Holy Temple).”⁵⁴

⁵³ Amy E. Waterman quoted in Marvin Griesman & Yori Yanover, “Restoring Eldridge’s Future”.

⁵⁴ From email conversations with Rabbi Yosef Shoshani, May 2008.

While it *is* miraculous to see the synagogue restored to its turn-of-the-century glory, to have rebuilt the temple, it was only accomplished with the hard work and dedication of *both* the non-profit Project and the steadfast commitment of the congregation. The cooperative alliance of the two makes the Museum a unique and admired institution among New York's cultural organizations. Yet the rich history of secular programming at the Museum, which drew its inspiration from (but was often battling for attention in the shadow of) the building's decaying splendour, is only fleetingly mentioned in much of the press coverage which the 2009 re-dedication received.⁵⁵

'Tenacious inhabitants of space'

As a comparative model to the Eldridge Street synagogue, St Ann's Warehouse⁵⁶ is a successful arts centre that was based, until 2000, at St Ann & the Holy Trinity Episcopal parish church in Brooklyn Heights, New York. The Gothic Revival church was built between 1844 and 1847 and is notable for its elaborate roof and interior stained glass windows, designed by William Jay Bolton.⁵⁷ Following the dissolution of the parish in the 1950s, the building remained closed for twenty years until it was

⁵⁵ See the *New York Times* article, 'Return of a Long Dormant Island of Grace' by Edward Rothstein; the *New Yorker* magazine's 'Talk of the Town' essay 'Face-Lift' by Adam Gopnik; WNYC Radio's programme 'Eldridge Street Synagogue Restoration Complete' by Richard Hake; the *New York Post's* article 'Back to Shul' by Rita Delfiner; the *New York Daily News's* article 'Lower East Side Synagogue Returned to Glory' by Jess Wislowski; and *New York* magazine's article and film 'Reconstructionist Judaism' by Justin Davidson.

⁵⁶ More information available at www.stannswarehouse.org

⁵⁷ The first American-made figural windows of their kind, predating the work of Louis Comfort Tiffany by forty years. Information provided by St. Ann & the Holy Trinity Episcopal parish church literature, obtained 2005.

reopened as an Episcopal church in 1970.⁵⁸ In much the same way as the Museum at Eldridge Street emerged, a preservation campaign was begun at St Ann's to restore the windows, and in 1979, a small arts group was offered the opportunity to move in and 'invigorate' the space, with a series of concerts and performances, which would, in turn, help with fundraising.



Interior detail, stained glass window

By seeking to enhance its profile within the local community, the congregation benefited tremendously from the presence of St Ann's Warehouse, (then known as Arts at St Ann's) and conversely, the thriving arts centre was able to utilise the

⁵⁸ More information available at www.stannswarehouse.org

dramatic sanctuary and remarkable acoustics the church provided. Eventually moving away from promoting classical concerts, Arts at St Ann's made their name as a venue for eclectic, experimental inter-disciplinary arts events. Film festivals, concerts by artists such as Marianne Faithfull, David Byrne, Lou Reed and John Cale (Reed and Cale recorded 'Songs for Drella', their tribute to Andy Warhol, in the church), brought large audiences to Brooklyn but also sowed the seeds of a dispute between the rector and the artistic director of Arts at St Ann's. The Reverend Orris G. Walker, now bishop of Long Island commented that 'the church is not a space, it is a church',⁵⁹ raising crucial questions that continue to resonate at the Museum Eldridge Street concerning the nature of secular programming in a sacred place. Having helped to raise approximately \$4 million dollars for the building's restoration, and with the stained glass windows complete in 2000, the arts group were asked to look for new premises. St Ann's Warehouse, as it has been known since 2001, is now located in an old spice milling factory in the DUMBO area of Brooklyn⁶⁰.

While the Reverend Orris G. Walker may be correct in stating that St Ann's church is not only 'a space' (if by this he meant unmoored, indefinable space that is in flux), I would argue that its significance as a 'place' of worship does indeed propel it beyond the narrow confines of 'church' as the receptacle that he is referring. As a porous, fluid place of prayer *and* a centre for cultural interpretation; responding to the

⁵⁹ Quoted in 'Sundered from its church, an arts group takes stock', by Celestine Bohlen, in the New York Times, August 10, 2000.

⁶⁰ DUMBO is the area known as 'Down under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass'. See St Ann's Warehouse website for more information www.stanswarehouse.org/history.php.

divergent needs of congregation and arts community, St Ann's succeeded, for a short time, in providing a unique environment for religious practice *and* secular programming, one that sought to re-inscribe the building's significance within its locale. Although the arts group had no clear ties to church, functioning as an extension of the built environment of St. Ann's, it provided a vital counterpoint to it.

The Elusive Past

'*All that is solid melts into air*': *The Experience of Modernity* by Marshall Berman, was written in the early 1980s, but the book's final chapters evoke the urban tapestry of New York City neighbourhoods such as the South Bronx and the Lower East Side in the thirty years prior to the book's publication. Drawing heavily on the writing and neighbourhood activism of Jane Jacobs,⁶¹ Berman argues that dialectic interplay can be achieved between the modernisation of the urban environment and modernism in art and literature.⁶² Using the broad sweep of Jacobs' often cited book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* for inspiration, Berman references key moments in late twentieth century modernism where art, in its many forms - visual and performance-based; literature and music - as well as modes of local activism and

⁶¹ Jane Jacobs' hugely influential study of New York City neighbourhoods, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, first published in 1961, was instrumental in altering the course of city planning in lower Manhattan in the late 1960s and '70s. Her grassroots community activism helped prevent the construction of a highway that would have transformed her neighbourhood – Greenwich Village – thus bringing to a halt the vision that planner Robert Moses had for a network of super highways bisecting the city. The construction of Moses' Cross-Bronx Expressway in the 1950s, supposedly encapsulating the spirit of modernity, obliterated consecutive close-knit communities and heralded what many saw as the beginning of a rapid decline in socio-economic conditions in the South Bronx. See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York & Toronto: Vintage Books, 1963) and Part V of Berman, '*All that is solid melts into air*'.

⁶² See Part II of Berman, '*All that is solid melts into air*', pp.88-94.

public resistance, have been deployed to respond to and combat the forces of urban development, gentrification and modernisation. Berman celebrates the 'urban street scene' as a recurring modernist theme, (where he argues that a Baudelairian 'universal communion'⁶³ is possible) and yet he acknowledges a crucial factor in the deterioration of his own South Bronx neighbourhood, and many like it: that the modern dream of mobility and progress necessitates that one leave one's 'old neighbourhood' and move onward and upward:

'To live well meant to move up socially, and this in turn meant to move out physically; to live one's life close to home was not to be alive at all. Our parents, who had moved up and out from the Lower East Side, believed this just as devoutly as we did...But when you see life this way, no neighbourhood or environment can be anything more than a stage along life's way, a launching pad for higher flights and wider orbits than your own'.⁶⁴

The acknowledgement that beloved neighbourhoods, streets and communities are, and perhaps should be transitory 'launching pads' is resonant, but the power of Berman's argument is in his suggestion that the destruction levied upon the South Bronx by developers such as Robert Moses⁶⁵ is the fulfillment of the neighbourhood's own 'moral imperative': for its residents to abandon it to memory in order to move on. This powerful, melancholic understanding of the part the individual plays in the erasure of her/his own community helps us to understand the emergence in the nineteen-seventies of a 'memory culture' that enabled the

⁶³ Berman, *'All that is solid melts into air'*, p. 316.

⁶⁴ Berman, *'All that is solid melts into air'*, p.326.

⁶⁵ See *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* by Robert Caro (New York: Knopf, 1974) and *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* by Hilary Ballon & Kenneth T. Jackson (New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 2007).

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mythologizing of the Lower East Side, and other comparable neighbourhoods: 'the rehabilitation of ethnic memory and history as a vital part of personal identity'.⁶⁶ It was the decade that gave US television audiences Alex Hayley's *Roots*, charting the African-American experience since slavery, and Gerald Green's *Holocaust*, both hugely popular and over-idealised prime-time sensations, as well as the feature films *Hester Street*, based on an Abraham Cahan short story, *Yekl, a Tale of the Ghetto* (1896), and in 1980 a Hollywood remake of Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer* starring Neil Diamond.⁶⁷ These films affirmed that an exploration of ethnic identity was crucial to an understanding of the self, and moreover, was an essential aspect of modern living. In 1976 the publication of Irving Howe's aforementioned *World of Our Fathers* projected American-Jews Lower East Side memories onto a national arena as well as the best-sellers lists, and helped to foster a Jewish 'memory culture'.

Diner's study stands in marked contrast to Marshall Berman's evocation of the modernist desire to 'bring it all back into the past...to bring to bear on their past selves that which they have become in the present'.⁶⁸ Berman's urban modernism has an uneasy rapport with what he deems an 'elusive past'. He has the courage to revoke what was popular sentiment in the 1980s by suggesting that the past is often intangible; not always knowable and, finally it is what you create from this indefinite past *which is already disintegrating* that makes the present livable. In this respect, it

⁶⁶ Berman, 'All that is solid melts into air', p.333.

⁶⁷ The exterior of the Eldridge Street synagogue was used in the remake of *The Jazz Singer* before restoration work had begun in earnest.

⁶⁸ Berman, 'All that is solid melts into air', p.333.

is Berman’s evocation of the ‘elusive pasts’ of New York City neighbourhoods, and what we subsequently make from their ruins that speaks to Edward Casey’s project to imbue contemporary places with meaning. For it is not only in the backward glance, but, to reiterate the point made on page 26, it is in the acceptance that everything that is lost in the erosion of place – ‘identity, character, nuance, history’⁶⁹- is actively sought in the spaces that replace it. It is this acceptance that brings the indefinite past into sharp relief.



Restoring paint on the balcony, photo Evergreene Painting Studios.

In the case study of 19 Princelet Street I quoted Diner positing that:

‘The Eldridge Street Synagogue, by Jewish tradition, was always sacred [...] The restoration in essence gave it a double sanctity, one by virtue of its dedication in 1887, the other by virtue of American Jewry’s need to have a physical embodiment of its founding narrative’.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p.xiii.

⁷⁰ Diner, *Lower East Side Memories*, p.114.

This statement carries far more weight now than it did when she published her book in 2002. With the restoration complete and the building now officially secure in its status as a museum, it is, in the words of the promotional materials ‘glorious again’, with the congregation bringing torah scrolls back up to the ark for the first time in decades. The decision to ‘rededicate’ the building as a ‘museum celebrating the immigrant experience’,⁷¹ with all the implications that museum status carries with it,⁷² was a big consideration for the staff and Board.

Amy Stein Milford, the Museum’s Deputy Director told me that

“At this point in our history, we needed our name to immediately signal the cultural dimension of the project so that when we re-opened there was clarity as to our mission. We very consciously wanted to make the distinction between the congregation and the Project/museum, emphasising our non-sectarian quality, and we debated naming ourselves the Museum at the Eldridge Street Synagogue - that has even more clarity as to mission. However, we didn't want people to think we were presenting the history of just one congregation - the themes here are broader so we to use the tagline with mission in public: Museum at Eldridge Street - A Landmark Synagogue Story”.⁷³

This struggle for clarity – to be distinct from the congregation and yet in many ways echo the power of its endurance, is part of what makes the Museum at Eldridge Street unique. By acknowledging these complexities, this landmark multi-use building has the potential to fulfill its mission to remember, evoke and perpetuate

⁷¹ Executive Director of the Museum at Eldridge Street Bonnie Diman, as quoted on WNYC public radio, ‘Eldridge Street Synagogue Restoration Complete’ by Richard Hake, 2 December 2007.

⁷² “I’d be careful how you use that word ‘museum’”, warned Roberta Brandes Gratz, founder of the Eldridge Street Project, when interviewed by the New York Times in 2005. “Don’t call it a museum. It sounds like it’s over, like it has ossified”. Amy E. Waterman, former Executive Director, quoting Eldridge Street Project Board Members in the article ‘From the Brink of Death to Life Overflowing’ by Julie Salamon in the *New York Times*’ Museum Section, March 30, 2005.

⁷³ Email interview with Amy Stein Milford, 14 February 2008.

the practice of Jewish worship at the site for a new generation of visitors,⁷⁴ while also, and in some ways more significantly, relating that specific history to the contemporary experience of immigrant life on the Lower East Side. Attempts to promote a 'broader history'; be it that of other synagogues, or of other communities in the neighbourhood, signal the capacity for building a true dialogic model of the religious building/community museum. A tendency to memorialise and at times, over-sentimentalise the museum, the synagogue and the neighbourhood, (part of what Kirsehnblatt-Gimblett criticizes as the 'thematizing of immigration',⁷⁵) can be balanced by acknowledging that the neighbourhood itself, much like the synagogue, is fluid; open to divergent interpretation and change. Berman writes of an 'elusive past' – perhaps as a response to a burgeoning memory culture he witnessed emerging throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps in this context, the perfections of restoration can compensate for the imperfections of history.

In May 2008, the National Trust for Historic Preservation⁷⁶ added the Lower East Side to their list of the year's most endangered places. "Most people think the threat only comes from the wrecking ball, but that's not always true", said Richard Moe, President of the Trust. "It can be under-funding, it can be neglect, it can be

⁷⁴ The Museum now boasts a successful, grant-funded public education programme, 'Ways we worship', which introduces school groups to Jewish ritual practice.

⁷⁵ Kirsehnblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p.9.

⁷⁶ The Trust is a private, non-profit group founded in 1949.

inappropriate development".⁷⁷ The controversial issue of luxury high-rise apartments and corporate developments on the Lower East Side, (similar to the buildings that have recently sprung up in Bishopsgate, East London) has angered many preservationists who are currently seeking to have the area declared a landmark district, much as the 'Save Spitalfields' campaign was successfully able to achieve in London in the 1970s.



Re-dedication ceremony at the synagogue, December 2, 2007

As this case study suggests, criticisms of 'heritage production' peddled at some Lower East Side cultural venues must be balanced by the very real threat the neighbourhood faces at the hands of developers. For now, the Museum continues to operate as a successful multi-use space, honoured with a National Preservation

⁷⁷ Quoted in the article 'New York's Lower East Side on most endangered places list', by Devlin Barrett, Associated Press, 20 May, 2008, for the website examiner.com http://www.examiner.com/a-1400015~NYC_s_Lower_East_Side_on_most_endangered_places_list.html

Award in October 2008,⁷⁸ albeit one that relies on the endorsement of the congregation. Existing initiatives to engage a non-Jewish audience are not always woven into the fabric of the programming, and yet these attempts to work with a broader community suggest possibilities for the future of the Museum and are unique in a functioning sacred space. The Lower East Side has always thrived on the possibility of adaptation and change, as immigrant groups disperse and are replaced by new arrivals. As the next case study illustrates, the struggle to move beyond a single pedagogical narrative persists, even without the pressures, expectations and contrasting values a resident congregation can bring.

⁷⁸ In October 2008 the National Trust for Historic Preservation rewarded the Museum at Eldridge Street's efforts with a prestigious National Preservation Award for "monumental...restoration remarkable for its innovative use of both historic elements and new, energy-saving materials". Taken from the Museum's October 2008 electronic newsletter.

Chapter 4

'The Hooks of Remembrance':

Engaging the past, present and future at the District Six Museum.



Rebecca Faulkner
'For Whom was Built This Special Shell?' Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums, galleries
and cultural centres
Part II, Chapter 4

‘A sense of place must also be a sense of people or a lack of people. If you attempt to destroy a place you also attempt to destroy a people’.¹

Richard Rive

‘Community itself is an imagined identity of commonality and interest. Its parametres are the very essence of contestation’.²

Ciraj Rassool

The area at the eastern boundary of Cape Town referred to as ‘District Six’ occupies a pivotal geographic, historical and emotional space in South Africa. Located at the foot of Table Mountain, a few minutes’ walk from the city centre, District Six was named the Sixth Municipal District of Cape Town in 1867. Originally established as a mixed community of freed slaves, merchants, artisans, labourers and immigrants with close links to the city and the port, District Six was a vibrant, multicultural precinct during the first half of the twentieth century, home to almost a tenth of Cape Town’s population.³ On February 11, 1965, the apartheid government condemned the area as a ‘slum’ and under the Group Areas Act of 1953, declared District Six ‘whites only’, forcibly removing at least 60,000 people to townships east of the city. This spatial apartheid, eventually displaced at least 150,000 people from in and around District Six and resettled them throughout and beyond the ‘vast

¹ Richard Rive, former District Six resident and writer, (1987) Quoted in *Recalling Community in Cape Town: Creating & Curating the District Six Museum*, Ciraj Rassool & Sandra Prosalendis eds. (Cape Town: District Six Museum Press, 2001) p. 31.

² Ciraj Rassool, ‘Community Museums, Memory Politics and Social Transformation in South Africa: Histories, Possibilities and Limits’, (*Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*. Edited by Ivan Karp, Connie A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Duke University Press, Durham, NC & London) 2006, p.314.

³ Information from the District Six Museum’s website www.districtsix.co.za

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desolate area'⁴ on the outskirts of the city known as the Cape Flats. 'Communities, extended families and friends were separated [...] often to never see each-other again'.⁵ In the process 'over a century of history, community life, solidarity amongst the poor and achievement against great odds, was imperilled'.⁶ Only the mosques and churches were spared, the rest was razed to the ground and the rubble was dumped into the sea.



A map showing the perimetres of District Six. The red dot indicates where the Methodist Church on Buitnekant Street stands, just at the edge of District Six. Image courtesy of the District Six Museum.

⁴ Jessica Louise Thorne, 'The Choreography of Display: Experiential Exhibitions on the Context of Museum Practice and Theory', (Unpublished Masters thesis: M.Phil. (Fine Art), University of Cape Town, South Africa,) 2003, p.70.

⁵ Thorne, 'The Choreography of Display: Experiential Exhibitions on the Context of Museum Practice and Theory', 2003, p.70.

⁶ From the District Six Museum's website.

Although the declaration of District Six as a 'whites only' area took place in 1956, the final displacement of occupants did not occur until 1982. The forced removal of residents was deeply unpopular and profoundly embarrassing to all but the most fundamentalist supporters of apartheid, and thus actively resisted. After protracted removals had cleared the land of almost all signs of habitation, 'destroying families and tight community bonds', the 'Hands off District Six' activist campaign endeavoured to prevent the government from building a white or even a mixed suburb on the land⁷. District Six remains largely empty today; a site of national trauma and a physical reminder of the defiance of community activists.

In 1989, the District Six Museum Foundation was formed with a dual mission to preserve the memory of District Six while enabling the mobilisation of former residents and descendants to form a land restitution movement. The District Six Beneficiary and Redevelopment Trust, the body that oversees land claims, now works with the ANC government, and labours, like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did, to 'unearth' pasts and 'record memory', under joint pressure from displaced communities wishing to return to their former neighbourhood, and the vast numbers of people with no claim to the land, but who are in desperate need of housing.⁸ As complex as the claims for land restitution and relocation are, new

⁷ Till, K.E. 2011. 'Resilient Politics and Memory-Work in Wounded Cities: Rethinking the City through the District Six in Cape Town, South Africa' in Bruce E. Goldstein (Ed.) *Collaborative Resilience: Moving from crisis to opportunity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), p.302.

⁸ See Rassool, 'Community Museums, Memory Politics and Social Transformation in South Africa: Histories, Possibilities and Limits', 2006, p. 288.

houses are currently being developed on what many refer to as the ‘salted earth’ of District Six.⁹



The exterior of the Central Methodist Mission church, now the District Six Museum

The Museum is situated at the very edge of District Six, within the city’s former Central Methodist Mission church on Buitenkant Street. The church dates from 1883 when a local warehouse was refurbished by a ‘coloured’¹⁰ congregation, largely of

⁹Information provided by the District Six Beneficiary and Redevelopment Trust. www.d6bentrust.org.za

¹⁰ I will quote at length from Ciraj Rassool’s invaluable definition of the term ‘coloured’, as I believe it provides the most nuanced explanation of a problematic and complex designation: ‘By the nineteenth century, the terms ‘malay’ and ‘coloured’ (or ‘mixed’) (written here deliberately in all lowercase to indicate their constructedness as part of a racial order) were used to identify Muslim and Christian people, respectively, who were descended from Cape slaves (mainly of Malagasy origin but also African and South and Southeast Asian), indigenous Khoisan groups, other Africans, and/or Europeans. In cultural expression, they constituted an African creole segment of Cape society, often a feature of colonial port cities. In class terms, “coloured” also emerged as a category of self-definition, taken on by a nascent middle class intent on distinguishing itself from Africans. From the 1960s, the term ‘coloured’ (by then a legislated racial category) was increasingly rejected as a category of racial domination, as people increasingly defined themselves as ‘black’; a political category through which all segments of South African society that were not white united against apartheid. But since at least the 1940s, in the nonracial movement, racial terms such as ‘coloured’ came to be prefaced by the term ‘so-called’, or were placed in quotation marks to call attention to racial categories as impositions of a racist political order’. It is important to also note that despite this problematic history of racial classification, most people, when asked, still self-identify as ‘coloured’. See Ciraj Rassool’s very useful

slave descent, who were residents from the District Six community. The building, known to many as 'freedom church', was a sanctuary for political opponents and victims of apartheid, many of whom were arrested during protests in the 1980s. The District Six Museum Foundation secured rights to the building in 1994 and opened the museum that year, at a crucial time of transition for South Africa and its heritage sites.¹¹ Early curatorial initiatives at the District Six Museum emphasised educational outreach and oral history testimonies, resulting in a moving, ephemeral series of exhibition displays, which included possessions and artefacts donated by former residents.

The transition from religious building to community museum in this context was a seamless one, in part because the museum grew out of the needs of a congregation and its community, and not a separate organisation, but perhaps more significantly due to the non-conformist nature of the Methodist faith, which does not place the same significance on the church building as other branches of Christianity. District

discussion of this issue in 'Community Museums, Memory Politics and Social Transformation in South Africa', 2006, pp. 314-5.

¹¹ The apartheid system was ended by a process of negotiation between the ruling National Party and the un-banned ANC between 1990 and 1993, which led to the release of Nelson Mandela. After a landslide election victory brought the ANC to power in 1994 and inaugurated Mandela as the first black president of South Africa, a new constitution was finally agreed in 1995, which had far-reaching implications for all aspects of society, including the country's national and 'community' museums. In his essay 'Transforming museums on post-apartheid tourist routes', Leslie Witz describes Mandela's speech made on 'Heritage Day' in 1997, where he criticised South African museums for depicting African people as "lesser human beings, in natural history museums usually reserved for the depiction of animals". Witz, 'Transforming museums on post-apartheid tourist routes', (*Museum Frictions*, 2006, p. 115). Witz argues that in spite of significant changes made in South African museum culture since the end of apartheid, the 'promotion of South Africa as a place of exploration, where one encounters wildlife and ethnic indigeneity [...] uncritically celebrates the development of colonial modernity'. 2006, p.110.

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Six's unique history coupled with the building's multiple, and continuous usage invest the museum with huge significance as a 'destination'; a 'meeting place' and site of memory, distinct from other landmark museums and heritage sites in South Africa.

In this case study I will seek to question what this amicable, apparently effortless conversion from sacred place to "community museum" contributes to the emerging trend I have identified, and ask whether the success of the museum can be attributed to the cooperation of a supportive congregation in a society grappling with reconciliation and forgiveness.



Hanover Street in District Six, 1970.¹²

¹² According to Stan Abrahams, ex-District Six resident and Museum Trustee, "Hanover Street was the life and soul of District Six. It was the busiest street in District Six: full of sights, smells and sounds. The People's Diary, the fish market, Maxims Sweeteries, Waynik's school uniforms and Janjira's groceries lined the streets. The air was filled with exotic smells from Douth's Cafe where we bought curry for a

The 'hooks' of remembrance

'The act of recovering abandoned family remains may be cathartic, guilt-ridden too. The street signs 'interred' in the Museum, together with a map on the floor, make up a grid. To it, individuals and families of the forced migrations, which leaked out of the heart of the city to the Cape Flats, beyond and overseas, hook thousands of 'fleshy' acts of remembering'.¹³

Lalou Meltzer

The South African Central Methodist Mission traces its roots back to the end of the 18th century, with the earliest historical records identifying the congregation in Cape Town comprising people from different racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.¹⁴ In 1883, the Central Methodist Mission church on Buitenkant Street was converted from a large wine store and altered to seat 900 people, mostly of "coloured" descent from the neighbouring community of District Six, following the separation of the city's congregation along racial lines.¹⁵ By 1900, the evening congregation had grown to number a thousand, and a small primary school, (which many leading figures from the District Six community attended) and a mission house were added as part of the church complex.¹⁶ By the time District Six was proclaimed

shilling a plate on our way down to the Star bioscope". Taken from 'Stan's Walk' on the District Six Museum's website: <http://www.districtsix.co.za/walk/index.htm>

¹³ Quote by Lalou Meltzer from her essay 'Past Streets', taken from *Recalling Community in Cape Town: Creating & Curating the District Six Museum*, Ciraj Rassool & Sandra Prosalendis eds, 2001, p.22.

¹⁴ Taken from the Central Methodist Mission Church project: 'Memory, Sanctuary, Community and Education: Foundations for a better tomorrow', (Published by the Buitenkant Street Community Centre and compiled by Hannetjie du Preez, based on information supplied by Rev David J. Newby of the Central Methodist Mission, Sandra Prosalendis of the District Six Museum Foundation, Michael Scurr, of Rennie and Scurr Architects CC, Lalou Meltzer, of the William Fehr Collection in the Castle, and the National Monuments Council, Cape Town, South Africa,) 31 October 1996, p7.

¹⁵ In 1837.

¹⁶ Today these adjacent buildings function respectively as the Stepping Stones children's centre and 'Ons Plek' ('Our Place') women's shelter.

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a 'white area', Buitenkant Street was 'a thriving, well-established church with 700 members and many adherents'.¹⁷

Ex-resident Linda Fortune described the experience of being 'resettled' in one of the townships:

"It was not necessary to lock the front door. The house was going to be demolished. I didn't even bother to pull the door closed. Number 14 would exist no more...I started to cry. I sobbed as if someone has just died. I didn't care...the place was our home, after all".¹⁸

Reverend David J. Newby of the Central Methodist Mission notes that 'During this traumatic time, the [Buitenkant Street] church provided support and comfort – both spiritual and material – for those who had to move'.¹⁹ He continues:

'The church building became a venue for protest meetings, prayer vigils and a sanctuary for those who had been injured during protest action. The ministers and congregation members suffered arrest, detention without trial and harassment during the turbulent 'eighties. Despite this, and the fact that the people had been forced to live many miles from the church, the congregation continued to remain a vibrant and relevant community'.²⁰

¹⁷ From the Central Methodist Mission Church project: 'Memory, Sanctuary, Community and Education: Foundations for a better tomorrow', 1996, p.8.

¹⁸ Ex-resident, Linda Fortune, recalling the experience of the forced removals, 1996. District Six Museum sound archive. Reproduced in Roy Ballantyne, 'Interpreting Apartheid: Visitors' Perceptions of the District Six Museum' (In *Curator*, Issue 46, No. 3) July 2003, p.280.

¹⁹ Central Methodist Mission Church project, p.9.

²⁰ Central Methodist Mission Church project, p.9.



Congregants worship inside the Buitenkant Street church, 1949.

Curator and writer Lalou Meltzer describes the process of remembering District Six as one of 'filtering'... 'textured and entangled, the stages of then and now'.²¹ She continues:

'The streets of my childhood survive as the bones of an articulated skeleton remain preserved. Memories push forward; hot pavements, the scream of seagulls and the droning foghorn, yellow-foaming sea and crackling palm fronds...'²²

Memory, as discussed in Chapter 1, is informed by place. Recollections from our childhood are inextricably linked to the places in which we grew up, connecting us to built and natural environments, and merging our private memories with public ones. If urban places stimulate visual memories - the smells and tastes of Lalou Meltzer's evocation of home – they also activate public memory. With the destruction of communities such as District Six, and the gradual erosion of public life during

²¹ Meltzer, 'Past Streets' in *Recalling Community in Cape Town*, 2001 p.22.

²² Ibid.

apartheid, (with its sprawling, engineered townships lacking diversity and social cohesion) place was rendered non-existent. In 1981, during the State of Emergency²³, geographer John Western wrote emphatically, that

‘By removing ‘Coloureds’ from District Six, the ‘Whites’ are doing more than clearing slums or underpinning their exclusive claim to central Cape Town’s sacred space: They are also destroying one of the symbols of whatever ‘Coloured’ identity may exist, a space in parts at least seven generations deep and one with associations with the emancipation of the slaves’.²⁴

It is important to note that the misconception that District Six was predominantly a ‘coloured’ community is one which is still maintained, and is misleading. District Six was targeted by the apartheid regime precisely because it was a mixed neighbourhood of whites, blacks and ‘coloureds’. There were immigrants from Europe, the Caribbean and the Americas, freed slaves of Southern African and Southeast Asian origin;²⁵ Jewish residents, Christians and Muslims. Nomvuyo Ngcelwane’s 1998 book *Sala Kahle District Six: An African Woman’s Perspective* makes this point clear. She includes a list of over 180 black families who lived in District Six and maps them on a street-by-street basis. Her testimony is crucial to the shifting of public perceptions about the museum and the broader community of District Six.

²³ The State of Emergency refers to the period of serious political violence against the apartheid government under P.W. Botha, in the years 1984 to 1989.

²⁴ John Western, *Outcast Cape Town* (Foreword by Robert Coles, University of Minnesota, MN & London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.) 1981, p.150.

²⁵ Till, K.E. 2011. ‘Resilient Politics and Memory-Work in Wounded Cities: Rethinking the City through the District Six in Cape Town, South Africa’, p.294.

The Museum's geographic location is crucial in the shaping of its identity as both a symbolic (remembered) and actual (experienced) community venue. As one of the few remaining 'sites of memory', the church lies on what still is an ambiguous, liminal zone - a threshold denoting the border between the lower inner-city bowl and the desolate land of District Six. As the Rev. Newby's quote on page 162 emphasises, even after the forced removals of 1966, the Methodist church functioned as a 'node'²⁶ within the community, both by virtue of its transgressive locale and because it offered a safe-haven for worshippers wishing to organise against apartheid. Many people traveled to attend services at the church *after* they had been forcibly removed from District Six, making the site a destination and the act of journeying there one of necessary pilgrimage. This journeying recalls the traditional Methodist practice of 'circuit riding',²⁷ in which pastors travelled, often on horseback, between churches within a 'circuit', preaching at every available gathering place.²⁸ The process of returning to the church from the townships also represented a mode of collective resistance to apartheid laws controlling movement and forbidding political meetings.

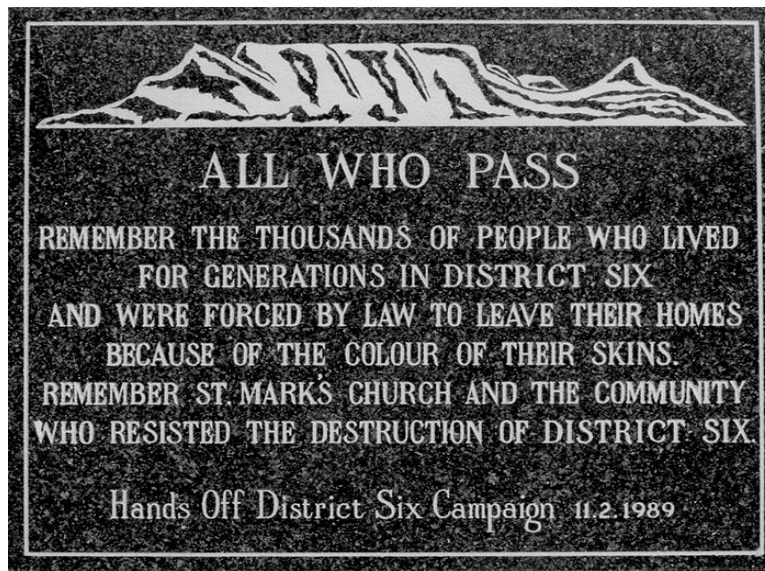
As a result of the forced removals, membership of the congregation was reduced from 700 in 1966 to 260 by 1983. In his book *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, David Hempton argues that 'The [Methodist] message of universal fellowship had a

²⁶ See the reference to Kevin Lynch in Part 1, footnote 20.

²⁷ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press), 2005, p.132. It is now more commonly referred to as "the charge".

²⁸ Ibid.

compelling power to undermine established notions of racial inferiority'.²⁹ It could be argued that the actions of the Buitenkant Street church in the late 1980s were informed by Hempton's assessments, for in 1988, after much discussion, the congregation amalgamated with the only other Methodist church in central Cape Town, (whose congregants were 'white') thus ending 151 years of racial separation, and challenging the divisions that the apartheid government enforced.



Remembrance plaque outside the District Six Museum.

As cracks in the apartheid regime began to appear, the 'Hands off District Six' movement grew in strength. The site for the Museum appealed to the community because of 'its significance [...] and the role that the complex played as a place of sanctuary in the liberation struggle'.³⁰ Housing the museum within the deconsecrated church building was deeply significant because it reanimated a border

²⁹ Hempton, 2005, p.132.

³⁰ Central Methodist Mission Church project, p.9.

zone in the city. The process of transfer from the church to the Foundation was relatively straightforward, with the congregation dwindling in numbers, and an agreement that the building would be better used as a community centre. Space had been unsuccessfully sought in other buildings (some of them also churches) within District Six, when, in 1992, ex-resident Stan Abrahams, who was also a Buitenkant Street congregant, negotiated the use of the church for regular meetings of the District Six Museum Foundation.³¹ Soon plans were underway for the remaining congregants to be relocated to Methodist churches elsewhere in the city, and in 1996 the building reopened with its first exhibition, *Streets: Retracing District Six*.

During the four tumultuous years between 1992 and 1996, the building, and the country, underwent significant change. The support and solidarity of a cooperative congregation and the vision of Stan Abrahams, who was (and still is) deeply dedicated to the Museum's mission, enabled the transfer from sacred to secular space in this very short time. A contributing factor to the ease with which this transferable occurred is Methodism's attachment to 'place', which differs greatly from Anglican or Roman-Catholic attitudes. The lack of commitment to the church building in this context denotes a combination of traditional Methodist principles, among them the valuing of the church 'community' over and above bricks and mortar, and the preference for worship taking place in a variety of temporary

³¹ Information taken from Peggy Delpont's chapter 'Museum or place for working with memory?' in *Recalling Community in Cape Town*, 2001, pp. 11-12.

locales.³² The condition of the Buitenkant Street church building, coupled with a lack of funds and a diminished congregation who recognised the opportunity to convert the space while ensuring it remain a landmark within the community of former residents, was therefore met with unanimous agreement. The Museum's identity has always been very much bound up with its religious past, both as a site of solidarity and refuge. As Peggy Delpont, one of the museum's former curators notes: 'Within its space, still filled with pews once used by a displaced congregation, the Museum began to assume an identity and potential'.³³



Interior, Buitenkant Street church, 1986.

³² For example 'house churches' and public meeting places within the 'circuit'. See my reference on page 116.

³³ Peggy Delpont 'Museum or Place for Working with Memory?' in *Recalling Community in Cape Town*, 2001, p. 40.

'Memory, Sanctuary, Community and Education: Foundations for a better tomorrow', a project conceived by Cape Town's Central Methodist Mission Church and published in 1996, details the museum's inception. It charts the six year period during which community activists developed ideas for the museum, inspiring the Buitenkant Street church to donate their space, and the International Human Rights Trust to provide a small grant to enable the aforementioned *Streets* exhibit. The project's publication states: 'It was necessary to develop from an entirely voluntary process, with an inherent impermanence, to a sustainable organisation, accountable to the donors and the community'.³⁴ This process of 'museumizing' was met with both excitement and ambivalence by many ex-residents and trustees, and these conflicts, which continue today, are detailed with tremendous insight by historian and Museum Trustee, Ciraj Rassool, in his valuable essay 'Community Museums, Memory Politics and Social Transformation in South Africa: Histories, Possibilities and Limits'.³⁵

The desire to make the District Six Museum a 'living, interactive space' – not simply a collection of static displays recreating the past was emphasised from the outset. Moreover, there was a need for the Museum to occupy the church, as a symbolic means of repossessing but *not* reproducing the community that was District Six. Art

³⁴ From the Central Methodist Mission Church project: 'Memory, Sanctuary, Community and Education: Foundations for a better tomorrow', 1996, p.48.

³⁵ Ciraj Rassool, 'Community Museums, Memory Politics and Social Transformation in South Africa: Histories, Possibilities and Limits', (*Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, eds Ivan Karp, Connie A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Duke University Press, Durham, NC & London: 2006.)

historian Annie Coombes, when writing about the museum, refers to ‘intangible cultures [...] the hidden histories, values and social fabric of communities that no longer exist’.³⁶ By a process of active participation and archaeology, the museum managed to excavate many of these ‘hidden histories’ from the former District Six community: street signs donated as a process of atonement by a man hired to drive one of the bulldozers that had destroyed the area; books, clothes, photographs, household items and ephemera of former residents; the memories and detritus which collectively reconstructed a splintered past were archived and displayed. Once opened to the public, it was hoped that this ‘collection’ could provide ex-residents and former congregants with a means of retracing their pasts in order to reposition their future, and the future of other South Africans.³⁷



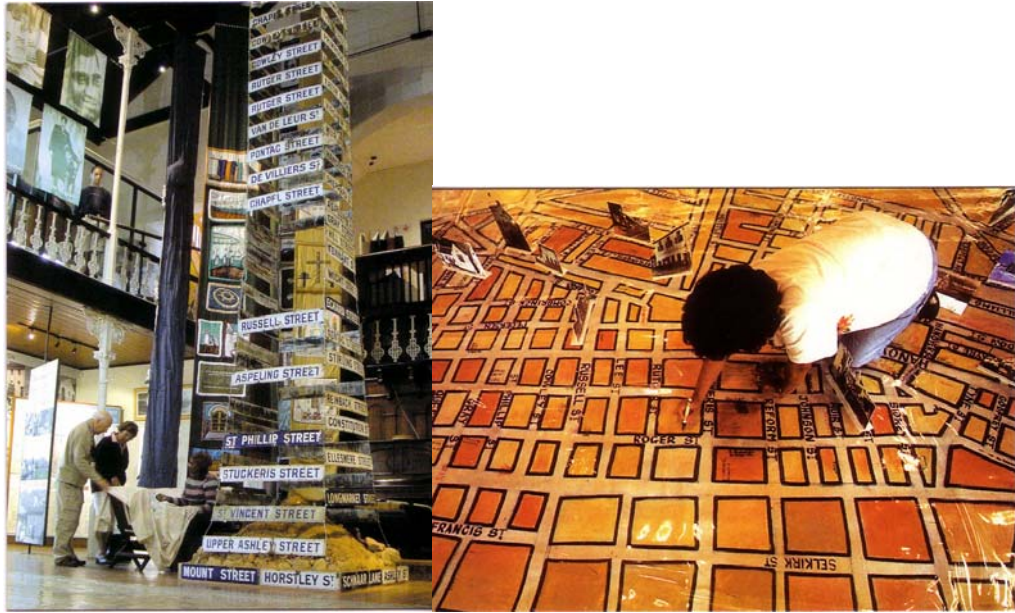
³⁶ Annie Coombes ‘The Archaeology of Memory’, in *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press), 2003 p.184.

³⁷ ‘Community museums’ such as District Six and the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, located in the Lwandle township just outside Cape Town, have become, according to historian Leslie Witz, ‘important signifiers in the unfolding discourse of a newly (re)discovered [South African] heritage’. These are museums which do not necessarily ‘conform to national narratives’ and rely heavily on short-term grants and international funding. Witz, ‘Transforming Museums on Postapartheid Tourist Routes’, 2006, pp. 107-108.

Previous page: church interior, (left, 1986) Museum interior (right, 1996). Photos courtesy of the District Six Museum

The interior of the museum maintains much of the original detail of the church, including the large main hall (formerly the sanctuary) and an ornate gallery of crafted timber that runs the length and the front of the building and overlooks the pulpit and former choir gallery. Extensive alternations to the façade and interior took place in 1903, endowing the building with a cast-iron balcony colonnade and a new roof. Victorian detailing such as the balustrade, were commonly found along the narrow streets of District Six. As staff members informed me, these instances of ‘familiar reproduction’ enable the building to ‘resonate with the remembered environment of “old” District Six’.³⁸ Located above the organ and choir gallery is a ‘memory cloth’; a calico sheet over one hundred metres long embroidered with names of former residents, as well as quotes, remembrances, and testaments to which visitors are invited to contribute. Original street signs hang in ladders suspended from the balcony.

³⁸ In conversation with Margaux Bergman, Resource Centre Coordinator, District Six Museum, 6 March 2008.



Museum interior – street signs & memory map. Photo courtesy of the District Six Museum.

There is no prescribed narrative within the museum - no order with which one must view the displays; (in marked contrast to the designated route at 19 Princelet Street) simply a series of spaces-in-process that enable reflection. The church alcoves house replicas of domestic living spaces and small businesses; vignettes of family and working lives. These scenes are bound together by a visual skyline of District Six, which continues around the gallery. Environments such as the barber's shop can be entered as 'active spaces':³⁹ the chair can be sat on, objects held and considered, so that the Museum is 'continuously shifted, layered and subverted by its visitors'.⁴⁰ This radical departure from 'traditional' museum practice is one which fits perfectly with the participatory narrative of the building, recalling its multiple usage as a

³⁹ Rassool, 'Community Museums, Memory Politics and Social Transformation in South Africa', 2006, p.300.

⁴⁰ Rassool,, 2006, p.300.

church and community meeting place; a centre for worship, solidarity and exchange. These methods also speak to a splintered past that cannot be reclaimed but can be alluded to. Peggy Delport has remarked that ‘the content of the Museum is located not in what is seen but in what happens within the space. Once the Museum stops being a live, generative space and becomes an object, to be consumed, merely looked at and left untouched, its function as a living space will end’.⁴¹ Images on the walls are linked to texts that are transcribed from oral histories recorded and stored in the sound archive. An impressive laminated map covers the sanctuary’s entire floor space reproducing the streets of District Six, allowing former residents to reactivate and mark the borders of their neighbourhood. By resisting more generic modes of museum display, the District Six Museum demonstrates a pedagogic curiosity and willingness coupled with a fierce loyalty to the building and community’s ‘roots’ - crucial components in understanding its success and status both within South Africa and beyond.

Witnessing change

In February and March of 2008, I travelled to Cape Town to conduct field research at the District Six Museum. I had lived in Cape Town in 1996 and visited again in 2004, and was impressed by the changes the museum had undergone in the intervening years: the steady stream of visitors that I encountered on the days I spent there, the

⁴¹ Peggy Delport, former District Six Museum curator, quoted in Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, 2003, p.142.

new exhibition spaces and enhanced collection, and the expansion plans that the acting director talked me through during our meetings. The District Six Museum is a success, well established as both a 'community museum' and a tourist destination, attracting a diversity of visitors from international groups to local schools. The Museum receives limited funds from the South African government⁴² and supplements this with National Lottery funding and donations from the Ford Foundation and other funding bodies.⁴³ This degree of autonomy from state funding ensures what some critics refer to as a necessary 'distance' or 'independence' from the government funded organisation *Iziko: Museums of Cape Town*.⁴⁴ Ciraj Rassool applauds the creation of an 'independent cultural platform' that more marginalised museums inadvertently promote,⁴⁵ although as Annie Coombes points out, this independence comes at a price, as the District Six Museum does not receive national museum status, something it has been eager to acquire.⁴⁶ In spite of this, the funding the Museum enjoys has ensured that the exhibition spaces and sound archive are maintained and regularly updated; that the education programmes are far-reaching

⁴² Annie Coombes reports that in 2000 the District Six Museum received R150,000, compared to the R28 million allocated to the Robben Island Museum. In Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, p.317. In 2006, Witz wrote that 'The government allocates very little to national and provincial museums [...] R110,132,000 (approx. US\$18 million) in 2001-2 – and much less to community museums', 2006, p.115.

⁴³ Such as the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Swedish International Development Agency and the governments of Norway, Spain and the Netherlands, among others. Information provided by the Museum's acting director and also taken from Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, p.317.

⁴⁴ '*Iziko* (meaning 'hearth' in Xhosa): Museums of Cape Town' is a consortium which identifies itself as the "centre of cultural activity in Cape Town". According to its website *Iziko* are "African museums of excellence that empower and inspire all people to celebrate and respect our diverse heritage". See www.iziko.org.za. Also see Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, p.119.

⁴⁵ Rassool, 'Community Museums', 2006, p.288.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

and are often conducted in collaboration with other ‘community’ museums.⁴⁷ To quote Ciraj Rassool, the ‘archaeology of memory’⁴⁸ is continuously being built on; an integral component of the Museum’s overwhelming success and enduring appeal.



Interior museum, with stained glass window, 2008.

In the fourteen years since inception, the hybridised space that the District Six Museum occupies (tourist destination, cathartic community space for ex-residents and descendants, research/gallery/performance and workshop space) has necessitated that new premises be obtained in order to enable adequate expansion. There is also a full-time staff of fifteen, in addition to interns and ex-residents who manage the front desk, coffee and gift shop areas. A large, multi-use space at 15 Caledon Street, adjacent to the Buitenkant Street site, has recently been purchased, and will be known as a ‘homecoming centre’. The new museum buildings will

⁴⁷ Such as the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, which I refer to in the footnotes on page 170, and *Crossroads* and Protea Village in Cape Town.

⁴⁸ Rassool, ‘Community Museums’, 2006, p.291.

incorporate an auditorium and office space for the land trust. Coincidentally, and in keeping with the Museum's founding principles, part of the expansion project includes another disused church building, which will be revitalized as a theatre.⁴⁹



The museum's newest site at 15 Caledon Street

Current and future programming initiatives at the Museum include a digital youth project entitled 'Baluleka', ("Be important") ex-resident participation programmes, including public story-telling events and 'memory map-making' exercises, (similar to the oral history and genealogy workshops at the Museum at Eldridge Street). On February 11, 2008, as part of the commemoration of District Six as a 'whites only' area, site walks were conducted by ex-residents and a reunion was organized at the Museum. This 'reflexive pedagogy'⁵⁰ is part of larger initiatives to mark District Six as

⁴⁹ This information comes from discussions with the District Six Museum acting director Bonita Bennett on 6 March, 2008.

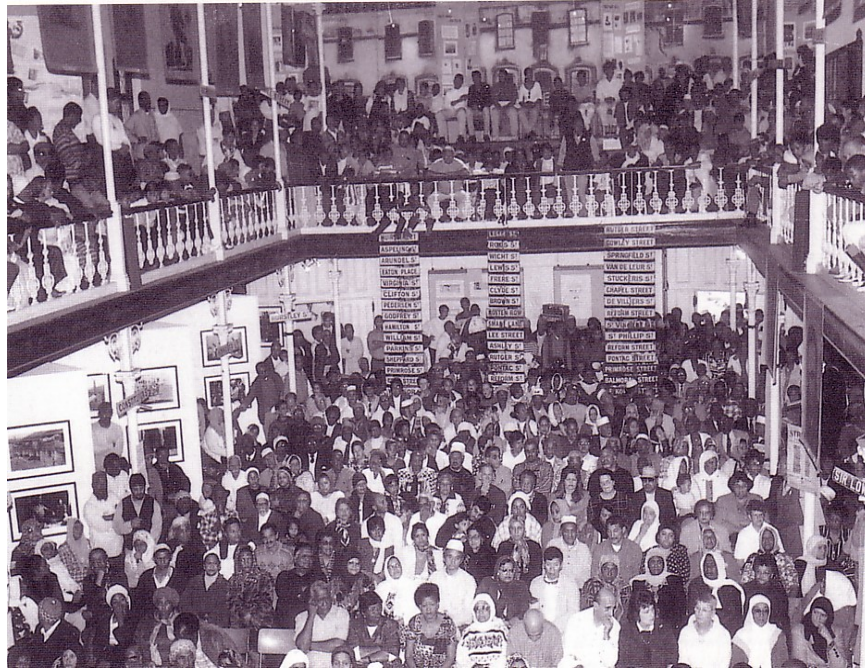
⁵⁰ Rassool, 'Community Museums', 2006, p.296.

a National Heritage Site and create a 'memorial to absence' on the land in advance of the estimated 2,500 families who hope to move back in the immediate future, once housing is complete.

In August 1997, when the issues concerning land claims and restitution were at their height, the Museum agreed to be the forum for an historic case establishing the protocol for land claims in South Africa. The session, held within the Museum's packed main hall, involved a ruling that ratified the transfer of land rights from the Cape Town municipality and provisional government to a community beneficiary trust representing ex-residents of District Six.⁵¹ The transformation of the Museum into a land claims court for this event reiterates what Coombes refers to as 'the uncompromising tightrope that the museum has chosen to walk in the interests of community'.⁵² In the packed Museum hall, throngs of people filled every available seat, recalling the anti-apartheid vigils of the 1950s and 1960s, and imbuing the building with real *and* symbolic significance - both a site of memory and the locus of social mobilization.

⁵¹ See Annie Coombes' section in Chapter 3 of *History after Apartheid*, (2003), pp.142-148. Information also taken from conversations with Beverley Crouts-Knipe, Western Cape province manager of the South African Heritage Resource Agency, various occasions, March 2008.

⁵² Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, (2003), p.142.



Land restitution ruling, District Six Museum, August 1997.

And yet in spite of the hundreds who gathered in the former Buitenkant Street church in 1997 to argue for land restitution, by the end of 1999, no land claims had been settled.⁵³ In 2004, 35% of the original land that made up District Six remained as it had been at the time the apartheid government began the forced removals - a remarkable fact given its proximity to the city centre and rising real estate prices. Soon after, work began on the first new buildings in District Six: twenty four houses that now belong to ex-residents over eighty years old.⁵⁴

⁵³ Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, (2003), p.147.

⁵⁴ Information provided by the District Six Beneficiary and Redevelopment Trust. www.d6bentrust.org.za See Roy Carroll's article 'Evicted return home as District Six rises again', (The Guardian newspaper, Society section, Wednesday 29 October, 2003).

In the decades since the forced removals, the empty wasteland has provided space for reflection and remembrance, akin to the 'melancholic' brand of 'memory culture' discussed in my New York case study.⁵⁵ The clearance of District Six was shameful and notorious, and subsequently developers were reluctant to touch it, which is why much of the bulldozed land was not built upon until the state intervened to fill part of the space with the Cape Technikon College.⁵⁶ There are mixed feelings among ex-residents about the redevelopment of District Six. New homes can never live up to the memories of the 'old' District Six, which has, for many, taken on near-mythic status. For some ex-residents who have moved on and rebuilt their lives, their memories, along with government compensation, are preferable to an engineered reunion; the lack of closure outweighing the desire to return, no matter how long the wait for restitution has been.

The quest for what psychoanalyst Susan Stewart terms the 'impossible object', thrives in the delays of homecoming. She writes:

'This point of desire which the nostalgic seeks is in fact the absence which is the very generating mechanism of desire...The realisation of re-union imagined by the nostalgic is a narrative utopia that works only by virtue of its partiality, its lack of fixity and closure: nostalgia is the desire for desire'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See the section on Marshall Berman on page 101.

⁵⁶ The Cape Technikon is a technical college built in 1999 on adjacent land formerly known as Zonnebloem.

⁵⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 1993, p23.

There is, indeed, a nostalgic component to the pervasive discourse of reminiscence perpetuated by the Museum that even some ex-residents have been critical of. By depicting the experience of living in District Six as one of harmonious integration, some of the displays and oral histories enact a sentimentalisation - a form of 'place attachment'⁵⁸ - that is appealing and necessarily cathartic, yet somewhat indulgent. At the Tenement Museum in New York, and to a lesser extent at 19 Princelet Street and the Museum at Eldridge Street, the nostalgia for a remembered 'place,' (which often amounts to a one-dimensional account of community and kinship on the bustling streets of the Lower East Side or the East End, coupled with a reverence for the age and ruination of the building itself) at times mask the multiple narratives the museum is seeking to extrapolate: those of struggle, hardship, and the continuous occupancy of a single building (or types of building) by a multitude of immigrants. All the aforementioned factors contribute to the character of the adaptive religious buildings discussed in these case studies, and inform the kinds of 'community museums' they become. And yet if the nostalgia deployed at these sites can be managed; counterbalanced and read as the active, reflexive nostalgia for an imagined future, as well as for an absent past, then hybrid spaces could claim to *continue* to represent 'place' - much as the District Six Museum does, (*even though the place itself is absent*) through a diversity of perspectives on the future of the building and the community it seeks to represent.

⁵⁸ See my reference to 'place attachment' theory on page 31 of Chapter 1.

The delays of homecoming

Empathy and memory are central components of a visit to the District Six Museum. During one of my meetings with Margaux Bergman, the Museum's Resource Centre Coordinator, she spoke quite openly of her memories of coming to the church with her family when she was thirteen years old; she recalled stretching out on the pews, waiting for her mother, and feeling 'safe'. She described the church/Museum as a 'comforting, calm and freeing' space.⁵⁹ Ex-residents who still play a vital role in the Museum's daily operations have vivid memories of the church in its hey-day: Mrs. DuPlessi who volunteers regularly, was baptised in the church; Stan Abrahams, who grew up in District Six, worshipped in the church on Buitenkant Street, and is a Museum Trustee, speaks of the church as 'representing hope to [the] family and community'.⁶⁰ Bonita Bennett, the Museum's acting director, talked with me of 'residue; a peculiar sense of reverence' she experiences within the building, recalling the many conversations I have had with staff and volunteers at all my case study sites. By contrast with 19 Princelet Street, there is continuity between the actual and the symbolic at the District Six Museum, in spite of its sturdy foundations and distinct lack of cobwebs, which makes the Benjaminian 'auratic value' inside its walls palatable. The 'reverence' that the staff speak of, is not fashioned with hushed tones and manufactured awe, or borne out of structural damage and lack of funds, but is a response to the sense of an 'unbroken history' that exists within the building. This

⁵⁹ Various discussions with Margaux Bergman at the District Six Museum, February/March 2008.

⁶⁰ Information from discussion with staff and also taken from 'Stan's Walk' on the District Six Museum website <http://www.districtsix.co.za/walk/index.htm>

lack of ‘connoisseurial silence’⁶¹– the hum of activity and discussion – is unusual in museum settings, and is in keeping with the mood and tone of the church in its heyday: not one of tranquility and reverence, but of ‘annunciation, conversation and debate’.⁶² It can be argued that the Museum has been instrumental (much as the church has) in ‘changing people’s sense of art and visual representation, and asking them to rethink fundamental questions concerned with the category of the aesthetic’.⁶³

‘The idea of a “community museum” tends to conjure up notions of authenticity and representativeness in a local institution that supposedly works with an audience considered as a bounded community. The interests and worldview of the community museum are supposedly circumscribed by locality’.⁶⁴

Ciraj Rassool posits that the ‘suspicious’ category of ‘community museum’ in South Africa, (with the ‘paternalist sentiments [and] ideas of innocence and naiveté’⁶⁵ that the term invites) is now strongly associated with the work of the District Six Museum (2006).⁶⁶ He argues that the Museum’s deployment of the term is ‘conscious and strategic [...] as the expression of a commitment to social mobilization’.⁶⁷ Whether the District Six Museum *should* be referred to as a ‘community museum’, or a ‘people’s museum’, (as some staff members would prefer it to be known) remains a

⁶¹ Rassool, ‘Community Museums, Memory Politics and Social Transformation in South Africa’, 2006, p.291.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Rassool, ‘Community Museums, Memory Politics and Social Transformation in South Africa’, 2006, p.291.

⁶⁴ Rassool, 2006, p.311.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Rassool, 2006, p.289.

⁶⁷ Rassool, 2006, p.311

significant talking point amongst the Trustees, staff and visitors. As referenced in earlier chapters, the term ‘community museum’ is awkward and unsatisfying, and due for reappraisal. Certainly with regards to the sites discussed in this thesis, “community museum” is ill-fitting as it does not adequately represent the vision and breadth of the organisations’ guiding principles. Bonita Bennett described to me a three-tiered concept of ‘community’ in relation to the District Six Museum, with the term encompassing, first and foremost, the ‘community’ of descendents and ex-residents; then Cape Townians and the broader South African ‘community’; (with the Museum’s narrative standing in for the articulation of a national ‘story’) and lastly, as a ‘community for displaced peoples’, with District Six as a ‘symbolic reminder of human rights violations worldwide’.⁶⁸

One of the more interesting aspects of latter point is that it positions the District Six Museum as a site within a network of other museums and organizations dedicated to the (re)telling of a larger narrative – that of the ‘diaspora of apartheid’.⁶⁹ The District Six Museum is already part of a coalition of ‘sites of conscience’,⁷⁰ but the notion of programming and exhibiting towards a unifying South African ‘story’ is

⁶⁸ In conversation with Bonita Bennett, 6th March, 2008.

⁶⁹ Rassool, 2006, p.297.

⁷⁰ www.sitesofconscience.org

organisationally distinct and something which could benefit 19 Princelet Street, with their universalising immigration narrative, and the Museum at Eldridge Street.⁷¹

Because the concept of ‘community’ in this South African context is inextricably linked to a history of state enforced racialised ‘group areas’, there is a danger in identifying what Rassool terms ‘static cultures’,⁷² (for example, ‘the Chinese community’ on the Lower East Side) who, it is believed, are the museum’s target audiences or beneficiaries. At the District Six Museum it is assumed this target audience is the ‘coloured community’, and yet black people were also residents who were removed to far-flung townships like Nyanga and Khayelitsha. An article in the Cape Argus newspaper in 1996 urged blacks to submit restitution claims on the grounds that “perceptions that District Six had been inhabited exclusively by coloured people were inaccurate.”⁷³

‘The production of hereness’

The significance of the church building to the District Six Museum and the various District Six ‘communities’ cannot be overstated, and, as I have attempted to illustrate, its permanence is juxtaposed with the histories of dispersal and fragmentation that are detailed inside its walls. In her book *Destination Culture:*

⁷¹ The Museum at Eldridge Street already collaborates with other Jewish and non-Jewish sites within the United States, such as the National Yiddish Book Centre in Amherst, Massachusetts, and YIVO, the Institute for Jewish Research, and the Museum of Chinese in America in New York.

⁷² Rassool, 2006, p.311.

⁷³ See the postscript to Nomvuyo Ngcelwane’s *Sala Kahle District Six: An African Woman’s Perspective*, (Cape Town, South Africa: Kwela Books, 2001.)

Tourism, Museums, and Heritage, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, explores what she terms ‘the production of hereness’: how the museum and heritage industries exploit the absence of actualities at their sites by the substitution of virtualities. She illustrates this by detailing the case of the Abbey Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul (1088-1804) in Cluny, France,

‘... a church the size of two football fields [...] outlived its usefulness [...] Shortly after the French Revolution, the Burgundian village in which it was found allowed the massive church to be dynamited and the stone sold. Not till protective legislation halted the process in the late nineteenth century did the village realise what it had lost’.⁷⁴

She goes on to describe the legacy of the church’s destruction; the thousands of tourists who visit Cluny each year to see the church that does not exist. ‘Like an amputee who still feels sensations in his phantom limb, the ancient village of Cluny is still haunted by its phantom church’.⁷⁵ Though distinct in many ways from the Buitenkant Street church in District Six, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s assessment of the exposed foundations of the former church and the small museum nearby dedicated to re-creating a ‘virtual church’, (‘Inside, I look at an animated, three-dimensional computer re-creation on videotape that shows views of the [church] structure from all angles while a Gregorian chant fills the background. Back outside, I stare again at the void’⁷⁶) is pertinent insofar as illustrates how integral a (religious) building, even one which no longer resembles its former self, is to the site on which it stands. In

⁷⁴ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, 1998, p.169.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Cluny, the absent church reminds the village what has been lost. At the District Six Museum, the church, sturdy, intact, is a visceral reminder of the absence of a community. 'On the basis of excavation and historical reconstruction and in collaboration with visitors', writes Kirshenblatt-Gimblett of the museum at Cluny, '[the museum] openly imagines the site into being – in the very spot where it should still be standing but is no more'.⁷⁷



Visitors to the former Abbey at Cluny on the spot where the church's foundations once stood.

The national and international success of the District Six Museum, in contrast with my other case studies, can, in many ways be attributed to its savvy 'production of hereness'; to its displays and programmes, but most importantly, to the building itself. Neither awe-inspiring (like the Eldridge Street Synagogue) nor elusive (like 19 Princelet Street) but simply solid and inhabitable, and thus, crucially, adaptable, the Buitenkant Street church *remains*, and in doing so it continues to be hugely significant to displaced ex-residents. Like 19 Princelet Street, there is no active

⁷⁷ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 1998, p.170.

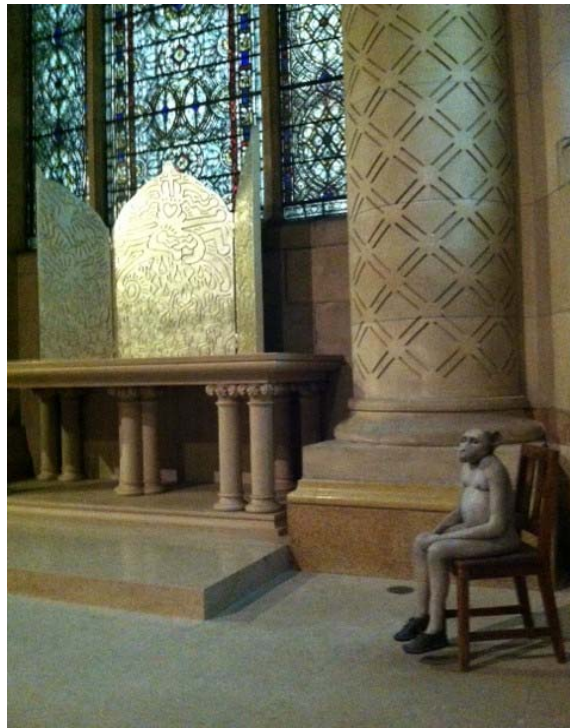
congregation to impinge on the secular programming that takes place, and yet the presence of ex-residents and former congregants as Museum volunteers, Trustees and docents (as is the case at the Museum at Eldridge Street) helps to justify the term 'community museum', with all the complexities bound up in the definition. The tension that exists within the building is not borne out of the sharing of a space, or as a result of an unwillingness to identify the religious history of the site. Addressing the interpretive needs of museum audiences beyond their target community of ex-residents; understanding how the story of the apartheid years can be balanced by the 'hereness' on display in the Museum, has been an on-going issue that District Six Museum staff have been keen to address.⁷⁸ Yet the partnerships formed by the Museum in recent years will go a long way toward making broader connections between the public legacy of apartheid and the personal stories excavated by the District Six Museum Foundation, creating what Doreen Massey refers to as a 'progressive sense of place'⁷⁹ for future generations. In this way, the District Six Museum can benefit from what it means to be a virtual, resilient and real place for all.

⁷⁸ See Ballantyne, 'Interpreting Apartheid', 2003, pp.279-92.

⁷⁹ See Doreen Massey on page 24 of Chapter 1.

PART 3

'This Special Shell': **A New Museum Model**



Rebecca Faulkner
'For Whom was Built This Special Shell?' Exploring the adaptive use of religious buildings as museums, galleries
and cultural centres
Part 3 Chapter 5

Evaluating emerging sites

*When churches fall completely out of use
What shall we turn them into?*¹

St George's Bloomsbury was the sixth and final of the London churches designed in 1711 by the leading architect of the English Baroque, Nicholas Hawksmoor (1661-1736). Considered to be his most idiosyncratic work, St George's 'marries baroque splendour with classical references and is topped by the most eccentric spire in London'.² Hawksmoor's designs incorporated complex internal plans with a dramatic play of space and light. The striking monumental exterior of his London churches presented both 'movement and classical gravity within their urban settings'.³ During the 19th century, St George's played a key role in the Church of England's 'civilizing mission'; providing practical help, including schooling, library facilities and a soup kitchen for the local community. The Victorian novelist Anthony Trollop was baptised in the church in 1815, and it featured as the fictional setting for Dickens' 'A Bloomsbury Christening' in *Sketches by Boz*. In 1913, the church hosted the memorial service for Emily Davison, a suffragette who threw herself under the King's horse in the Derby in June of that year. Thus the early twentieth century saw St George's as an active centre for both spiritual and secular affairs.

¹ Philip Larkin, 'Church Going', from *The Less Deceived*, (originally published 1955. Faber & Faber: 2001.)

² Quotes taken from the World Monuments Fund, Britain website:
<http://www.wmf.org.uk/projects/view/>

³ Ibid.

From 1956 to 1968, St George's served as the University of London's church, with the Rector as Senior Chaplain. When this association with the University ended in the early 1970s, the church struggled to establish a clear role for itself within the local community and subsequently fell into disrepair. The congregation had diminished in size and the fabric of the building, despite its Grade 1 listed status, had begun to deteriorate. Attempts during the 1990s to restore the building attracted the attention of the World Monuments Fund (WMF), which agreed to lead and manage the renovation at a cost of £9.2 million. In association with the Parochial Church Council, restoration began in 2002, funded primarily by the WMF and Paul Mellon, the American philanthropist, with additional support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)⁴ and other smaller donors.

Today, the beautifully restored church is attempting to revitalise its role in and beyond Bloomsbury by running a series of education programmes in collaboration with London schools, in addition to hosting concerts, lectures and guided tours year-round. The church boasts an impressive permanent multi-media exhibition, *'Hawksmoor and Bloomsbury'* in the building's cavernous undercroft, and the congregation is steadily growing. This new approach to outreach has occurred in part to meet the requirements of the various funding bodies responsible for the restoration (HLF in particular), but also stems from the desire of the former Rector,

⁴ The Heritage Lottery Fund grant to St George's, which began in 2005, is primarily an 'activities' budget', totaling £57,000 covering projects and public programmes. Information provided by Kirsty Marsh, Events and Outreach Officer, November 2008.

Perry Butler, to see the church fully engage with its constituents by offering a more diverse programme of events.⁵

This final chapter will chart the re-emergence of St George's, Bloomsbury as a multi-use venue for worship and cultural programming, contrasting its efforts with other Church of England buildings in London and the South East. With specific focus on the church's schedule of public programmes in the autumn/winter of 2008, the chapter will further explicate the trend identified in the introduction: that of the landmark religious building determined to increase visitor-ship by disseminating a varied history through secular events and exhibits. Through field research and interviews, the first part of this concluding chapter will assess the complexities of shared and adaptive use in Anglican models, (in response to the analysis of Christian attachment to sacred places I provided in Chapter 1) in contrast with the Jewish and Methodist sites discussed in previous case studies. The St George's case study examines how a recently emergent site can differ from an established site such as the Museum at Eldridge Street (the other example of a functioning shared use space), exploring to what degree the Anglican building in question represents a new model of 'community' or 'participatory' museum.

As the chapter continues, broadening to encompass an analysis of the diverse cultural and secular uses of Anglican buildings across London, I will assess the rich history and recent reemergence of siting art in sacred places. By responding to

⁵ Conversation with Perry Bulter, 16 January 2008, St George's, Bloomsbury.

contemporary interventions in houses of worship such as St. Martin's-in-the-Field, and All Hallows on the Wall, the final part of this chapter will demonstrate that these 'special shells' can elicit art work that 'questions the values and traditions of the host space, or present objects and events that challenge its visual conventions'.⁶ The chapter closes with an assessment of current work being carried out by organizations mediating on behalf of congregations and arts groups in order to enable adaptive and shared use schemes in both Britain and the USA.

Hawksmoor's beginnings

'Each church is an enclosure of force, a trap, a sight-block, a raised place with an unacknowledged influence over events created within the shadow-lines of their towers...'⁷ Iain Sinclair

Commissioned by the Tory government under the 1711 Act of Parliament to build a dozen new churches for the city as a response to London's increasing population, Sir Christopher Wren's pupil Nicholas Hawksmoor designed his Bloomsbury church as a fulfillment of his architectural ambition. The new parish of St George's was formed from the ancient parish of St Giles-in-the-Fields, (surrounded by one of London's most notorious slums) to serve the more fashionable area of Bloomsbury. The plan for St George's was to accommodate an awkward location, nestled between Bloomsbury Way and Little Russell Street, and the design was informed by

⁶ Jonathan Koestlé-Cate's, 'A Fractious Embrace': Rethinking Ecclesiastical Encounters with Contemporary Art', doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths College, 2011.

⁷Iain Sinclair, *Lud Heat and Suicide Bridge*, (with an Introduction by Michael Moorcock, London: Granta, 1998) p.20.

Hawksmoor's interest in classical archaeology, and his fascination with mausoleums.⁸

The church is eclectic in design, featuring a large Corinthian portico as its entrance façade, thought to be inspired by the temple of Bacchus at Baalbek, Lebanon⁹.



Façade of St George's, post-restoration Image from WMF website
<http://www.wmf.org.uk/projects/view/>

Designed as an 'auditory' church,¹⁰ (much like Wren's city churches) St George's was intended specifically for the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer,¹¹ with both the

⁸ As proved by Hawksmoor's surviving letters and the sale catalogue of his library in 1740. See Hugh Mellor's *St. George's Bloomsbury: An Illustrated Guide to the Church*, (Published by St. George's Bloomsbury, London) 1975, pp. 2-5, and Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey's *Hawksmoor's London Churches: Architecture and Theology* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press), 2000, pp. 111-115.

⁹ Information taken from the World Monuments Fund, Britain website.

¹⁰ Taken from St. George's archival materials. With thanks to Kirsty Marsh for her assistance.

¹¹ The Book of Common Prayer refers to a number of related prayer books used in the Anglican church. The original book, published in 1549 in the reign of Edward VI, was a product of the English Reformation following the break with Rome. Prayer books, unlike books of prayers, contain the words of structured (or liturgical) services of worship. The work of 1549 was the first prayer book to include

pulpit and the altar clearly visible and the interior lit with clear glass windows. Unusual features in the design of St George's, (in contrast with Hawksmoor's other, more conventional London churches such as Christ Church, Spitalfields) include a steeple, featuring a statue of King George I atop. Notes of unintentional humour such as this are combined with what art historian Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey refers to as Hawksmoor's 'serious pursuit of neoantique reconstruction',¹² providing a curious blending of traditions – 'a springboard from which to launch a new style appropriate to the eighteenth century Anglican Church's search for its early Christian roots'.¹³

In the mid-1960s, architectural journalist Ian Nairn considered the disparate elements in the design of St George's as the one occasion where 'prodigious invention' ran away with Hawksmoor.¹⁴ The 'various characters' of the building; the narrow passage-way at the church's west side; its steps and curves; the rear elevation standing in stark contrast to the rest of the building, provided, for Nairn, the 'drama of a full symphonic movement'.¹⁵ Hawksmoor used a richer ornamentation on the outside of the church than the inside (in keeping with Protestant guidelines) however, what is praised today as idiosyncratic was met with derision at the time of consecration.

the complete forms of service for daily and Sunday worship in English. From conversation with Rev Perry Bulter and Rev Alan Walker.

¹² du Prey's *Hawksmoor's London Churches*, 2000, p.116.

¹³ du Prey's *Hawksmoor's London Churches*, 2000, p. 118.

¹⁴ Ian Nairn, *Nairn's London*, (London: Penguin Books, 1966) p.p.112-113.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Shadow lines

The aforementioned tower and steeple, featuring the only statue that existed in England at the time of King George I,¹⁶ invited criticism and ridicule when it was erected. It was featured in artist and social satirist William Hogarth's engraving *Gin Lane*, issued in 1751, which presents the steeple in the background of a scene depicting the squalour and despair of an impoverished community raised on alcohol. Bloomsbury in the mid-eighteenth century marked a distinct border zone between the neighbouring parish of St Giles-in-the-Fields (now delineated by the triangle of Charing Cross Road, New Oxford Street and Shaftesbury Avenue). In his vast biography of London, Peter Ackroyd writes that 'the invocation of sorrow and loneliness, first embodied in the twelfth-century foundation [of St. Giles] has never entirely left the area; throughout its history it has been the haunt of the poor and the outcast'.¹⁷ He continues: 'the whole history of London vagrancy can be understood by proper attention to this small territory'.¹⁸ St Giles, much like Spitalfields, had been the site of a hospital for lepers in the twelfth century, and by 1585 was home, as was much of the East End, to immigrants, mostly Irish and French, ejected from the city. Yet in stark contrast to Spitalfields, the parish of St Giles also attracted the wealthier classes who 'built grand houses among pasture grounds recreated as gardens',¹⁹ and were enticed by the open spaces and proximity

¹⁶ Influenced, supposedly, by the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, one of the seven wonders of the Ancient world. From the WMF website.

¹⁷ Peter Ackroyd, *London, The Biography*, (London: Vintage, 2000) p. 131.

¹⁸ Ackroyd, *London, The Biography*, 2000, p.1324.

¹⁹ Ackroyd, *London, The Biography*, 2000, p.132.

of Westminster. As Ackroyd notes, by the seventeenth century, St Giles was known for its 'startling contrasts between rich and poor...remaining an unsettled state for several centuries'.²⁰

The construction of St George's Bloomsbury came about in part as a response to the depths of misery that could be witnessed in the neighbouring parish of St Giles, and the subsequent need for the creation of a new and separate parish for the predominantly wealthier classes in the area. The choice of St Giles as the London setting for Hogarth's *Gin Lane* was hugely significant given the number of taverns located there, and the high incidences of drunkenness. Ackroyd writes that Hogarth captures the essential spirit of outrage and despair in his engraving, depicting 'a world where vagrants sit in small groups drinking ale, [...] the drunken woman with syphilitic sores, [foreshadowing London's Great Plague] the child about to fall to its death, all these reflect in exaggerated detail the reality of St Giles as a centre of death-dealing drink'.²¹

²⁰ Ackroyd, *London, The Biography*, 2000, p.132.

²¹ Ackroyd, *London, The Biography*, 2000, p.133.



William Hogarth's *Gin Lane* (1751)



Steeple detail

Having established a dedicated congregation, and with the accruing of necessary funds, St George's was reoriented in 1781 with the apse²² becoming the baptismal area, and the galleries expanded, making it the only church in London with galleries on all four sides. Restoration work in the 1870s included replacing clear glass from the windows with stained glass. The original lions and unicorns around the base of the tower were removed in the nineteenth century, but have since been recreated, and the original west entrance at the base of the tower has been restored. Much of the recent renovations have posed what the WMF refers to as 'fundamental questions in the restoration field: Are alterations as much a part of the history of a

²² Semicircular recess at the east end of the building, above the altar.

building as what was there at the start?²³ As the WMF commentary on the project attests to:

‘St George’s had been dramatically altered, largely by the Victorians who shifted the entire layout of the church by ninety degrees. However, once all the evidence had been unravelled there was little doubt that it was achievable to return the interior to Hawksmoor’s original design. Therefore the most radical aspect of the internal restoration was the reinstatement of the altar in the eastern apse. This alters the whole effect of the space on a visitor. Hawksmoor had created the apse as a special place for the altar, its’ plaster vault decorated with cherubs and symbols of the Resurrection. Today, visitors to the church now enter via the Western tower and turn right into the open, harmonious interior as Hawksmoor intended’.²⁴



²³ Taken from the WMF, Britain website

http://www.wmf.org.uk/projects/view/st_georges_bloomsbury/overview.

The Museum at Eldridge Street in New York has recently overcome similar preservation issues in its quest to restore a stained-glass rose window. For some years both the docents and the Museum’s website asked visitors for their opinion: ‘How would you restore a historic building? The synagogue’s glass-block east window was originally occupied by a grand rose window that, according to the congregation’s minute books, was blown out by the hurricane of 1938. Lacking funds, the congregation replaced it with economical clear glass blocks. Though incongruous, the current window represents an era in the synagogue’s life. What would you do?’ Forty-eight per cent of those questioned nominated to restore the window to its original grandeur. In October 2010 this preservation dilemma was solved when the staff and Board moved ahead with option three, and the synagogue revealed its new, bespoke east window, designed by internationally renowned artist Kiki Smith and architect Deborah Gans.

²⁴ Taken from WMF website.

Various characters

Returning to London, this concluding chapter provides a view from the heart of Bloomsbury, a stone's throw from the university and only five miles or so from Spitalfields, where this research began. Like much of London, the parish of St George's has undergone seismic shifts in the last two hundred years, though perhaps none as radical as those of Bishopsgate and Brick Lane in the past decade. The renewal of the area since the 1990s is reflected in the remarkable and swift transformation the church has undergone in the last ten years.

Notable local landmarks such as the Brunswick Centre at the edge of the parish near Russell Square, have been similarly reborn from a rather scruffy modernist residential housing complex to a Grade II listed commercial and cultural quarter. The redesigned Brunswick Centre shares many features with the new Spitalfields market: open-plan; boasting a proliferation of glass and chrome and a profusion of high street shops. And while it is no longer a surprise to stumble upon the expensive boutiques and eateries in the heart of Spitalfields, an historically poor, residential area, Bloomsbury has long been associated with shopping and culture, something which both serves the church well in terms of foot traffic from tourists, with its proximity to the British Museum, yet also hinders it in its attempts to develop a permanent and dedicated audience from its immediate constituency.²⁵

²⁵ From conversations with Kirsty Marsh, September 2008.

The church, which has hosted music programmes for the last ten years, featuring seasonal recitals and lectures on Sunday afternoons, benefits from foot traffic, the majority of whom are tourists and may know something about Hawksmoor. Parishioners are drawn from a broader cross-section of the community: some local, wealthier residents, others journeying from as far north as Tottenham to attend services.²⁶ The interior of the church, post-restoration, is a beautiful venue for music; warm and inviting; well lit, with glorious acoustics that serve the concertos well. The size of the church's exterior belies an interior intimacy (it seats two hundred and twenty) that befits the small orchestras performing there.²⁷



Audience at recital, September 2008.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ I attended a series of Bach and Mozart concertos at the church in October and November 2008 performed by the Orchestra of Situation Opera who were in residence in the church, after which I spoke to members of the audience about their experience and reasons for visiting.

Despite the popularity of many of these events, St George's is no closer to realising a 'vision' for programming at the church without wrenching control away from its funding bodies. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has made it clear that St George's main grant for programming is to be used for 'heritage' events, such as school visits and architectural programming. However, with a part-time staff of four, and a greater emphasis placed on concerts and recitals, the attempts at outreach with schools in the borough of Camden have been minimal. As a consequence, the church had, by the end of 2008, not yet secured the majority of its grant from HLF.

The undercroft, the cavernous, underutilized space beneath the church, has been redesigned to accommodate the permanent '*Hawksmoor and Bloomsbury*' exhibit, featuring a series of wall panels and interactive video kiosks, which tell the story of the building and explore Hawksmoor's vision for Bloomsbury. The exhibition should be a crucial component of the church's 'vision'; a destination for students of architecture and history, and yet the space is often virtually empty.²⁸

²⁸ St George's has hosted successful education programmes based on the Hawksmoor exhibit, such as the summer 2007 project *Hawksmoor Online!* which was inspired by students' visits to the church and the *Hawksmoor* exhibition, and a concluded with a series of workshops involving the new St George's website with the aim of exploring how technology, art and design can intersect and compliment student's history research.



Visitors to the *Hawksmoor and Bloomsbury* exhibition June 2007.

Because of staff shortages, visitors are unable to drop in to see the exhibition unannounced.²⁹ This factor, combined with a lack of signage and promotion, and the complex task of attracting return visitors, is a huge drawback for the church. St George's has the potential to produce and promote successful, participatory, and relevant programme seasons, drawing on Bloomsbury's rich history and the architectural legacy of Hawksmoor in London. While the parish is confident that the church will remain a shared use space, with religious services taking precedence over secular programming, in order to guarantee that the valuable grants which fund the concerts and school visits remain in place, St George's will need to look beyond short term hires and residencies if it wishes to nurture a dedicated audience for its cultural events.

²⁹ The visitor statistics for the exhibition indicate in the summer of 2008 (when there were greater numbers of tourists, and also, crucially, additional volunteers on hand to staff) the attendance rose steadily from 400 for the month of June to 1,300 in September. This contrasts greatly with the monthly average throughout the year, which ranges from approximately 170 to 250 visitors per month.

Unlike 19 Princelet Street or the Buitenkant Street church in District Six (both sacred places which were, and still are, valued *not only* for their architectural splendour, or even solely for their religious significance, but for their material histories of endurance and resistance, and, crucially for the neighbourhoods in which they are located), St George's, Bloomsbury draws primarily on its architectural status and sacred legacy to define it. The church is located in a London district less subject to mythologizing and romanticism than the East End, (or the Lower East Side and District Six), but has its own fair share of lurid and colourful histories to nonetheless anchor it. This relative freedom to interpret the significance of the church and its environs, without the restrictive pedagogy or imposing narrative of the Museum at Eldridge Street, can be viewed as both an opportunity and a hindrance for St George's.

The other religious buildings examined in this thesis engage with, and actively participate in a specific 'theme', (immigration, assimilation, or the struggle against apartheid). These themes, however manufactured, help define and locate the institutions in the broader context of the neighbourhoods in which they are situated. St George's status is more ambiguous. The church's splendour reflects the cultural and historic wealth of Bloomsbury, while its architectural incongruities hint at a multifarious legacy on the doorstep of what was the parish of St Giles. Financially, the church benefits from the hire of the building to the World Monuments Fund, and

yet the rules governing how the sanctuary can be used, and for what purpose, are restrictive, and strongly adhered to, in much the same way as at the Museum at Eldridge Street. And yet it has a valuable, multi-use ancillary space: its undercroft, which is not being used to its full potential.

St George's is not a registered museum, nor does it consider itself an adaptive use cultural centre, and yet it is one of many established religious buildings in London and throughout England choosing to promote cultural events and embark on secular programming to appeal to a broader audience.³⁰ One immediate way of raising its profile would be for St George's to collaborate on the use of the undercroft with an organization such as Art and Christianity Enquiry (ACE), or Art and Sacred Places, two charities based in the south of England promoting dialogue between faith and contemporary art. In 2005 ACE produced *Insight*, a visual arts event, as part of the City of London Festival. *Insight* provided the opportunity to visit some of London's preeminent sacred spaces transformed by artistic interventions. Six artists responded to the history, culture and visual iconography of six major churches, with exhibits ranging from Rebecca Horn's ambitious *Moon Mirror* sculpture at St Paul's Cathedral, to John Newling's branded golden calf on the exterior of Hawksmoor's St

³⁰ See the Art and Sacred Places website www.artandsacredplaces.org and Art and Christianity Enquiry www.acetrust.org/insight for further details of religious buildings in England which are currently housing art exhibitions, installations, lecture series and events. ACE has recently undertaken a project entitled 'Ecclesiart', which aims to map permanent works of modern (post-1920) and contemporary art sited in UK churches and cathedrals. This extensive project currently lists over fifty works by artists ranging from Jacob Epstein to Tracey Emin, and seeks to 'stimulate debate about the nature of such works', as well as 'encourage further nominations'. <http://acetrust.org/ecclesiart> Also see my appendix for further examples.

Mary's, Woolnoth.³¹ The following year, ACE curated three works by Yoko Ono in St Paul's Cathedral, including *Morning Beams*, a dramatic installation using rope to create the illusion of beams of light from a natural light source.³²



Yoko Ono's *Morning Beams*

The ecclesiastical art encounter

Is there a renewed interest in siting contemporary art in sacred places?³³ According to Paul Bayley, Art & Christianity Enquiry's Church's Officer, until relatively recently there has been a "quiet standoff between the predominantly secular world of contemporary art and the Christian church".³⁴ With a handful of high profile exceptions during the 1980s and 1990s³⁵, there has, until recently, been limited

³¹ Information provided by ACE. Taken from the website www.acetrust.org/insight.

³² Information provided by ACE. Taken from the website www.acetrust.org/art-in-churches

³³ The post-war period saw a number of commissions for modernist sculptures to be sited in churches, among the more high profile were Henry Moore's 'Madonna and Child' (1943-44) at the church of St Matthew, Northampton, and Barbara Hepworth's 'Madonna and Child' (1954) for St Ives parish church.

³⁴ 'Contemporary Art & Church Commissions: Boom or Bust?' Paul Bayley, p.9, *Contemporary Art in British Churches* edited by Laura Moffatt & Eileen Daly. (ACE Trust Publications, 2010.)

³⁵ Anthony Gormley's 1986 sculptural work *Sound II* at Winchester Cathedral, and Bill Viola's 1996 video installation *The Messenger* in Durham Cathedral, among them.

dialogue between the contemporary art world and the church. Laura Moffat, ACE's Director, told me that she felt there had been a shift, "a kind of sociological/cultural interest in church spaces in particular, but also artists are interested in the mechanics of sacred space".³⁶ What are the conditions and implications of this shift? And what does this mean for the revitalisation and adaptation of redundant religious buildings?

To contextualize, the last twenty years has witnessed the emergence of a new generation of high profile British artists eager to push the limits of traditional museum and gallery display.³⁷ Art historian Reesa Greenberg summarizes that since the late 1960s there has been a 'paradigm shift in the types of spaces used for exhibitions of contemporary art, which can be characterized as a move away from domestic-like structures to buildings associated with commerce and industry'.³⁸ The dominance of conceptual installation-based art work, and the popularization of contemporary art practice through excessive media focus on 'celebrity artists' and collectors, in addition to the launch of museums such as Tate Modern and Guggenheim Bilbao (typifying the reuse of industrial/non-traditional space for siting modern and contemporary art), has generated an enthusiasm for conceptual and

³⁶ From email interview with Laura Moffat, May 2012.

³⁷ For a useful illustration of this see the essay 'The Exhibition Redistributed: A Case for Assessing Space', by Reesa Greenberg, pp. 349-364 in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Reese Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson & Sandy Nairne eds. London & New York: Routledge, 1996.

³⁸ Greenberg, 'The Exhibition Redistributed: A Case for Assessing Space' (1996), p.350.

site-responsive art, an engagement with public space and the built environment, and a rejection of the commodification of the art object.

Before the global financial crisis of 2008, the government spending review of 2011 and the biting cuts to arts funding in Britain, it would be accurate to say that the last two decades have seen a National Lottery funded boom in the commissioning of public art. This has coincided with the need to raise funds for, and increase attendance at many of the country's churches and religious centres. ACE reports attest to this, indicating that they have witnessed increased interest among contemporary artists for commissions within sacred spaces.³⁹ This desire to produce a 'different' and subjective art environment, either geographically 'off the beaten track,' or sited in locations that are 'spatially oppositional',⁴⁰ or unconventional, is a contributing factor to the rise in what Dr. Jonathan Koestlé-Cate terms 'ecclesiastical encounters with contemporary art'. Koestlé-Cate describes

'A vibrant critical exchange between contemporary art and Christianity has been increasingly prompted through an accelerating programme of art installations and commissions for ecclesiastical spaces. Crucially, rather than a 'religious art' reflecting Christian ideology, as in an earlier age might have been expected, current practices frequently initiate projects that question the values and traditions of the host space, or present objects and events that challenge its visual conventions'.⁴¹

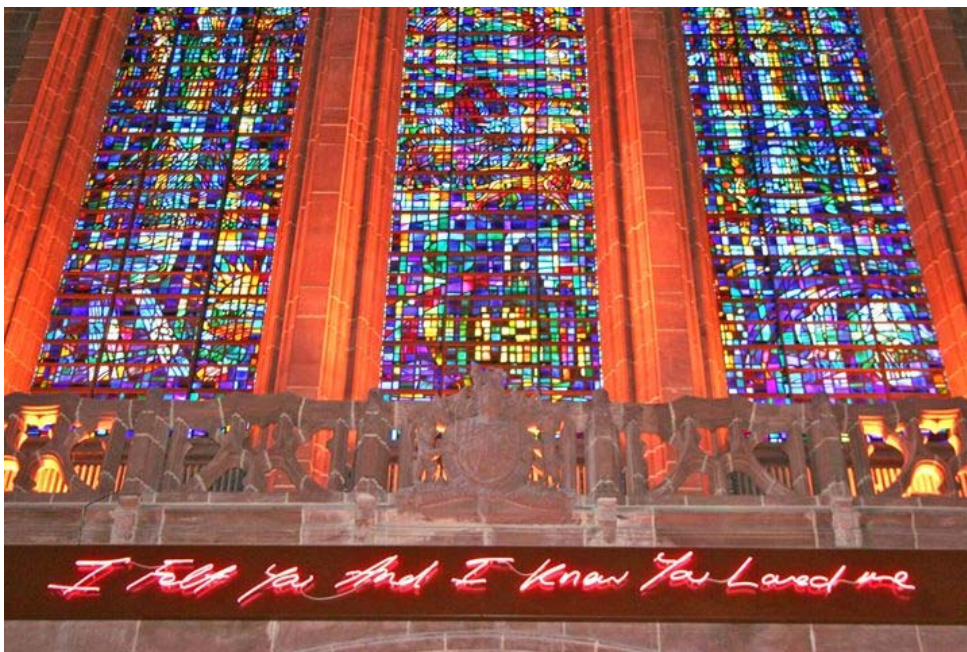
In addition to the aforementioned City of London Festival/ACE sponsored *Insight*, in 2000 the Arts Council England brought together a high profile group of

³⁹ See ACE's 'Ecclesiart' project.

⁴⁰ Greenberg, 'The Exhibition Redistributed: A Case for Assessing Space' (1996), p.352.

⁴¹ Jonathan Koestlé-Cate's, 'A Fractious Embrace: Rethinking Ecclesiastical Encounters with Contemporary Art', doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths College, 2011.

contemporary artists (such as Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst, among others) for a series of installations entitled 'Art in Sacred Spaces'. Since then, ACE, Art & Sacred Places and Wallspace have all fostered successful partnerships between contemporary artists and religious sites. On occasion, these temporary installations have led to the adoption of arts policy and the hiring of staff to oversee programming and engagement strategies. This was the case with St Paul's Cathedral which, as a result of the successes of Yoko Ono and Rebecca Horn's sculptural installations in 2005-6, now enjoys an active dialogue with the world of contemporary art.



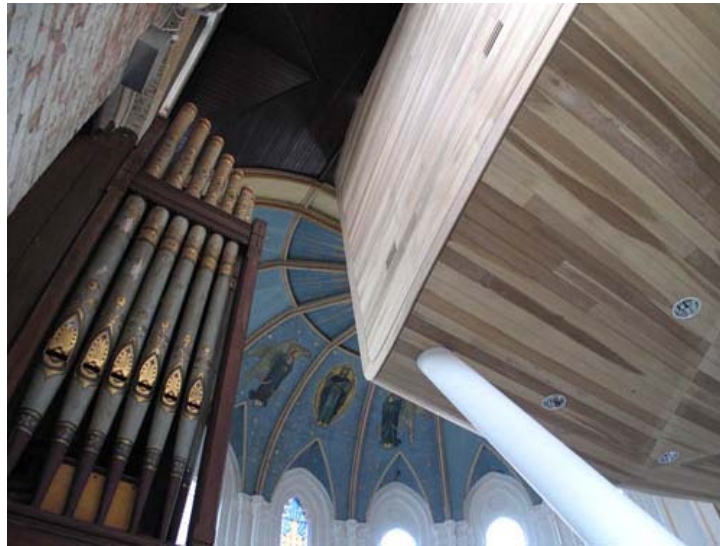
Tracey Emin, *For You*, Liverpool Cathedral, 2008.

In contrast to high profile cathedrals boasting art works by Tracey Emin and Yoko Ono, there are growing examples of smaller churches across the UK attempting to utilise limited space and funds to engage with contemporary art and attract a broader audience. In 2004, St Paul's Old Ford, in Bow (1878) completed a £3.3 million project to renovate and revitalise their Victorian interior by installing a two-storey steel and timber structure raised high on curving columns into the vaulted ceiling of church (see image on page 211). The creation of a 'combined use' central space, designed to resemble a boat or an ark, caters to the needs of a diverse local community by providing new areas in an otherwise derelict and redundant church, while leaving the nave and the chancel free for worship.⁴² According to the Rector, the striking assemblage of architectural styles visible within the church 'reflects the changing and divergent needs of the parish, and has been successfully received and utilized by the community since the building was reopened in 2004'.⁴³ The addition of new space inside the building, including a renovated Bell Tower, and meeting rooms available for hire, have opened up the interior of the small church, but, much like St George's, Bloomsbury, the spaces are currently underused. Thus the

⁴² The addition to St. Paul's was designed by Matthew Lloyd Architects, LLP in 2001 and completed in 2004. The space includes mixed use L-shaped rooms featuring an art gallery, project room, a small community hall, a crèche, a gym and a café. Information and images from the website www.matthewlloyd.co.uk

⁴³ It is interesting to note that the redevelopment at St. Paul's would not have been possible without the dedication and ambitious vision of the Rector, Phillippa Boardman MBE, who spent six years raising £20,000 through jumble sales and securing £3.3 million from various funding bodies, including the National Lottery and the Church Urban Fund. Information from the church website <http://www.stpauloldford.com>, and the conference 'A City to Dwell In: Church Buildings and Urban Regeneration', sponsored by The Shaftesbury Society and Art & Christianity Enquiry at St. Paul's church, London. 22 June, 2005.

renovation, while benefiting the parish and local community, and successfully modernising a tired interior space, has not significantly altered the way in which the church is used and perceived.



Ceiling detail of St Paul's Bow, showing the church organ and the timber structure.

Windows and wall space

The second case study in this thesis examined the twenty-five year long evolution of the Eldridge Street synagogue from a burgeoning preservation project to a registered New York City museum. Since completing the building restoration in 2007, one of the more significant developments at the museum has been the installation in 2010 of a stained glass window, designed by artist Kiki Smith and architect Deborah Gans. This permanent artwork, the culmination of extensive review and commissioning processes, in many ways represents the arc of the building's history from its Victorian inception to its 21st century incarnation, via the artists' contemporary practice. The commissioned window stands sixteen feet in diameter and occupies almost the entire top half of the building's eastern wall. According to their artists'

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statement, Smith and Gans believed that ‘the synagogue’s high-Victorian interior had an abundance of visual elements and did not need a new addition to its visual vocabulary. The design, a galaxy of golden stars against a blue firmament, recreates in stained-glass the blue and gold star pattern painted on the walls immediately surrounding the new window’.⁴⁴



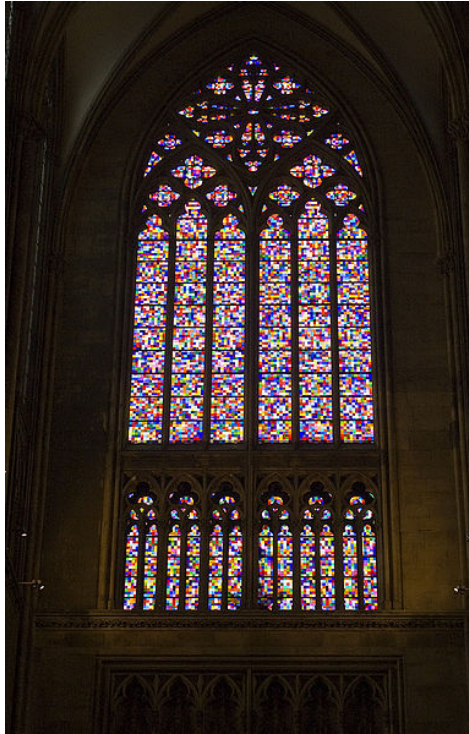
Kiki Smith/Deborah Gans window, image courtesy of Kate Milford.

There is a rich history dating back to the late Romanesque and Gothic periods, of artists commissioned to create stained glass window design for religious buildings. Notable nineteenth century and modern examples include windows by Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites; Matisse’s Venice chapel; Chagall’s windows in Israel, France,

⁴⁴ Taken from the Museum’s press release, 5 October, 2010
<http://www.eldridgestreet.org/images/stories/pdfs/window.pdf>

Germany and Britain; as well as the innovations of the Art Nouveau movement, including the work of Louis Comfort Tiffany. Fragile - 'subject to the mishaps of war, neglect, accident, and foolish renovation'⁴⁵ – and often subsumed within the buildings' architectural functions, stained glass art has suffered from being overly decorative and ornamental. The new rose window at the Museum at Eldridge Street is one of many recent examples of large-scale stained glass commissions for religious buildings across Europe and North America, pointing to a reemergence in the tradition of non-figurative window art. In his essay on the evolution of Gerhard Richter's stained glass window for the Cologne Cathedral, and Sigmar Polke's stone window for the Grossmünster in Zurich, art critic Peter Schjeldahl explores the attraction for high profile, contemporary artists with little or no religious affiliation to design work for churches and synagogues.

⁴⁵ From Peter Schjeldahl's essay, 'Many-colored glass', *The New Yorker*, 12 May, 2008.



Gerhard Richter's *Cathedral Window*, (2007) for Cologne Cathedral.

Richter's *Cathedral Window*, (2007) was designed for the south transept of the Cologne Cathedral. It consists of approximately 11,500 squares of glass in seventy-two colours, 'deemed consistent with those of the cathedral's forty-three windows dating from 1260 to 1562'.⁴⁶ The project went through many stages of development, from glass samples created based on medieval design, to computer-generated colour 'sequences', which caused some controversy, (the work was referred to derisively as 'pixels' and 'confetti'.⁴⁷) The city's archbishop complained to a local newspaper that the window 'belongs equally in a mosque, or another house of prayer [...] If we are

⁴⁶ Information from the Richter website <http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/paintings/other/detail.php?paintid=14890>

⁴⁷ From Peter Schjeldahl's essay, 'Many-colored glass', *The New Yorker*, 12 May, 2008.

going to have a window, then it should be one that reflects our faith, not just any faith'.⁴⁸ This is an interesting proposition, and one which is being addressed by groups such as Art and Sacred Places in Britain, and Partners for Sacred Places in the United States. Should permanent art works located within churches, cathedrals and synagogues not only be site, but faith-specific? Richter's window may not be dependent on thematic imagery, but is, nonetheless 'beautiful, grand, and entrancing [...] delivering an incessant first impression'.⁴⁹ It induces a mood; alters the light in the space; creates stillness. As Schjeldahl posits: 'if Richter doesn't provide a hard answer to the mystery of religious longings, he certainly pries open the question'.⁵⁰

The aforementioned preservation dilemma, or 'great Talmudic debate',⁵¹ was something the Museum faced when attempting to modify an architectural feature that had been altered over time. The commissioning of a new window, as opposed to re-creating the original Victorian rose window, (which had been damaged and replaced in 1944 with inexpensive glass blocks) references a history of modification and adaptation within the building. By drawing upon motifs present in the synagogue's design, (the canopy of stars; the colours in the remaining stained glass panels) while alluding to a break with tradition, (echoing the breakages in the history of a building and of a people) the new window at the Museum at Eldridge Street

⁴⁸ Peter Schjeldahl, *The New Yorker*, 12 May, 2008.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Deputy Director of the Museum, Amy Stein Milford, quoted in 'She Does Windows' by Paul Goldberger, Talk of the Town section, *New Yorker Magazine*, (January 18, 2010).

offers visitors the opportunity to reflect upon and engage with change made manifest inside the building, as well as beyond its walls, on the streets outside.

Another comparison to the new window at Eldridge Street was installed at St Martin-in-the-Fields church in London in 2008. Like the Smith/Gans window, St Martin's new East Window⁵² was the product of a collaboration between Iranian artist Shirazeh Houshiary and her husband, architect Pip Horne. Both windows were the result of a high profile commissioning process; both combined the skills of a renowned artist and architect, and both outcomes were deemed groundbreaking in their departure from traditional religious stained glass work. The new east window at St Martin-in-the-Fields is breathtaking: on first glance it appears as a warped monochrome grid. However, on closer inspection it seems to depict a cross reflected in water. The cross and grid motifs, so simple, and yet so skillfully wrought by Houshiary and Horne, feel at once fitting, naturally responding to the building's sight lines, with the oval at its centre echoing the shape of the church ceiling. Critics have pointed out that Houshiary's 'subtle curvilinear abstraction of stained glass lattice feels very other and feminine, throwing the Church of England's slowly shifting conservatism towards matters of race, gender and sexuality into sharp relief'.⁵³ Houshiary embraced the opportunity to challenge binary conceptions of religious art by bringing back what she refers to as the "essential meaning of religion, connecting back to one's

⁵² The east window commission at St Martin-in-the-Fields is featured in the aforementioned Art & Christianity Enquiry project 'Ecclesiart', which seeks to map significant works of modern art in British churches.

⁵³ 'Rebecca Geldard, 'A new window on St Martin's past', *The Guardian*, Art & Design blog, 25 April, (2008).

essence”.⁵⁴ The Rev Nicholas Holtam and the commissioning team reinforced the universality of Houshiary’s sentiments, stating ‘as long as it had a spiritual dimension, the piece didn’t need to be specifically Christian’.⁵⁵ This statement stands in contrast with some of the responses to Richter’s Cologne window. Though Houshiary’s window represents a radical break with traditional ecclesiastical stained glass art, it provides a clear continuity with the church’s ethos as an evolving space for all.



The east window at St Martin-in-the-Fields, designed by artist Shirazeh Houshiary and architect Pip Horne, (2008).

The Kiki Smith/Deborah Gans east window commission is successful for many reasons, not least because of the beauty and delicacy of its design, and its thoughtful integration within the sanctuary. Winner of the 2011 Religious Art and Architecture Design Award, the commission was funded by private donors, and the City of New

⁵⁴ Pauline Bache, ‘Common Humanity: Shirazeh Houshiary’, *Aesthetica*, 22 (2008), p. 29.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

York. There is a significant difference in the history and application of philanthropic giving in the United States than exists in Europe, specifically Britain. Philanthropy in the US is more institutionalized than in the UK, with the rich seen as 'having a duty to give'. There are many factors to explain this: social welfare provision plays a stronger role in the UK than the US, where private giving plays a more prominent role, and has a longer history. Much of the twentieth century witnessed the development of large private foundations created by industrialists such as Rockefeller, Ford and Carnegie.⁵⁶ Other than English Heritage, primary sources of grant funding for heritage sites, museums and arts organizations in Britain include the Heritage Lottery Fund, which was established in the UK in 1993, and uses money raised through the National Lottery to fund heritage projects across the country. The Arts Council England, which distributes funds to hundreds of arts organizations, had its budget cut by almost 30% for 2011-15 in October 2010 during the government's spending review. English Heritage also suffered grant funding cuts of 38%. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council was abolished in July 2010. These changes have had a huge impact on the status and operation of smaller arts organizations, with many museums and libraries facing closure.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Taken from www.philanthropy.co.uk. Giving in the UK was 1.1% of GDP in 2006, half that of the USA, but higher than giving in other European countries. The largest share of American giving (32.8%) went to churches and religious organisations. The wealthiest 10% account for about half of all individual giving in the USA; in Britain it is only a fifth. In the UK, charitable giving traditionally has been considered 'private', though this is changing.

⁵⁷ Sources include Commons select committee publications on the state of heritage funding, March 2011, www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmcmds/464/46406.htm,

One such casualty of the current economic climate in Britain, and its impact on arts and heritage funding, was Wallspace, an exhibition venue in the church of All Hallows on the Wall in the City of London, which closed in February 2011. The church is a beautiful, barrel-vaulted Grade 1 listed 18th century building, built on London Wall. Designed by George Dance the younger, it has a sacred tradition going back to at least 1120.⁵⁸ All Hallows currently houses four charitable Christian organizations, (among them the aforementioned Art and Christianity Enquiry) and until 2011 was also the permanent home of Wallspace. Meryl Doney, Wallspace's director and curator from 2006-2011, had experience of siting art works with spiritual themes in sacred places throughout England,⁵⁹ and felt that there was a dearth of permanent venues for work of this kind to be shown on a regular basis. During her search for suitable premises, she benefitted from the help and support of the Archdeacon of London the Right Rev Peter Delaney, who suggested All Hallows.⁶⁰ As their publicity materials attested, Wallspace was 'integral to the vision and ministry of All Hallows on the Wall under vicar Canon Garth Hewitt, who was enormously enthusiastic [...] It dovetailed with his own vision for the church to act as a centre for creativity and justice'.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Taken from the Wallspace website www.wallspace.org.uk.

⁵⁹ In 2004 Meryl was responsible for curating *Presence: images of Christ for the third millennium*, a series of linked exhibitions of contemporary art housed in six cathedrals across the UK. This ambitious project - which included site-specific pieces for Canterbury and St Paul's cathedrals - involved the work of more than 50 artists. Taken from e-mail interviews with Meryl Doney, May and July 2012.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Taken from the Wallspace website www.wallspace.org.uk

Siting contemporary art at All Hallows never proved to be a problem in the way in which it had been at the Museum at Eldridge Street. The vicar, Garth Hewitt, was a personal friend of Ms Doney's, and was keen for such work to be shown in the church. All Hallows is a guild church, meaning it has no congregation who needed consulting. The other building occupants were charities, and very supportive. Additionally, the sanctuary space was flexible, with no pews, and the Archdeacon gave them license to be imaginative with the space, as long as they made no permanent changes.

Ms Doney describes the first year at Wallspace as one of rapid growth. In an interview conducted in May 2012, she spoke of the opportunity to show Damien Hirst's *New Religion*⁶² at All Hallows in March 2007:

“This meant that the initial, more measured plans to develop Wallspace as a spiritual home for visual art in the City of London went into fast-forward. We had established office space in the church from as early as January 2006 and were in the process of building the organisation's infrastructure when the opportunity arose. This meant that we had rapidly to design an identity, a brand, construct a website, develop a mailing list, and alert the media. Damien Hirst's celebrity status (and his reputation as a considerable artist) meant queues down London Wall for the Private View, and outstanding media coverage. This established Wallspace immediately as a venue

⁶² Damien Hirst's 'New Religion' was the inaugural exhibition at All Hallows in 2007. It consisted of an altar holding a cedar cross studded with gem-like pills, a child's skull and a heart wrapped in barbed wire and pierced by needles and razor blades, cast in silver, and a large carved marble pill. Meryl Doney explained that “Damian came to the church and loved it. He promised to make three new works for us. One work was an altar, with several sculptures on it. He said the obvious site for it was in place of the altar in the apse. After a short silence, I ventured, 'No, I don't think so.' He was surprised, 'Why?' 'Because the altar here represents the presence of God. If we put your work here instead, it will fundamentally change the nature of the building, turning it into an exhibition space'. There was a long pause. 'I get that,' he said”. Taken from email interviews with Meryl Doney, May 2012.

which was prepared to take risks and to redefine what it means to put art in a sacred space”.⁶³

In describing the programme of installations, it was clear that they were developed with each artist setting up a personal 'conversation' within the 'calm dignity' of the 18th century building. Of the nineteen exhibits at Wallspace during their five years of operation, sculptor Angela Wright's *189 Miles* wool installation, was one of the more powerful and engaging. Two giant cascading skeins of wool hung were from the ceiling of the church, 'parting like a doorway and spilling out across the floor in the nave of All Hallows'.⁶⁴ Visitors to the church could stand beneath the waterfall of wool; an obstacle and a portal.⁶⁵



Angela Wright's *189 Miles*, wool installation, Wallspace, All Hallows church, spring 2009.

⁶³ Interview with Meryl Doney, conducted by email, May 2012.

⁶⁴ <http://www.wallspace.org.uk/exhibitions/wright/index.html>

⁶⁵ Over the course of 22 days, 809 visitors to All Hallows experienced the artist's intervention within the sanctuary; standing close and walking within the wool, feeling their warmth, protection and comfort.

Wallspace was a charitable organisation, independent from, but sustained by the church they resided in. Between 2007 and 2011, 15,496 people visited the church for twenty exhibitions and public events.⁶⁶ The majority of the funding for these programmes came from the Jerusalem Trust, a Christian charity supporting both art and religion, an unusual combination for a funding body. Following the budget cuts of 2010, and unsuccessful applications to the Arts Council, it became increasingly hard for them to remain financially viable. Although Wallspace no longer has a home, and thus no permanent exhibition space, Meryl Doney continues to consult on similar faith-based art projects and is optimistic about the interest (at least from Christian groups) in promoting dialogue between contemporary artists and the church.

If the precedent has been set, (for example with the undercroft at St George's already used as a venue for exhibits) and if the congregation is willing, a variety of artistic interventions can be staged to great acclaim, as was evidenced by the installations and performance art curated at Wallspace. In the spring of 2013, the chapels, aisles and open-air transept of the Cathedral Church of St John the Divine in Morningside Heights, Manhattan, were occupied, to dramatic effect, by South African artist Jane Alexander's site-responsive exhibition *Surveys (from the Cape of Good Hope)*. This startling series of sculpture, photomontage and tableaux offer commentary on the 'lasting disfigurements' of her native Cape Town. The art works,

⁶⁶ Statistics provided by Wallspace.

under the curatorial eye of Josep Subirós, respond to to the majestic architecture of the cathedral; ‘the marginal creatures carved on high corbels and capitals in medieval churches: half-hidden, half-human, half-bestial things, refugees from the subconscious, defectors from dreams, staking claim to turf in the spiritual realm’.⁶⁷

In attempting to ‘be respectful of the Cathedral and its ordinary uses’, while taking advantage of the building’s ‘extraordinary theatre’,⁶⁸ the *Surveys* exhibition successfully shares the many spaces of the cathedral without detracting from the drama of the altar and main sanctuary, which remains uninhabited. The dark menace evident in Alexander’s often tormented human-animals leaves the series open to ‘spiritual interpretation and political speculation’;⁶⁹ her use of razor wire, blindfolds, machetes, and blood red industrial rubber gloves evoking the tumultuous violence that has gripped her native South Africa in the years since 1985, when she began working as an artist.

The Cathedral of St John the Divine has a long-established history as both a landmark place of worship, and a secular cultural venue (a ‘unifying centre of intellectual light and leadership’⁷⁰). Designed in 1888 and begun in 1892, the Cathedral has undergone many radical stylistic changes. It disputes the title of the largest Cathedral and Anglican church with Liverpool Cathedral, and is the fourth largest church in the

⁶⁷ Holland Cotter, ‘The Beast in the Human, and Vice Versa: Jane Alexander’s Work at St. John the Divine’, in *The New York Times*, Art Review, 25 April, 2013.

Also see <http://www.stjohndivine.org/CloseReadings.html>

⁶⁸ From a short interview with the curator available on the Cathedral’s website.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ From the Cathedral’s exhibition materials.

world.⁷¹ It is a major concert venue, hosting choral music, recital series, and avant-garde performance. The scope and success of Jane Alexander's exhibition at the Cathedral is a striking reminder that in spite of cuts in arts funding in both Britain and America, there is an appetite for, and willingness to see remarkable religious spaces transformed by challenging art interventions. As the Cathedral's exhibition text reiterates: *Surveys* 'demonstrates the powerful dialogues that can emerge when contemporary art is shown in social environments with deep historic, societal, and spiritual resonances'.⁷²



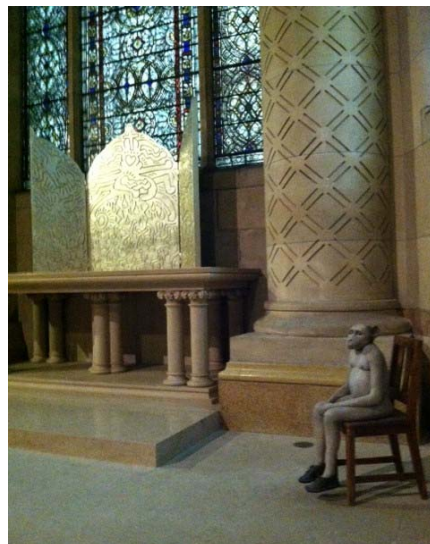
Detail from the sculpture *Infantry* (2008-10) features some two dozen fiberglass jackal-headed soldiers posing in lock-step formation. Part of Jane Alexander's *Survey* exhibition at the Cathedral Church of St John the Divine, 2013.

⁷¹ The inside covers 121,000 sq ft (11,200 metres), spanning a length of 183.2 meters (601 ft) and height 70.7 meters (232 ft). The inside height of the nave is 37.8 meters (124 feet). Taken from the Cathedral's website.

⁷² Jane Alexander *Surveys (from the Cape of Good Hope)* exhibition materials from the Cathedral Church of St John the Divine. May 2013.



The *Bom boys* sculptural tableaux in the St Ambrose chapel at the Cathedral Church of St John the Divine, 2013.



Detail from the sculpture *Harvester*, (1997-98) in the St Columbia chapel, with Keith Haring's bronze altarpiece (made in 1990) to the left.

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Iain Sinclair writes that ‘each church has an unacknowledged influence over events created within the shadow-lines of their towers’.⁷³ These events, writ large in the Bloomsbury of Hogarth’s *Gin Lane*; the anti-apartheid rallies at the Buitenkant Street church, or the throngs lining Eldridge Street to celebrate the High Holy Days, have, in turn informed generations of visual artists looking to harness the scale, grandeur, iconography and spiritual lexicon of religious buildings. From commissioned stained glass-art to theatrical site-responsive installations, much of this chapter has demonstrated that a way for dwindling congregations to revitalize their communities is to explore the broader use of their ancillary spaces as locales for the siting of contemporary art. As the the examples in this chapter have demonstrated, the emergence in the last ten years of organizations mediating this relationship, and emphasizing the renewed importance of religious places as multicentered, sacred and secular spaces, provides houses of worship with value (cultural, spiritual and economic) beyond the limits of sectarianism and historic preservation.

Measuring the ‘value’ of sacred places

It is not only the visual arts that can benefit from collaborating with religious groups. As recent research undertaken in Philadelphia and Chicago illustrates, there is strong evidence to support the argument that churches and synagogues in both Britain and the United States serve their communities in myriad ways that extend beyond their sacred function. Partners for Sacred Places, a Philadelphia-based non-profit

⁷³ Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London*, (London: Granta, 1998) p.20.

organization founded in 1989, provides training programmes advocating the ‘sound stewardship’ and active community use of America’s older religious properties. In addition to publications and reports that attest to this,⁷⁴ Partners have created a membership system which pairs religious groups with small arts organizations in need of space. An extensive database of sites enables congregations to offer space on an occasional, or permanent basis, to dance companies, visual artists and theatre groups, while maintaining the fabric of their historic buildings, and raising funds for capital improvements.⁷⁵

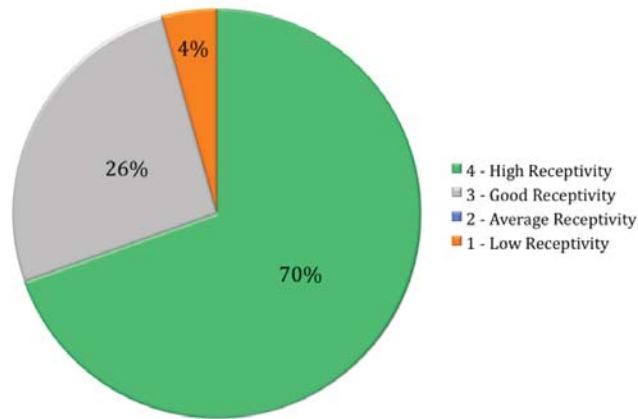
Although Partners was formed over twenty years ago, it wasn’t until 2010 that a pilot study of the ‘working relationships between the cultural and faith-based communities in Philadelphia’⁷⁶ was commissioned. This study used a sample of responses from sacred places across a variety of denominations, as well as a number of small visual and performing arts organizations. The key findings of the study included the following data:

‘There is a significant interest among both leadership of sacred places and arts organizations in partnering with each other, both occasionally and in longer-term relationships’.

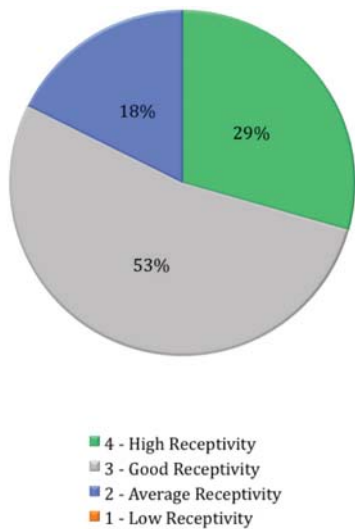
⁷⁴ See Diane Cohen and A. Robert Jaeger’s *Sacred Places at Risk: New Evidence on how endangered older churches and synagogues serve communities* (Philadelphia: Partners for Sacred Places press, 1998).

⁷⁵ Partners for Sacred Places guides include titles such as “Your Sacred Place Is A Community Asset: A Tool Kit to Attract New Resources”, and “New Partners and Stewardship Series No. 1: A Fund-Raising Tool: Creating a Supporting Organization. See the website for more information <http://www.sacredplaces.org/what-we-do/publications/>

⁷⁶ *Making Homes for the Arts in Sacred Places*, a report prepared by CultureWorks, Philadelphia on behalf of Partners for Sacred Places, 2011, p.3.



Graph 1 (above) represents sacred organizations level of receptivity to partnering with arts organizations. In order to gauge receptivity, Partners asked sacred organizations to respond to a selection of questions, which included the following: 1. How receptive are you and your congregation/community to welcoming tenants into your buildings? Is renting your space necessary to your mission and operations? 2. Do you see welcoming other organizations into your space as part of your mission and ministry to the community or only as a means to generate revenue? 3. What kind of art work would you like to see created, performed, exhibited or taught in your space? What kind(s) of arts would you *not* like to see in your space? 4. If you have/have had arts organizations working in your facility, what were/are the key contributions to a positive relationship? What were/are the things that didn't or continue to work?⁷⁷



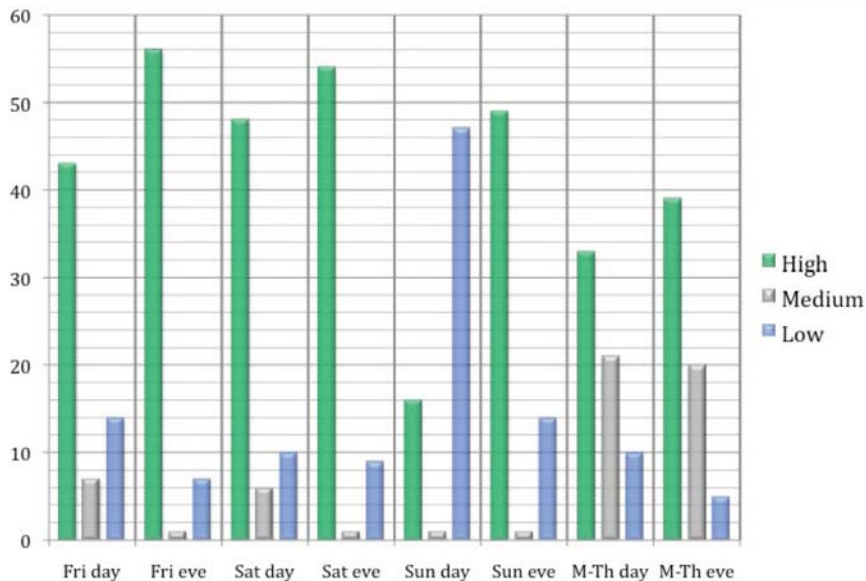
Conversely, Graph 2 (above) represents arts organizations' levels of receptivity to partnering with sacred organizations. The graph represents an index extracted from some of the following qualitative

⁷⁷ *Making Homes for the Arts in Sacred Places*, 2011, p.29. Graphs reproduced with permission from Partners for Sacred Places.

questions asked by Partners: 1. How receptive are you and your stakeholders to associating your work with a sacred place and inviting your audience to a sacred place? 2. Might your association with a faith-based community and space be considered part of your mission, or is it only a means to secure “affordable” spaces for your work?⁷⁸

The findings of this portion of the survey clearly indicate that the primary motive for both arts groups and faith leaders to partner and connect space and other assets is the development of stakeholders (audience, community supporters) and *not* the mitigation of financial burdens (cost savings/revenue generation). Other significant findings include:

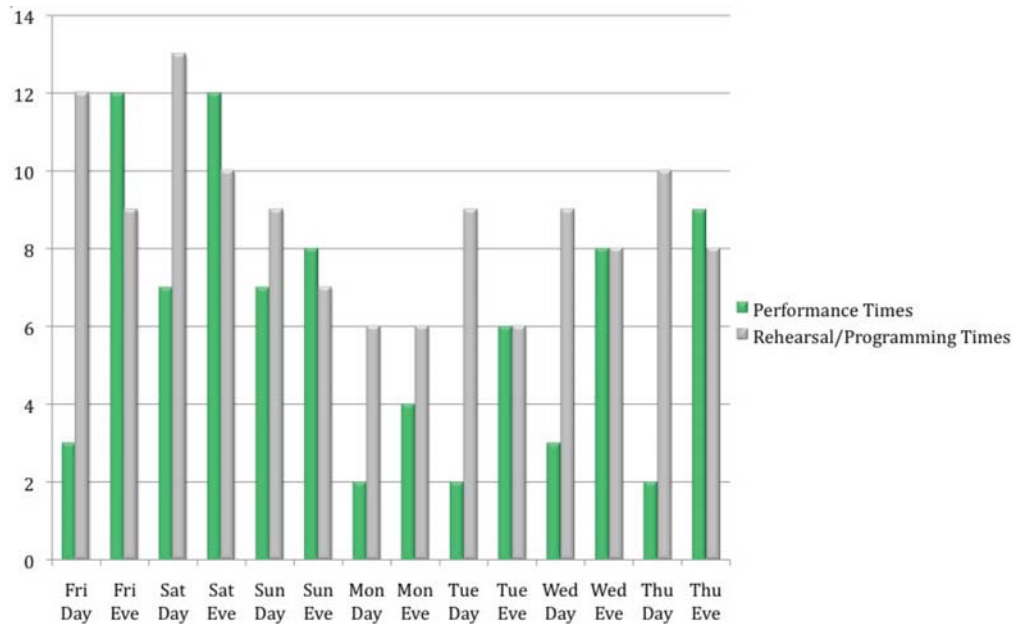
‘There is substantial physical space available for arts use in most of the sacred places studied, some that would have to be shared and some that could be dedicated 100% to arts uses’.



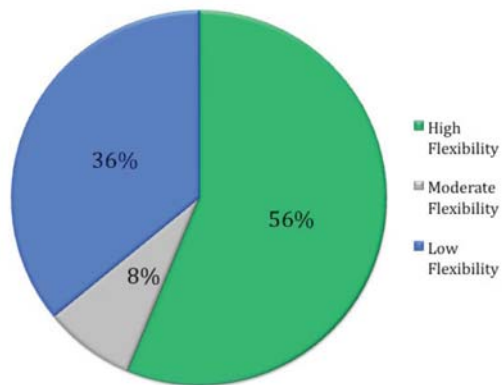
Graph 3 (above) shows the availability of the total number of facilities (64 individual spaces distributed among 22 sacred sites) used in the study, showing daytime and evening availability for usage by arts organizations. The ‘high’ category indicates that the facility is generally available; the

⁷⁸ *Making Homes for the Arts in Sacred Places*, 2011, p.31.

'medium' category indicates the facility is sometimes available; and the 'low' category indicates the facility is not generally available for outside use. Most spaces are unavailable on Sundays.⁷⁹



Graph 4 (above) shows the distribution of all arts organizations' surveyed desired facility requests. Organizations indicated desired times for facility use and this data was plotted according to daytime and evening for all seven days of the week.⁸⁰



Graph 5 (above) shows the architectural analysis of sacred spaces according to the following criteria: flexibility of a performance area within a room, flexibility of the seating within a room, and level of iconography and moveable furniture.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Making Homes for the Arts in Sacred Places*, 2011, p.28.

⁸⁰ *Making Homes for the Arts in Sacred Places*, 2011, p.30.

The level of detail contained within graphs 4 and 5, stating when sacred buildings are available for use, and the types of spaces available within them, is precisely the information needed by arts organizations to make partnerships possible. That Partners have begun to accumulate such data, (recording which sacred buildings benefit from adjustable lighting, sound systems and transport connections) and are now in a position to match religious organizations wishing to partner with arts groups, illustrates the demand in urban centres for available space for the arts, as well as a willingness to see sacred sites used in this multiplicity of ways. Many of the groups surveyed had concerns, among them:

‘There are many knowledge and sensitivity barriers to fostering deeper partnership: lack of reciprocal understanding of operating models, core values, terminology, etc’.⁸²

As the case studies in this thesis have shown, a lack of reciprocal understanding of core values, and overcoming ‘sensitivity barriers’⁸³ are among the reasons why an intermediary organization such as Partners in the USA, or Art and Sacred Places in the UK, can, in specific cases, facilitate a stronger working relationship between arts groups and religious organization.

⁸¹ *Making Homes for the Arts in Sacred Places*, 2011, p.28.

⁸² *Making Homes for the Arts in Sacred Places*, 2011, p.3.

⁸³ Such as the congregation’s initial concerns over the Egg Creams and Egg Rolls block party at the Museum at Eldridge Street.

Gianfranco Grande, the director of Partners Chicago office,⁸⁴ envisages the work of their organization reaching cities across the United States. Partners' research indicates that the 'economic value' of religious buildings in urban centres, such as Chicago, New York and Philadelphia is tremendous.⁸⁵ Research conducted with the University of Pennsylvania, evaluating twelve Philadelphia congregations and parishes, showed that these religious buildings collectively contributed an average of \$52 million in annual economic value to the city of Philadelphia.⁸⁶ This new quantitative approach to understanding how congregations impact on local economies; a 'halo effect' of historic buildings, reveals that urban congregations provide over £90,000⁸⁷ in resources to support community-serving programs each year.⁸⁸ In addition, the research confirmed that four out of five of those benefiting from church or synagogue-hosted outreach are not members of the congregation, confirming my assessment that many sacred places already serve as *de facto* neighbourhood community centres.

⁸⁴ At present, Partners have focused on developing partnerships in the greater Philadelphia and Chicago areas, but they have a satellite office in Austin, Texas, and are hoping to begin work on a much-needed database of religious buildings in New York City willing to partner with arts groups.

⁸⁵ From a conversation with Gianfranco Grande, April 2013.

⁸⁶ Approx £33.5 million. Partners for Sacred Places national study: *The Economic Halo Effect of Sacred Places*, 2013 <http://www.sacredplaces.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Halo-Effect-White-Paper-1-18-12.pdf>

⁸⁷ \$140,000 (in 1997.)

⁸⁸ Jaeger and Cohen, 1998, *Sacred Places at Risk*. <http://www.sacredplaces.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/SPAR.pdf>

If, as posited in the introduction to this thesis, churches and synagogues in urban centres, with the aid of not-for-profit charities and secular organizations, continue to increase visitorship, raise funds and rescue damaged or deteriorating buildings (as many of the examples I have provided in this chapter have done) a proliferation of sacred sites can be successfully adapted and interpreted as 'porous places',⁸⁹ exhibiting a renewed sensitivity to place, neighbourhood cohesion and religious history. All these factors combine to elicit the very participatory museum experience I have argued in support of throughout this thesis.

⁸⁹ Doreen Massey, 'Power-Geometry and Progressive Sense of Place', (*Mapping the Future: Local Cultures, Global Change*, eds. Jon Bird et al. London: Routledge, 1993.)

CONCLUSION

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Spaces come from places

In the previous chapter of this thesis I demonstrated that the economic benefits derived from the partnerships described are one of the ways that the value of sacred place can be measured. By linking this value (assessed by income generated and resources provided) to the investment individuals make in places with social, historical, cultural and religious meaning, this thesis has asserted that adaptive use religious buildings have emerged within the urban landscape as significant ‘nodes’¹ connecting both the sectarian and secular experiences of modern life. These adaptive religious buildings have the potential to function as ‘participatory museums’; showcasing diverse, mult centered opinion and promoting dialogue around the content presented.

I began this thesis by arguing in support of a reappraisal of place, as advocated by Edward E. Casey and Doreen Massey. With regard to divine places, Casey proposes that ‘particular places have taken the place of God and the gods: this is precisely what makes them divine. Despite, or perhaps because of their ineradicable emptiness, such places are powerful generators of ‘novel spaces’’.² As Casey

¹ Not simply a landmark, I am using Kevin Lynch’s example of ‘nodes’ in this urban context as the ‘focus and epitome of a district over which their influence radiates, and of which they stand as a symbol’. The Buitenkant Street church, now the District Six Museum, is an obvious example of a ‘nodal point’ in the city. Lynch, (1960) p.48.

² Casey, 1997, p.341.

persuasively argues: 'spaces come from places, not the other way around'.³ The porous, multifarious, often empty spaces contained within the sacred places of these case studies - museums, galleries, archives, and community centres - are dynamic, responding to the changes in the urban landscape beyond their walls.

In recognizing the many methods of attributing 'value' to these sacred places, and by exploring the ways in which religious buildings are perceived, from their meaning and place in the Judeo-Christian tradition, to their contemporary usage in urban city-centres, this thesis has assessed their importance, historically, from the Medieval to Modern period, architecturally, as symbols of grandeur, hope and prosperity; and culturally, often as markers of a decline in religious observance in the Western cities described.

As this thesis has shown, adapted synagogues and churches in our urban centres can be interpreted as cultural venues, unmoored from the limitations of nostalgia, sectarianism and artefact, yet retaining a crucial link to a past otherwise undiscovered by new waves of residents. Religious buildings are vital community assets, and are currently being used extensively for purposes beyond worship. The case study sites in this thesis document the history of the building housing them, and engage visitors with the changes made manifest in the surrounding streets.

Evidence from my field research suggests that, of the sites I researched, only the

³ Casey, 1997, p.341.

District Six Museum and the Museum at Eldridge Street are successfully functioning as adapted religious buildings; secular museums honouring the religious history of the sacred site in which they are housed. The Museum at Eldridge Street remains unique among all the sites I have researched,⁴ in that it remains multi-use; open for worship and used permanently as a not-for-profit cultural venue. I have demonstrated that shared use is easier to achieve when the congregation is receptive to collaboration, and does not need daily access to the building.

Adapted or reused sites which once housed a congregation, such as the Museum of Immigration and Diversity at 19 Princelet Street, remain architecturally distinct heritage palimpsests, featuring hidden, liminal interior spaces. Crossing the threshold at 19 Princelet Street is like stumbling through the wardrobe without arriving in Narnia.⁵ While you sense the bustle of Brick Lane behind you, there is a cultivated aura of having entered a musty, fur-coat laden, time capsule. And while Narnia is a destination, the wardrobe remains a passageway; an aperture, not a place. Iain Sinclair implores us to open the wardrobe,⁶ declaring 19 Princelet Street's 'passivity' an affront.⁷ By contrast with this 'closed shop', ('no longer a place of

⁴ With the exception of Wallspace, which has now closed. See appendix for further details.

⁵ Of her first visit to 19 Princelet Street, Rachel Lichtenstein writes: 'Gently, I pushed against the large wooden doors, and, finding them open, stepped inside. The temperature change was extreme. I began to shiver, and I put on the jacket that had been unnecessary in the heat of the summer day'. *Rodinsky's Room*, 1999, p.21.

⁶ *Rodinsky's Room*, 1999, p.11.

⁷ *Rodinsky's Room*, 1999, p.177.

business, no longer a site for worship, not yet a museum'⁸) the Museum at Eldridge Street attracts a broad audience in spite of ceasing to be an evocative, ruinous artefact. The Museum, now restored, is steadfastly multi-use, with an elderly congregation defiantly *remaining*. This remarkable building provides this thesis with the only working example of a shared use religious building, functioning successfully as a cultural centre, a place of worship, and, I would argue, a participatory museum.

As data presented at the end of Chapter 5 demonstrate, successful partnerships between arts groups and congregations are vital in sustaining sacred buildings at risk. While the Sacred Sites programme at the New York Landmarks Conservancy, (similar to the Churches Conservation Trust in Britain) provides grants to religious buildings for restoration purposes, and can advocate for adaptive use at sacred sites, they do not fund such initiatives. The landscape of adaptive re-use and shared use has been altered dramatically by the emergence of organizations such Partners for Sacred Places (USA) and Art and Sacred Places (UK). As interest in sustainable architecture, historic preservation and adaptive reuse grows, university programmes have begun to offer courses in their art history and built environment departments, examining successful strategies for reviving entire districts, cities, and regions around repurposed historic buildings.⁹ In 2012, students at the Rhode Island School of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The M.A. in Historical and Sustainable Architecture, launched in 2010 at NYU is the first academic programme to unite the topics of sustainable architecture, adaptive reuse, and historic preservation within a single curriculum. The course of study combines academic training and research with experiential learning opportunities, and the program operates within the framework of New York

Design with Brown University spearheaded a revitalization project with local artists and community groups to restore Temple Beth-El, a landmark Providence synagogue built in 1911, which had stood abandoned and derelict for seven years.



Interior, Temple Beth El, 2012.

Undergraduate students, attracted by the ruinous auratic value of the Broad Street synagogue, fundraised to begin the project, but are, as yet, unclear as to how the building should be used, once the restoration is complete. These examples point to a burgeoning academic interest in adaptive reuse and repurposing of religious buildings.

Venues such as the Museum at Eldridge Street, (with its dual emphasis on the Jewish experience on the Lower East Side, and its celebration of the newer immigrant communities in Chinatown through its annual 'Block Party') present us with a unique, often idealistic museum pedagogy. The District Six Museum in Cape

University's London programme. Recent sites included a small chapel in Repton Park, part of a complex of buildings transformed into a residential complex. <http://arthistory.as.nyu.edu/page/ma>

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Town, like the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, is one among a network of sites recreating absent place: reimagining domestic interiors within the museum, and in doing so, recreating and representing a neighbourhood, or an entire city footprint which has vanished. 19 Princelet Street, with its uncertain relationship to its religious past, claims a multicentered identity without necessarily striving to achieve this in its outreach or museum practice. Examples of visual arts and education programs in landmark religious buildings, such as St George's, Bloomsbury, the Cathedral Church of St John the Divine and the now closed Wallspace at All-Hallows church, benefit from the prestige of the historic sites which house them. All of these examples contain within them elements we can identify as part of a new approach to museum engagement and participation, whether it be in the presentation of multicentered narratives, or the eliciting of opportunities for dialogue with visitors. However, the strongest example of this practice comes from a response from visitors to the transformations which have occurred within the building *itself*. As my case studies have demonstrated, it is the unique built histories of rupture and change, the centrality and role of the building within the community, as well as its vernacular language, which provokes a level of engagement and participation I identify as unique within comparable small museums or cultural institutions.

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Throughout the case studies, I have demonstrated that these sacred buildings are resilient, not simply receptacles, ('special shells') but are 'practised places'; synchronous, and dynamic. The broad sweep, hidden histories and architectural bricolage discernible in the fabric of these remarkable buildings are evidence that religious places at risk across Britain and the USA have the potential to remain open and relevant, emerging as examples of participatory museum practice, with the support of the organizations and methods of collaboration I have identified.

The next decade will see a marked increase in partnerships between congregations wishing to revitalize their religious buildings, and arts organizations looking for affordable space. Citywide databases of available sites, and the growth of skilled consultancies facilitating shared use agreements will increase the examples of successful multi-use spaces, such as the ones outlined in these case studies. Further research in this emerging field would include repeat site visits to assess and compare the long-term success of participatory programmes, exhibits and outreach, and a detailed analysis of the agreement drawn up between groups. At the time this research was undertaken, 'community museums' were beginning to transform the urban landscape. Ten years later, some of the most successful small museums continue to thrive in re-purposed domestic and civic buildings.¹⁰ These museums – former homes, cramped tenements and school houses - are 'storied places', with all

¹⁰ The Tenement Museum in New York, and the Geffrye Museum and the Ragged School Museum in London among them.

the contradictions and discrepancies that these narratives imply. And much like the Buitenkant Street church in Cape Town, or the Eldridge Street synagogue on the Lower East Side, they are generators of new space, new meaning, and new possibilities for the field of museology and beyond.

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APPENDIX 1 METHODOLOGY

My interest in the adapted religious buildings I chose to explore for my three case studies stemmed primarily from the marginalized histories they represent. These sites are notable for their modest design, (with the exception of the grand Eldridge Street synagogue) unconventional histories of adaptation, and location in neighbourhoods renowned for mass immigration and urban unrest. They are all also sites I know intimately; through ten years of work, travel, coincide and curiosity. They are buildings I have explored and observed, listened to and pondered.

It was important for the purposes of this thesis to have two conventionally 'Western' case studies: New York and London, as these are the cities I am the most familiar with. The archival research and on site interviews at these sites were the most straightforward to secure, as I knew the staff and Board members, and approached them directly. At each site I asked the following questions of my research: How do the organizations operating these 'buildings in transition' represent the multicentered histories contained within them? Are they 'barometres of place'? Do they achieve the aims of their mission statements? And, most importantly, do these sites represent a departure from the 'community museum' model – presenting a 'new museology' through their adaptive use?

The challenges of research and field work such as the kind conducted for this thesis is manifold: Aside from the need to develop trust and rapport with staff, volunteers and congregants, there is the ethical issue of how to represent individuals and organizations whose approaches you disagree with, or find unworkable. At 19 Pinecelet Street I struggled to balance my interest in the building itself with the problems I had obtaining data and interviews. As a result, the opinions presented in my first case study are, for the most part, mine alone – not ideal for an impartial assessment of museum practice. This is contrasted greatly by the wealth of material made available to me at the District Six Museum, where I conducted interviews with staff, docents and ex-congregants, and was given unlimited access to archival materials, as well as tour groups and school visits.

APPENDIX 2

SITES REFERENCED

Temple Beth-El

Broad Street Synagogue Revitalization Project

Providence, RI

www.688broad.com

Built in 1911, Temple Beth-El, the Broad Street Synagogue was the first temple on the south side of Providence and immediately served as a focal point of community activity. As the city's Jewish population tripled over the next 30 years, the community began to move to the east side of the city, and in 2006, the synagogue was left vacant. In 2012 a small group of artists, educators, and community residents, based at the Rhode Island School of Design spearheaded a revitalization project to breathe new life into the historical landmark.

Angel Orensanz Foundation for the Arts

172 Norfolk Street, New York

NY 10002, U.S.A

www.orensanz.org

The Angel Orensanz Foundation is located at 172 Norfolk Street in the heart of the Lower East Side. The Foundation is housed in one of the oldest surviving gothic-revival synagogues in New York, and has proudly kept its architectural integrity. Today, the Foundation acts as both artist Angel Orensanz's studio and as a centre for the arts. The Foundation provides an artistic and cultural resource for, artists, writers, thinkers and members of the surrounding community.

St Ann's Warehouse

38 Water Street

Brooklyn, NY 11201

www.stannswarehouse.org

The original home of Arts at St Ann's (now St Ann's Warehouse) was the National Historic Landmark church of St Ann and the Holy Trinity in Brooklyn Heights. For twenty-one years, St Ann's presented a broad and determinedly eclectic concert and theatre performances in the church's Gothic Revival sanctuary. St Ann's moved to an old spice milling factory in 2001 after longstanding disagreements with the congregation.

Cathedral Church of St John the Divine

1047 Amsterdam Avenue

New York, NY 10025

www.stjohnthedivine.org

The cathedral disputes with Liverpool Anglican Cathedral the title of the largest cathedral and Anglican church, and fourth largest Christian church in the world. The inside covers 121,000 square feet, spanning a length of 183.2 metres (601 ft) and

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height 70.7 metres (232 ft). The inside height of the nave is 37.8 metres (124 feet). The cathedral, designed in 1888 and begun in 1892, has, in its history, undergone radical stylistic changes and the interruption of the two World Wars. Originally designed as Byzantine-Romanesque, the plan was changed after 1969 to a Gothic design. After a large fire on December 18, 2001, it was closed for repairs and reopened in November 2008. It remains unfinished, with construction and restoration a continuing process. The size of the church's interior, larger than that of any of the European cathedrals, presents a superlative level of natural acoustics. Music of many genres, including chant, choral music, organ music, and hymnody adapted for large cathedrals is therefore important for the worship regularly celebrated in its nave. The cathedral is additionally a major centre for concert musical performances in New York. In addition to performance, the cathedral also hosts contemporary art installations, photography exhibits and lecture series.

Crypt Gallery

St Pancras Church

Euston Road

London NW1 2BA

www.cryptgallery.org.uk

The Crypt of St Pancras Parish Church was designed and used for coffin burials from 1822, when the Church was opened, to 1854, when the crypts of all London churches were closed to burials. It is now used as a gallery space, showcasing a series of rotating art exhibitions.

The District Six Museum

25 Buitenkant Street

Cape Town 8001, South Africa

www.districtsix.co.za

The District Six Museum Foundation was established in 1989 and launched as a museum in 1994 to keep alive the memories of the District Six community and of displaced people everywhere. The museum is housed in the Buitenkant Street Methodist church in downtown Cape Town; a pivotal location for members of the local community and anti-apartheid activists. It came into being as a vehicle for advocating social justice, as a space for reflection and contemplation; the Museum is committed to telling the stories of forced removals and assisting in the reconstitution of the community of District Six and Cape Town by drawing on a heritage of non-racialism, non-sexism, anti-class discrimination and the encouragement of debate.

Islington Arts Factory

2 Parkhurst Road

Holloway, London N7 OSF

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www.islingtonartsfactory.co.uk

Islington Arts Factory is a community arts centre and registered charity in Holloway, north London. Since its foundation in 1977, Islington Arts Factory, which is housed in a converted church building, has been a consistently inspirational vehicle for the development of dance, visual art and music, providing high quality classes, courses and workshops for children and adults.

Jackson's Lane

269 Archway Road
Highgate, London N6 5AA
www.jacksonslane.org.uk

Jackson's Lane Wesleyan Methodist church was opened in 1905, on its' current site in Highgate, north London. The church was closed in 1976 and soon after was reopened to begin its new incarnation as an arts centre. It is now a multi-arts venue, home to a theatre, a large scale dance and rehearsal studio, a cafe-bar and four other multi-purpose spaces.

Judson Memorial Church

55 Washington Square South
New York, NY 10012
www.judson.org

In 1888, with the backing of John D. Rockefeller and other prominent Baptists, construction of a new church south of Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village was begun. Judson had chosen the location because he wanted to reach out to the neighbouring communities. The church building was designed by architect Stanford White, with stained-glass windows by John La Farge. The church began to support a radical arts ministry in the mid-1950's, making space available to artists for exhibitions, rehearsals, and performances. The church also assured that this space was to be a place where these artists could have the freedom to experiment in their work without fear of censorship. In 1957, the church offered gallery space to Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine and Robert Rauschenberg, who were then unknown artists. Yoko Ono also had her work exhibited at the gallery. The Judson Dance Theater, which began in 1962, provided a venue for dancers and choreographers including Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton, David Gordon and Yvonne Rainer to create and show their work. Among others, these dancers and choreographers shaped dance history by creating postmodern dance, the first avant-garde movement in dance theatre since the modern dance of the 1930s and 1940s. Music, theatre and dance have been an ongoing, integral part of Judson Memorial Church's mission ever since.

Manchester Jewish Museum

190 Cheetham Hill Road,
Manchester, M8 8LW

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www.manchesterjewishmuseum.org

The Museum is located in the oldest surviving synagogue building in Manchester; the former Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, completed in 1874. With a compelling history to tell, the building needed a new purpose and in 1984 it re-opened as a Museum. The Museum now chronicles the lives of Jewish people in Manchester and their contribution to making the city what it is today. The former women's gallery houses the Museum's permanent displays, in which the history of Manchester's Jewish community is vividly brought to life.

Revelation St Mary's

St Mary the Virgin Church,
Ashford, Kent, TN23 1QG

www.revelationstmarys.co.uk

Emerging series of arts programmes in the historic landmark St Mary the Virgin Church in Kent.

St George's Bloomsbury

Bloomsbury Way,
London WC1A 2HR

www.stgeorgesbloomsbury.org.uk

St George's Bloomsbury, a Hawksmoor church originally consecrated in 1731, was reopened to the public in 2006 following a five year restoration initiated and managed by the World Monuments Fund. Today, St George's is a thriving parish church, concert venue and centre for community arts and education located in the heart of Bloomsbury.

St Mark's Church in-the-Bowery

131 East 10th Street
New York, NY 10003

www.stmarksbowery.org

St Mark's church is the oldest site of continuous worship in New York City and the second oldest church in Manhattan. The site is officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was designated a New York City Landmark in 1966. The St Mark's Church and chapel was erected on April 25, 1795, and support for the arts has long been an integral part of St Mark's community-based mission. Poetry, theatre and dance have co-existed at St Mark's providing a neighbourhood and national forum for original and provocative performances. W.H. Auden, William Carlos Williams, Patti Smith and Allen Ginsberg have taken part in poetry readings. Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham danced at St Mark's, and Sam Shepard produced his first plays here. From 1993 to 2010 the Ontological-Hysteric Theater, in addition to its primary support of the work of Richard Foreman, opened its doors to emerging, independent artists. Today three innovative arts projects are housed at St Mark's – The Poetry Project, DanceSpace Project and the Incubator Arts Project.

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St Paul Old Ford

St Stephens Road,
London, E3 5JL

www.stpauloldford.com

Anglican church with community arts outreach and flexible sanctuary space for events in East London.

Synagogue for the Arts

49 White Street,
New York, NY 10013

www.synagogueforthearts.org

Reform synagogue in a Bauhaus-inspired building in Tribeca, New York. Congregation hosts community events and some secular cultural programming.

The Tabernacle Arts Centre

Powis Square,
London W11 2AY

www.tabernaclew11.com

Built in the 1850's as an evangelical Christian church, the Talbot Tabernacle became a community arts venue in the mid-1970's. The large auditorium was used as a rehearsal space by the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd and The Clash. The hub of the Notting Hill Carnival, the Tabernacle was refurbished in 2009 with studios, an art gallery and rehearsal spaces and is now a Grade II* listed building.

The Museum at Eldridge Street

12 Eldridge Street,
New York, NY 10002

www.eldridgestreet.org

Built in 1887, the Eldridge Street synagogue is the oldest functioning Orthodox synagogue in north America. Today, the landmark Lower East Side building is also a museum and thriving cultural centre, showcasing concerts, lecture series, literary events, art installations and award winning educational programming.

The Garden Museum

Lambeth Palace Road
London SE1 7LB

www.gardenmuseum.org.uk

The Museum was set up in 1977 in order to rescue from demolition the abandoned ancient church of St Mary's which is the burial place of John Tradescant, the first great gardener and plant-hunter in British history. In 2008 the interior of the church was transformed into a centre for exhibitions and events by the construction of temporary gallery spaces. In addition to exhibits, the Museum also hosts a series of lectures and public events on the theme of garden history.

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The Museum of Immigration & Diversity

19 Princelet Street
London E1 6QH

www.19princeletstreet.org

19 Princelet Street in Spitalfields, East London, is an unrestored Huguenot master silk weaver's home, built in 1719, whose shabby frontage conceals a rare surviving synagogue built over its garden.

Union Chapel

Compton Avenue
London N1 2XD

www.unionchapel.org

Dedicated in 1877, Union Chapel is a working church, an award winning music venue and a centre for the homeless and in crisis in London. In 1991, Union Chapel Project was formed as a charity devoted to restoring and running the building and making its facilities available to a diverse group of people.

Walpole Old Chapel

Halesworth Rd,
Halesworth, Suffolk
IP19 9AZ

www.walpoleoldchapel.co.uk

Walpole Old Chapel is a redundant chapel in Halesworth Road, Walpole, Suffolk. A Grade II* listed building, the chapel was built as a farmhouse, and was converted into a chapel in the 17th century. It continued in use into the 20th century but closed in 1970. It is now administered by the Historic Chapels Trust. It is now used as a venue for concerts, readings and lecture series'.

Wallspace

All Hallows Church
83 London Wall
London EC2M 5ND

www.wallspace.org.uk

Wallspace was an exhibition venue located in the church of All Hallows on the Wall in the City of London. Its aim was to provide a spiritual home for the visual arts in London, and to explore the relationship between art and spirituality. Artists including Yoko Ono and Damien Hirst exhibited and performed at Wallspace between 2007 and 2011. **Closed.**

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Bes hamedrash: Hebrew for 'house of learning' referring to the study hall area of a synagogue.

Bimah: Elevated reader's platform.

Diocese: A bishop's area of responsibility, split into several **archdeaconries**, which are themselves split into a number of **deaneries**. A diocese will normally have several hundred **parishes**. A parish may contain one or more church buildings.

Mechitza: A partition used to separate men and women during Orthodox Jewish prayer.

Mikvah: Jewish ritual bath.

Minyan: Quorum of ten Jewish adults required for prayer.

Nave: The nave of a church refers to the central approach to the altar, extending from the entryway.

Pesach: Yiddish for Passover, the Jewish festival which retells the story of the Jews exodus from Egypt.

Shul/shool: Yiddish term for synagogue.

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