



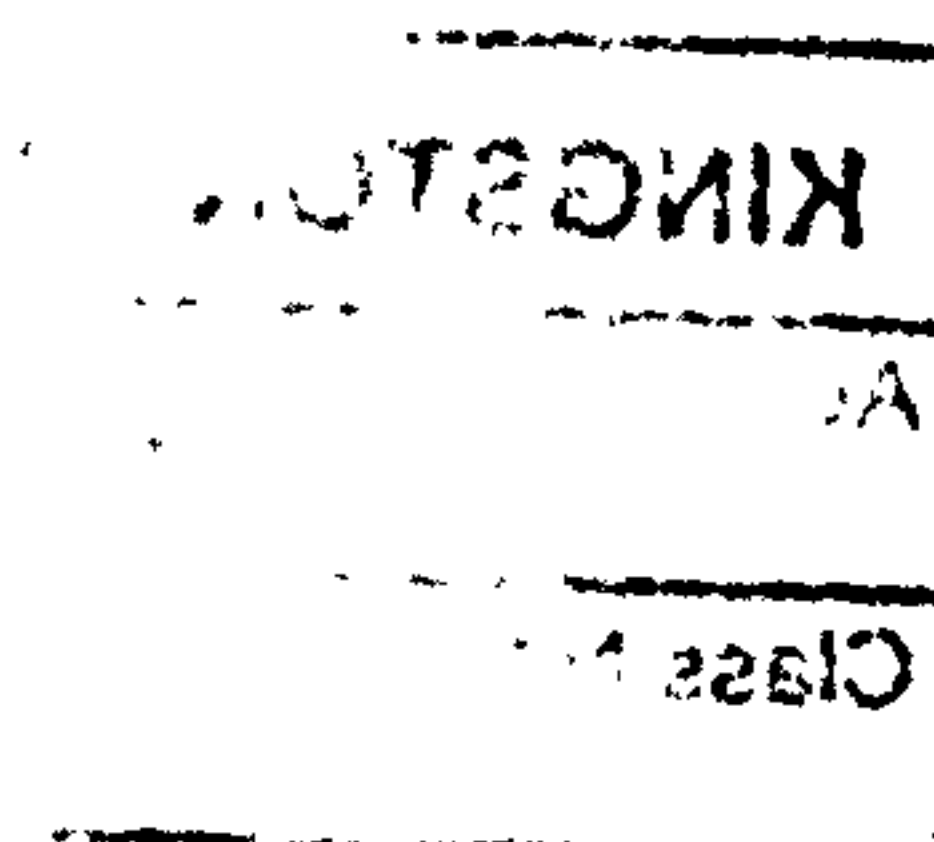
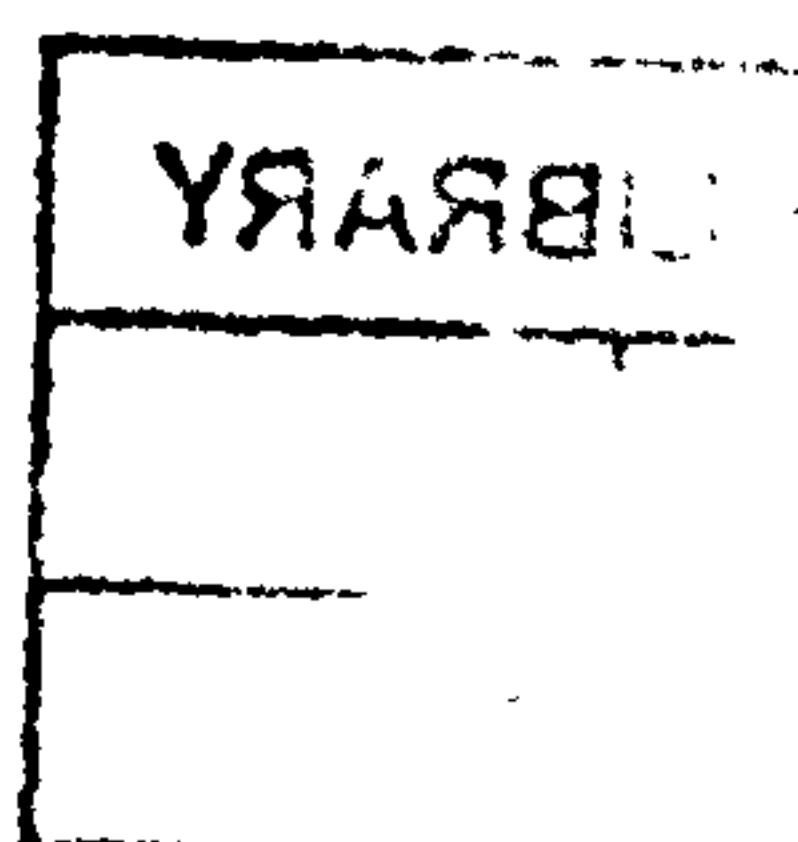
**THEORIES AND PRACTICES OF MEANING-MAKING
AMONG DESIGN PROFESSIONALS:
AN EMPIRICAL CASE STUDY
IN THE DESIGN MUSEUM LONDON**

by
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**FOR
REFERENCE ONLY**

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in fulfilment of the thesis requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**



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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine socio-cultural and political interventions in meaning-making by the design profession and to present an explicit model of meaning-making in the design profession by investigating members of that profession as an audience in a design museum.

First, professional meaning-making is addressed from the viewpoint of theoretical understandings of the way in which the design profession makes meaning and gains knowledge. This study starts from an interaction-theoretical approach to meaning-making, suggested by interactionists such as Goffman, and a power-theoretical approach as proposed by, among others, Bourdieu. Both of these approaches have their own limitations, however. The first (the interaction-theoretical approach) is too personal to account for the affects of power relationships between members of the field and the second (the power-theoretical approach) is too deterministic to enable an understanding of the capacity of the individual. Neither approach gives a satisfactory explanation of professional meaning-making. For this reason, the thesis intends to combine these two theoretical approaches.

The second aim of the thesis is to conduct research into a particular design museum (the Design Museum London), taking it as an example in order to investigate the design profession's actual meaning-making process. The research subjects consist of designer visitors who reflect their own field while visiting the design museum. The empirical findings are combined with the theoretical

foundations to show that the museum visit is an important symbolic ritual in which members of the profession present their habitus, as a notion of self-identity, to other people as well as themselves.

In light of the empirical findings, the last section of the thesis is dedicated to building a model of meaning-making among design professionals in design museums in order to gain a more complete understanding of the social system embedded in the profession. The model suggests that the key factors affecting the way in which the design profession makes meaning of design exhibits are 'self-identity', 'interaction', 'ritual', 'habitus', 'social practice' and 'symbolic power'. It is anticipated that the thesis will illustrate the application of sociological theories and discourses to investigations of the design profession and to related cultural and institutional activities for higher education, museum curatorial practice and creative industry development.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....1

Table of Contents.....3

List of Figures.....7

List of Tables.....9

Introduction

Chapter 1. Introduction10

 1.1 Research Questions

 1.2 Literature Review

 1.3 Research Methodology

 1.3.1 Theoretical Location

 1.3.2 Empirical Support for the Meaning-making Framework

 1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2. Focus: Specialist Visitors in Museum Audience Research

.....25

 2.1 Introduction

 2.2 Paradigms of Museum Audience Research

 2.3 Museum Audience Research Application

 2.3.1 The Meaning-making Paradigm

 2.3.2 Audience Identification in Museum Audience Research

 2.3.3 The Audience-as-profession Approach to Design Museums

 2.4 Chapter Summary

Theoretical Research

Chapter 3. An Interaction-theoretical Approach to Meaning-making	49
3.1 Introduction	
3.2 An Analysis of Theoretical Contexts for the Meaning-making Process	
3.2.1 Personal Context Elements	
3.2.2 Physical Context Elements	
3.2.3 Socio-Cultural Context Elements	
3.3 Theories of Interaction and Meaning-making	
3.3.1 Overview	
3.3.2 Symbolic Interactionists' Notions of Meaning-making	
3.4 Chapter Summary	

Chapter 4. A Power-theoretical Approach to Meaning-making	88
4.1 Introduction	
4.2 Theories of Practice and Meaning-making	
4.2.1 Overview of Bourdieu's Notions	
4.2.2 Bourdieu's Model of Society and Meaning-making	
4.3 The Limitations of the Approaches	
4.4 Models of Meaning-making	
4.5 Chapter Summary	

Empirical Research

Chapter 5. Research Methods for Empirical Research	113
5.1 Introduction	
5.2 The Selection of Research Methods	
5.2.1 The Research Approach	
5.2.2 The Type of Research	
5.3 The Qualitative Methods	
5.3.1 Overview	
5.3.2 Auto-photography	
5.3.3 Observation	
5.3.4 Interviews	

5.4	Practical and Ethical Considerations	
5.5	Chapter Summary	
Chapter 6. The Case Study: Overview.....		129
6.1	Introduction	
6.2	A Brief Overview of the Chosen Museum	
6.2.1	Macro Perspective: The City of London	
6.2.2	Micro Perspective: The Design Museum, London	
6.2.3	Reasons for Choosing the Museum	
6.3	The Research Process	
6.3.1	Data Collection	
6.3.2	Data Analysis	
6.3.3	Research Credibility	
6.4	Chapter Summary	
Chapter 7. An Auto-photographic Investigation into Meaning-making		
		157
7.1	Introduction	
7.2	Findings and Results	
7.2.1	Overview	
7.2.2	Photographic Findings	
7.2.3	Categories and Coding of the Interviews	
7.3	Development of Categories	
7.4	Research Limitations	
7.5	Chapter Summary	
 <i>Combining Empirical Findings with Theoretical Foundations</i>		
Chapter 8. The Development of a Theory of Meaning-making		
		196
8.1	Introduction	
8.2	Conceptual Framework Development	
8.2.1	Overview	
8.2.2	Elaborating the Theoretical Context Elements	
8.2.3	A Conceptual Meaning-making Framework	

- 8.3 Evaluation
 - 8.3.1 Overview
 - 8.3.2 Method Considerations
 - 8.3.3 Research Process
 - 8.3.4 Findings
- 8.4 Chapter Summary

Conclusive Thoughts

- Chapter 9. Conclusion..... 221
 - 9.1 Summary
 - 9.2 Implications of the Conceptual Meaning-making Framework
 - 9.2.1 Implications for Design Scholarship (focusing on higher education)
 - 9.2.2 Implications for Curatorial Practice (especially for design museum educators)
 - 9.2.3 Implications for the Development of Creative Industries
 - 9.3 Concluding Remarks
- Bibliography.....241
- Appendix.....264

List of Figures

- [Figure 3.1] D. A. Kolb's four stage learning cycle (Kolb, 1984)
- [Figure 4.1] Dispositions reflecting a positioning in border social space carried into the field (drawn from the original figure of 'Dispositions reflecting a positioning in border social space carried into the organisation' depicted by T. Hallett, 2003)
- [Figure 4.2] Social space in the Design Museum London mapped as spatial and contextual roles (referenced from P. Dimaggio and M. Useem, 1978)
- [Figure 6.1] Entrance to the Design Museum. Courtesy of the Design Museum
- [Figure 6.2] Lobby in the Design Museum. Courtesy of the Design Museum
- [Figure 6.3] First floor exhibition space used for temporary exhibitions. Copyright by author permission granted by the Design Museum
- [Figure 6.4] Slogan on the staircase between the first and the third floors. Copyright by author permission granted by the Design Museum
- [Figure 6.5] Design Museum Space, vacant but used for events. Courtesy of the Design Museum
- [Figure 6.6] Front view on the second floor showing an exhibition. Copyright by author permission granted by the Design Museum
- [Figure 6.7] One of the pre-case study workshops with participants conducted in the private meeting room of the Design Museum. Copyright by author permission granted by the Design Museum

- [Figure 7.1] An example of the ‘Object’ category. Photographed by participant #03 at the ‘Zaha Hadid Architecture and Design’ exhibition
- [Figure 7.2] An example of the ‘Exhibition Space’ category. Photographed by participant #12 at the Zaha Hadid Exhibition.
- [Figure 7.3] An example of the ‘Museum Display’ category. Photographed by participant #07 at the ‘Matthew Williamson 10 Years in Fashion’ exhibiton
- [Figure 7.4] An example of the ‘Museum Building’ category. Photographed by Participant # 04 outside the museum
- [Figure 7.5] An example of the ‘Museum Display’ and ‘Object’ category. Photographed by participant # 10 at the ‘Zaha Hadid Architecture and Design’ exhibition
- [Figure 7.6] Dimensions of coding analysis through photographs (referenced from J. Mason, 2002)
- [Figure 7.7] A web to show patterns of relationships found in the preliminary coding process
- [Figure 8.1] The concept of the intellectual field defined by Bourdieu (1994) and an application to the field of design
- [Figure 8.2] Interpretation of dispositions reflecting a positioning of the individual and meaning
- [Figure 8.3] A hypothetical model for the meaning-making framework
- [Figure 8.4] The contextual model of learning (Falk and Dierking, 2000)
- [Figure 8.5] An enhanced socio-cultural model for meaning-making

List of Tables

[Table 6.1]	Distribution of interviewed participants
[Table 7.1]	Coding categories of visitor interview definitions
[Table 7.2]	Coding of the participant interviews; self-identity roles
[Table 7.3]	Coding of the participant interviews; expectations
[Table 7.4]	Coding of the participant interviews; motivation and benefits
[Table 7.5]	Coding of the participant interviews; prior knowledge, aesthetic framework, and reflection on work
[Table 8.1]	Evaluation categories and examples

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Research Questions

Sociological Approaches to Making Sense of the Design Profession

Studies of the design profession from a sociological perspective differ from those within design theory. N. Albertsen, the Director and Associate Professor at the Aarhus School of Architecture in Denmark, said in a lecture entitled ‘The City between the Disciplines’ in August 2000 that if design theory considers the ‘how’-questions of professional practice, then the sociology of professions is concerned with the ‘why’- questions, and those of a social kind (including the practice and work of professions) (Albertsen, 2000). Although design theory has contributed to the examination of the conditions of the production and reception of design works, there are some reservations about its ability to explain the set of behaviours, knowledge, values, expectations and perceptions that form a frame of reference that influences designers’ work. The sociology of professions, however, focuses on these aspects of professional activities that shape overall social mechanisms in the professional field and in society (see Durkheim, 1893; Parsons, 1951; Hughes, 1971, 1994; Johnson, 1972; Bourdieu, 1986; Abbott, 1988; Larson, 1990, 1993, 1994).

Within the thesis, the use of a meaning-making approach is instrumental to an examination of this frame of reference. The concept of meaning-making is widely employed and, historically, has multiple origins in sociology, anthropology and other social sciences. In response to this theoretical background the concept of meaning-making takes as a starting point the idea that humans constantly seek to make sense of the world around them and that the placement of meaning is a goal in itself, a motivation to action and a motive for argument. For that reason examining a person's profession in terms of meaning-making from the perspective of sociology is worthwhile in trying to understand the profession, since the frame of reference, namely, the set of behaviours, values, expectations and perceptions which the professional shows involve meaning-making.

In the sociology of professions, professional meaning-making might be conceptualized with reference to four distinct theoretical approaches, and these might accordingly be applied to the design profession; a functionalist perspective (e.g. Parsons, 1951; Durkheim, 1893), an interactionist perspective (e.g. Hughes, 1971, 1994), a power perspective (e.g. Johnson, 1972; Bourdieu, 1986; Larson, 1990, 1993, 1994) and a systemic division of labour perspective (e.g. Abbott, 1988). It is undoubtedly the case that a great deal of valuable knowledge can be acquired from the above perspectives from the sociology of the professions in order to understand activities within the professions.

However, this thesis posits arguments in favour of two of the above approaches – the interactionist perspective and the power perspective - to meaning-making, which address questions such as; “What do they (in this thesis, the design profession) make sense of?” or “How do they relate to shared experiences?” (Foucault, 1988: 121). Although each of the four approaches contributes to an understanding of professional meaning-making in direct or indirect ways, and provides insight into the analysis of the meaning-making process, the other two perspectives – the functionalist perspective¹ and the division of labour

¹ The main arguments of the other two perspectives are as follows. Functionalists maintain

perspective – are inappropriate to this study; on the one hand, the functionalist perspective regards meaning-making subjectively in terms of the minds of actors. This is empirically problematic and tends to view meaning-making as ignoring conflict. By emphasizing fixed meaning, change becomes difficult to explain, and the descriptions of meaning-making behaviour do not generate causal propositions in different situations; on the other hand, the division of labour perspective views meaning-making within an inter-connected context². This perspective is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, due to the idealism of the functionalist perspective and diverse conceptions of the professions, it seems that the above mentioned perspectives – the interactionist perspective and the power perspective - are most appropriate to this thesis.

On the one hand, the interactionists concentrate on studying the everyday actions and interactions of professional individuals and groups; how professions constitute participants in both the work and social spheres; and how they construct meanings from their careers to negotiate and maintain their professional positions (Hughes, 1971). On the other hand, the power perspective focuses especially on meaning-making within the professions as a strategy for gaining higher social

that the professions, in conducting their functional roles, contribute to the prosperity or integration of a functionally-divided modern society. In this respect, it is claimed that a functionalist perspective tends to adopt a self-oriented attitude toward the professions, viewing them as a mediating force in modern society, which can suppress the morally disintegrative powers of bureaucracy and market. This approach is understood to look empirically for specific traits defined in the professions, taking into account integrative functions of the profession as a whole, as well as occupational groups within the profession (see Parsons, 1951).

² In contrast to other theorists (functionalists, interactionists and theorists of the power approach) who focus on only one profession, separated from the totality of professions, theorists of the division of labour argue against this approach and attempt to investigate inter-professional competition. In this way, ‘the division of labour perspective concentrates on the content of professional work, considering the notion that there are disputes over what A. Abbott calls the “jurisdiction” over work areas among the professions’ (Abbott, 1988, cited in Albertsen, 2000).

positions within the larger structure of society (Bourdieu, 1986). From this perspective, professional meaning-making is considered to be the driving force in achieving power and maintaining upward mobility in social status, and can be the main strategy which governs patterns of behaviour within the profession and functions as shared knowledge, values and ideals in the field.

The interactionist perspective and the power perspective have some limitations, however. The flaw in the interactionist perspective is that it concentrates on the communication of meaning, so it removes the possibility of the affects of power relationships between members of the field. For this reason, the interactionist perspective is criticized by adherents of the power perspective. P. Bourdieu (1986) probably offers the most critical perspective on the social interaction approach. However, the power perspective has also been shown to have flaws. The power perspective is too pessimistically deterministic to take into account the capacity of an individual who is responsible for his own actions. Interactionists criticize the power perspective because it has underemphasized the fact that people have active and dynamic interpretive strategies for the processing of knowledge, as well as different agendas that they bring to the practice of meaning-making. This problem is explained well by the theories of interactionists including E. Goffman, V. W. Turner, E. M Bruner, and G. H. Mead, as well as the theories of practice of Bourdieu: both theoretical approaches will be examined in the following chapters.

The difficulty to be faced in adopting a theoretical framework is that of choosing either approach as being best suited to an understanding of meaning-making. It is not possible to maintain the idea of the power perspective and nor can a return to the interactionist perspective be adopted as an alternative. Instead, the opposing concepts within these two approaches are used to examine the activities of the design profession, including professional meaning-making. In this way, the meaning-making process can be properly explained. The first purpose of this thesis is to investigate a series of factors conceived of as social, cultural and political interventions in meaning-making by the design profession - designers,

graduate students and design researchers - whose meanings might circulate among community members who are sensitized recipients of shared knowledge. In order to explore these interventions two different theoretical approaches will be discussed.

The Nature of the Meaning-making Process of the Design Profession in the Design Museum London

The subjects of the research are placed in a specific and bounded (limited) environment and context. They are not observed in a design organization with an internal approach, but in further expanded social and cultural domains. The research observes one of these domains, a design museum, and examines the context in which members of the design profession become participants. That is to say, this study analyzes the design profession as a specific group of visitors, in particular, visitors who perceive their 'field' (in the sense that Bourdieu uses the term), in a specific design museum.

The case study museum is the Design Museum in London, the first design museum in the world. Since it opened in 1989 the museum has been devoted exclusively to contemporary design, playing a vital role in spreading design knowledge and enjoyment. Instead of the traditional role of a museum in 'preserving the material evidence of people' (see ICOM definition, 2007) the museum is searching for a new role for communities (see report, *Design museum response to understanding the future: Museums and 21st century life – the value of museums*, 2008). However, despite design museums in their contemporary form having existed for almost twenty years, there is much that is not understood about how people in the design community value these museums. As cultural institutions in the corresponding field, community and society, design museums are now being challenged to find ways to appeal to professional design communities and make a real difference to the museums' role and function in the real world.

Until now design museums have tended to concentrate their knowledge and scholarship on activities within their institutions (e.g. *Design Museum Journal*). Conversely, design professionals working within an academic context have rarely dealt with design museums. One consequence of this lack of research is a shortage of information about the content and methods, in relation to interpretation, criticism and appreciation, employed by the design profession. Although for museum professionals, the design museum and designer visitor could still be regarded as just another object or subject that is observed within the context of established museum studies, the second aim of this research is to promote designer visitor studies within design museums.

Having identified the process of meaning-making among design professionals in a design museum, it will be possible to communicate about design within and beyond academic institutions. As a design researcher and museum educator I have been encouraged, firstly, by a focus on the active contribution that museums can make to academic circles and the related field, secondly, by the recent trends in design museum education to support the communities' engagement through museum learning, and lastly, by transforming perspectives with regard to museum processes such as representation, socialization and institutionalization. I believe that the future practice of the design museum has to be underpinned by a sound theoretical understanding and with the agreement of related field and community members. Therefore, the second main issue for this study is to examine the references that these members bring to their encounters with the design museum exhibits, whose meanings are concealed, and to consider the ways in which they use them in their meaning-making strategies. Finally, it is anticipated that a theoretical model of the design professional's meaning-making in a design museum can be constructed using these resources.

To answer to these two main research questions, the research will be situated within the context of theoretical debates and paradigms of museum audience research in relation to meaning-making (*Chapter 2*). Basic theoretical contexts for

the museum meaning-making process will then be explored (*Chapter 3*). Focused and selected social theories will then be discussed in order to consider the field and the institution (*Chapter 4*). The remaining sections of the thesis are dedicated to the results of empirical research conducted to investigate ‘what is happening’ (Foucault, 1988: 121) and to examine real processes of meaning-making in museum spaces. It is anticipated that the thesis will illustrate the actual application of theoretical considerations to the process of professional meaning-making and to shed a theoretical light on the educational strategies of design museums, which have not yet been actively studied from a theoretical viewpoint.

1.2 Literature Review

The following literature review examines three areas - educational studies, contemporary museum education and practice research, and design studies, all of which have been selected on the basis of relevant issues of meaning-making.

The first approach was to review research articles on meaning-making studies in contemporary education agendas (see e.g. Darling-Hammond, 1993; Howard, 1994; Langer, 1997; Jensen, 1998; Kessler, 2000; Simon, 2001). These developed theoretical models that stress the learner’s involvement in meaning-making, such as Feldman’s model (Feldman, 1985), the feminist model (e.g. Garber, 1990) and the structuralist educational model (e.g. Anderson, 1993). They are well-established and see the meaning-making process as a result of the visitor’s active pursuit of new knowledge (see Koroscik, Short, Stravropoulos, and Fortin, 1992; Barrett, 2000; Addison, 2003) that s/he integrates into existing knowledge or experience (Hagaman, 1990; Parsons, 1998; Eisner, 2002). That is, in a meaning-making approach the learner actively selects information that is

relevant to something about which s/he already knows. J. Piaget, the pioneering Swiss philosopher and psychologist, calls this ‘assimilation’ (2001) which indicates that ‘when we attempt to come to know and understand something, we usually attempt to identify and contrast it with something that we already find familiar’ (Sullivan, 1990: 2). This understanding of work of meaning-making has been also validated as knowledge within the learning community (see Bruner, 1990; Hicks, 1992; Anderson, 2003).

The second approach can be found within contemporary museum education agendas. In this type of research article meaning has been interpreted within a broader discursive framework, and has recently been regarded as a complex phenomenon made up of the complementary strands of the personal, the socio-cultural and the physical. These fundamental components were proposed by J. H. Falk and L. D. Dierking (1992, 2000) in their analysis of learning. They formulated a framework about learning that tries to accommodate much of the diversity and complexity surrounding learning. The framework is called the ‘Contextual Model of Learning’³ (2000). A distinguishing feature of Falk and Dierking’s account of learning is its focus on the personal, the socio cultural and the physical and the authors maintain that learning is regarded as ‘the process/product of the interaction between these three contexts’ (Falk and Dierking, 2000: 10). These contexts will be dealt with in Chapter 3 in order to understand the background to the meaning-making process. One more aspect of the model is that it includes a fourth dimension – time. This concept was added to emphasize the ephemerality and changeability of learning. Ultimately, learning is viewed as the never-ending integration and interaction of the three contexts over time in order to make meaning (ibid.: 11).

Further to these two general approaches to meaning-making, the last approach is to consider studies of museum practice from the field of design research. The

³ The ancestor model proposed by Falk and Dierking is called the ‘Interactive Experience Model’ (1992).

little work of this type that exists falls into two areas, namely, studies of professional practice and studies in higher education. The entire literature could be read in a day. There has, however, been a recent increase in practice-led and educational studies with a trend toward empirical research. The majority of empirical research in these two types of study has focused particularly on what designers and design students take with them when they leave the museum. For instance, a series of design research seminars held in 2008, in partnership with the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design (CETLD), the University of Brighton, the Royal College of Art, the Royal Institute of British Architects, and the Victoria & Albert Museum, all in the United Kingdom, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), provided an overview of related work in progress. These seminars have created an opportunity to reflect on why today's design research tries to bring design professionals from higher education and museums (mainly collections-based partners such as design museums in this seminar) together. All of the seminars took a pragmatic and constructivist approach to research, mostly influenced by Anglo-American educationists such as J. Dewey (1934, 1938, and 1949) and G. E. Hein (1998). They offered advice on how to lead the museum visit into useful and empirical practice. For instance, as part of their series, two CETLD seminars led by A. Smith (November, 21, 2007) and F. Wisker (March, 5, 2008) called for attention to an understanding of the ways in which student research into the museum might be interpreted through the design process and what higher education tutors might do to enable that research. Until now their discourse has tended to encourage educational studies for design students, design practice-based students, design theory-based students or weavers (those who combine design practice and design theory), rather than studies of informal learning by the design profession including professional designers, which is what this thesis considers.

These three approaches - educational studies, contemporary museum education and practice research, and design studies - raise several questions for design museums such as; "What makes them a positive museum experience?" and "Can a design museum really become a realistic and didactic place for visitors from the

field of design?” These questions would be beyond the scope of these studies. Unlike the research articles reviewed above, rather than examining the ways in which visitors incorporate museum visits into the performance of their practice, this research aims to illuminate the ways in which they affirm ideas, values and social identities in the field of design through their museum visits. For that reason, a sociological approach will provide a more complete understanding of meaning-making in design museums. The thesis employs two different types of social theories that will supplement the theoretical framework and underpin the conceptual model as theoretical leverage for understanding the specific and situated context for meaning-making. These social theories will continue to be reviewed and examined in the following theoretical chapters.

1.3 Research Methodology

1.3.1 Theoretical Location

In approaching the question of meaning-making this thesis depends on modern social theories; the interactionist theories of E. Goffman (1959, 1974) and, among others, E. M Bruner (1986), G. H. Mead (1934) and V. W. Turner (1974, 1982); and the theories of practice of P. Bourdieu (1977, 1988 and 1998) and A. Swidler (1986). In drawing on these social theories it is expected that the meaning-making process of designer visitors to design museums can be addressed in a more plausible way. These theories will also contribute to the provision of a theoretical framework within which to situate professional meaning-making processes in a museum. Furthermore, the concepts of ‘self’ and ‘habitus’, which are influenced by the insights of these theories, will be used not only to explore specialist visitors’ meaning-making frameworks, but also to design a new model of museum experience for them.

1.3.2 Empirical Support for the Meaning-making Framework

Along with a consideration of theories, the meaning-making framework will also be supported by conducting interviews with twelve participant visitors from the field of design. The last part of the thesis is devoted to an auto-photographic investigation of meaning-making, describing how participant visitors develop their meaning-making in the case study museum. The methodologies used for this empirical research encourage the participants to reflect on their experiences. The methods were intended to serve as a catalyst for the participant visitors, helping them to describe their own meaning-making in the museum. Finally, through the case study, the recursive relationship between theories and practices of meaning-making among design professionals in the case study museum will be illustrated.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2, *Focus: Specialist Visitors in Museum Audience Research*, explores visitor research within the context of the discipline of museum practice and distinguishes certain characteristics of relevant studies conducted during the twentieth century and up to the present day. An examination of historical research studies into museum audience is relevant since the design museum is the object of the research and the research subjects (i.e. design professionals as visitors to the design museum) constitute a museum audience. The terms ‘audience’ or ‘visitors’ are, therefore, critical to the thesis, which focuses on the design profession as a specialist visitor group (as defined in visitor segmentation research) which can be identified from other types of visitor groups that use the museum. This permits the professional meaning-making of designer visitors to

be distinguished from other visitors' meaning-making, and allows an investigation into a case study museum in which numerous communities of learners mingle and learn. From the audience-as-profession approach to design museums, the hypothesis of this study emerges. The hypothesis is that as a specialist visitor group design profession visitors to design museums, make meanings in transactions with symbolically powerful objects among the exhibits, which make reference to star designers, or whose designers occupy a relatively high social position in the field (see section 2.3.3).

Theoretical Backgrounds

Chapters 3 and 4 draw on sociological theories from several relevant areas to describe theoretical approaches that enable an understanding of social, cultural and political actions in the professional meaning-making of visitors with backgrounds in the design field.

Chapter 3, *An Interaction-theoretical Approach to Meaning-making*, examines dominant views in meaning-making research, analyzing the contexts of the meaning-making process as personal, social and physical. Two significant types of social theory emerge in Chapters 3 and 4; theories of interaction and theories of practice. Chapter 3 deals especially with the first of these and introduces important concepts such as 'interpretive community', 'role-playing' and 'ritual' in order to examine meaning-making from the symbolic interactionists' viewpoint, which has been widely accepted in museum meaning-making research.

In Chapter 4, *A Power-theoretical Approach to Meaning-making*, social and political contexts for professional meaning-making are explored. The chapter maintains that theories of interaction cannot fully explain the notion of meaning-making, so theories of practice are used to reconsider meaning-making. In particular, Bourdieu's concepts, 'field', 'habitus' and 'practice', which focus on the reproduction of power and knowledge, are addressed in order to investigate

the relationships between individuals and relevant institutions. Consideration is then given to the ideas of social space, power and knowledge in meaning-making. However, as mentioned above, many cases have shown that the power-theoretical approach to meaning-making fails to explain a highly personalized meaning. Nevertheless, the reason for focusing on the association with theories of practice is that some elements of professional meaning-making can be found in theories of practice and it therefore seems fair to assume that these might help to overcome the limitations of the interaction-theoretical approach to meaning-making. Finally, these two different theoretical backgrounds will be used to extend the hypothetical framework of meaning-making in order to explain the idea of a cultural institution within the context of professional society.

Empirical Case Study

From Chapter 5 onwards the thesis is case-study focused. It explores and examines twelve research participants in the Design Museum in London and uses the empirical results of the case study to propose a new conceptual framework or model for understanding meaning-making.

Chapter 5, *Research Methods for Empirical Research*, discusses the research methods used in the empirical case study. The thesis employs qualitative and interpretive research methods for deriving meaningful data. The research data consist of spoken materials (interview data) and visual materials (participants' photographs). The research posits that the photographs are the most instant, realistic and social outcomes of a desire by a participant to express her/his views on the museum visit. In order to investigate the validity of the research methods, a review was conducted of adult education research, cultural studies and museum studies that have used photographs in interviews in a similar manner. Particular consideration is given to Taylor's article (1994, 2002) which provides in-depth explanations of 'auto-photography' and 'photo-elicitation', the main research methods employed in the empirical case study. The chapter also discusses some

of the issues that arise in the research design and raises awareness of the problem of bias in the selection of participants, making explicit this issue by employing a 'reference sampling' technique.

Chapter 6, *The Case Study: Overview*, gives a brief introduction to the Design Museum, London. A macro perspective description is discussed first and then a micro perspective overview of the museum is put forward, which considers its history, role, and physical and educational functions. The reasons for choosing the museum for the case study and the case study research process are also addressed.

A New Model Combining Theoretical Foundations with Empirical Findings

The analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 led to a proposition for a hypothetical model of professional meaning-making. In response to the empirical findings, theories of interaction and theories of practice, which provide critical observations on general meaning-making, are re-investigated.

Chapter 7, *An Auto-photographic Investigation of Meaning-making*, provides an analysis of photographs taken by the participant visitors to the case study museum, the Design Museum in London, and their responses to the photographs. The research employed the following process of analysis: after setting out the preliminary photographic research a series of interviews was conducted with the participants and then codified. It was initially anticipated that the method of analyzing the qualitative data and developing theoretical categories would be developed by grounded theory, but this theory failed to derive analytical frames from the data itself. Therefore, in the final stage of the coding process, the theoretical discussions of earlier chapters were adopted. Firstly, the concepts of self and role issues provide the key to understanding how the individual constructs her/his self-identity and plays roles. Secondly, from the viewpoint of theories of

practice, a plausible explanation is given of professional self-identification, based on expectations, motivations and benefits. Thirdly, 'interpretive communities' attempt to address individuals' prior knowledge as a background to meaning-making. Lastly, reflection and transaction experience support the individuals' aesthetic framework of meaning-making. These become major categories of the hypothetical meaning-making framework as they seem to be pervasive elements of professional meaning-making in the museum space.

Chapter 8, *The Development of a Theory of Meaning-making*, re-examines the categories and re-evaluates the theoretical considerations to develop a model of the meaning-making process. The model can be dealt with in terms of the previously examined research question, which pre-supposes the dilemma of choosing between an interaction-theoretical approach and a power-theoretical approach. To strengthen the usefulness of these approaches and overcome their weaknesses, it would be reasonable to consider a new paradigm of meaning-making. Thus, this thesis addresses the possibility of a new paradigm by discussing the empirical findings, then reconceptualizes meaning-making as a negotiated performance that emerges through interactions between six keystones; 'subjective/objective self-identity', 'interactions', 'ritual', 'habitus', 'social practice' and 'symbolic power'. Finally, to make the model more feasible in practice, the chapter proposes an enhanced socio-cultural model for meaning-making and shows how the model can contribute to developments of design scholarship and curatorial practice which especially recognizes the collaboration between specialized museums, their specialist visitors and the creative industries.

Chapter 2

Focus: *Specialist* Visitors in Museum Audience Research

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of some of the main directions in museum audience research and visitor studies, especially where paradigmatic shifts in view towards a consideration of people as meaning-makers may be situated. Thus, this chapter examines meaning-making in museum audience research and, since it is necessary to identify the research subjects, designer visitors, in order to understand the meaning-making processes that are shared by them, focuses on visitor segmentation research, which has particular relevance to specialist visitors. The visitor segmentations developed by seven researchers (Knudson, Cable, and Beck, 1995; Garzotto, Mainetti and Paolini, 1997; Booth, 1998) during the 1990s are explored in order to consider the ways in which a designer visitor group in a design museum might be identified from various other groups of museum visitors.

The field of museum audience research, often called visitor studies, is not well coordinated, largely because it spans so many academic disciplines. To review all of these areas is well beyond the scope of this chapter which, instead, focuses on a macroscopic view of research paradigm shifts carried out in a range of

disciplines within museum practice, and highlights some of the empirical research that seems worthy of further investigation in this thesis. Although the chapter does not seek to orient this study toward museum audience research, it is worth providing a review of the main approaches that have been employed in audience research into meaning-making in a museum context, since the research subject is audience.

As primary sources on the chronology of visitor studies and the research models employed in them, introductory overviews of visitor studies in a few major books were indirectly considered (see e.g. Cameron and Abbey, 1961; Hood, 1986; Loomis, 1987; Williams and Lubenstein, 1994). In addition to these sources, reference was also made to visitor studies published in journals including; *Curator, the Journal of Museum Education* (originally called Roundtable Reports and renamed in 1985) and more recent publications, *International Laboratory of Visitor Studies (ILVS) Review*, *The Visitor's Journal* and *A Journal of Visitor Behaviour*.

Before taking up the main issues of this chapter it should be noted that the majority of the studies reviewed here were conducted in western society, in particular, the United States rather than the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe. Most of the studies considered in this chapter concern what is known in western society as a result of investigations into museum audiences that have been especially concerned with adult learning perspectives in museums and galleries from the 1900s to the present time. Thus, it is chiefly a study of Western institutional research patterns. The chapter does, however, include some studies conducted in non-western countries. In addition, it is worth noting here that although the term 'audience' is generally applied to various cultural studies that deal with public institutions and events of any kind (see Almasan et al., 1993) this study uses the term, 'audience' to refer only to those visiting museums and galleries *actually* and *physically*.

2.2 Paradigms of Museum Audience Research

Overview of Museum Audience Research from the 1900s to the mid 1950s in the USA

Much museum audience research originates in the 1920s: all of the major types of visitor study were introduced in the period. Studies of visitors to museums were not conducted seriously until the late 1920s because, even though public museums appeared in the United States in the late nineteenth century, they were still relatively new at the beginning of the twentieth century. There are, however, a few earlier works that can be called visitor studies (e.g. Rea, 1910).

P. M. Rea was one of the first and, for several decades, one of the only researchers in the United States to interview visitors to obtain raw data for critical evaluation and in order to make improvements. In 1910, he was also the first to publish museum attendance figures (Rea, 1910). Rea went on to analyze museum-going in the early 1930s, presenting his results in two publications (Rea, 1930, 1932). His assumption that 'every citizen reacts to the museum daily, positively or negatively by either visiting it or not visiting it' (Rea, 1932: 40) was an important contribution to critical evaluation. L. V. Coleman, an American museum researcher, also analyzed attendance figures, especially through social and economic contexts; e.g. visitor increases during the worst of the Depression in the early 1930s (Coleman, 1939: 297). His analysis indicates the contextual reasons why people visit museums.

The main strand of museum audience research at this time could be characterized as educationally-focused studies. Psychologists E. S. Robinson (1928) and A. W. Melton (1938), sponsored by the American Association of Museums, conducted observational studies on museum visitor behaviour to explore the educational

value of museums. Among educational philosophers J. Dewey, the American educationist and philosopher, who rendered great service to early visitor studies. Dewey's philosophies of education engaged with informal learning and cognitive thinking and influenced a number of other museum visitor studies (Dewey, 1916, 1934). As an example of the approach to informal learning and cognitive thinking, in M. Bloomberg's work at the Cleveland Museum of Art, in order to assess the relationship between exhibit pedagogy and data retention, she investigated formal school tour groups through the use of standardized test procedures (Bloomberg, 1929). She was concerned with the quality of visitors' attention and specifically with what information they retained from their visit. Bloomberg's work raised key questions as to the nature of museum learning when she found that the students who were the most interested and enthusiastic about their museum visit actually scored lower on recall of exhibited material and ability to form conclusions from the concepts presented. She concluded, because the scores of even the brightest students were disappointingly low, that more material was being displayed than could be assimilated in a single visit.

Although the researchers who were influenced by Dewey's philosophy were concerned with the differences between museum experiences and formal learning environments, such as schools, there were also early studies of cognitive thinking in museum contexts using school tour groups. Although there were very few in the early twentieth century, Bloomberg (1929), and N. Goldberg (1933) who was interested in the unique contributions to regular classroom curriculum that museum exhibits could make, studied the relationship of museum visits and the classroom curriculum for young students.

Despite the growing interest and respectability of research into the museum field very few visitor studies were conducted in the 1940s. Two exceptions were G. K. Bennett's and H. M. Cowee's applications of visitors' behavioural studies to commercial displays. In describing the profitable relationship of market research techniques to exhibit display contexts Bennett's and Cowee's work foreshadows an important style of research in the 1950s (Bennett, 1941; Cowee, 1949).

Alongside educational research, 'behaviourist' approaches gradually became an important component of institutional evaluation and remained so until the mid twentieth century. These behavioural studies became the most common form of museum audience research, together with survey work, usually carried out by museums themselves and possibly also by market research companies. C. E. Cummings, former director of the Buffalo Museum of Science, was the first to criticize behavioural research in his works of the 1940s (Cummings, 1940, 1947).

Development of Museum Audience Research from the mid 1950s up to the Present Day

Although many studies of visitor behaviour were carried out between the late 1920s and about 1949, relatively few research projects of that type were conducted in the 1950s. L. Draper (1984) claims that during the Cold War of the 1950s, which emerged after World War II, American museums could be characterized by two intellectual movements; one was a trend towards conformity (orthodoxy); and the other an unswerving trust in the scientific method (Draper, 1984: 54). According to him, influenced by the rise of reactionary philosophies in the 1950s, in response to the perceived threat of social disintegration 'Americans clung to the potential of science to defend themselves' (ibid.: 54). In this context, the 'scientific method' was applied in every academic field and even to every product. In addition, the scientific method was used to attain the goal of conformity in the field of education. At that time, American school children were evaluated in terms of a socially utilitarian approach (ibid.: 54-55).

One of the major trends in museum visitor studies to be influenced by scientific methods such as those of the mid twentieth century was the growth of cognitive studies, which stemmed from the educational values of museums. Although a few researchers began to investigate cognitive learning from the 1920s (e.g. Bloomberg, 1929; Goldberg, 1933), these studies finally came to dominate museum visitor research in the 1960s. Since then many researchers have studied

cognitive education for adults during their casual museum visits. The 1960s saw an explosion of visitor studies. New terms were developed that reflected transformations perceived in museums in order to understand the new audiences. In 1960 alone, three important publications discussed this growing recognition of public involvement (Abbey and Cameron, 1960; Frese, 1960; de Borhegyi, 1963).

Starting from the 1960s through the late 1970s an internal and systematic approach to visitor evaluation, designed to assess visitors' preferences and feelings, was adapted to visitor studies (see e.g. Srivastava and Peel, 1968; Borun, 1977; Miles and Tout, 1978; Miles and Alt, 1979). For instance, various visitors' preferences were measured by R. K. Srivastava and T. S. Peel, who opened up a new type of behavioural study when they began to apply environmental design theory to museums (Srivastava and Peel, 1968). From this research, they discovered the influence of wall colour on the visitors' pace through galleries. These types of studies became more popular in the 1970s (Borun, 1977; Miles and Tout, 1978; Miles and Alt, 1979).

A major trend, which can be seen in most recent visitor research from around 1980 onwards, suggests that museums themselves are in transition. Museums are now required to engage with the public and compete with the rest of the entertainment industry for tourist and leisure time while maintaining their learning functions. Thus, extensive studies were carried out which placed an emphasis on leisure time pursuits (e.g. Fosdick, 1942; Stone and Taves, 1958). A recent trend in these types of studies is to couple detailed information about leisure activities with museum and visitors' satisfaction ratings, employing preference scores (e.g. Likert Scales) as well as providing basic demographic audience data on visiting. This practice is called 'counting and mapping' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006: 368).

During the 1970s and 1980s audience research became richer in qualitative and quantitative terms and more distinct from 'classical' audience profiles (e.g. Miles, 1986). Research on visitor behaviour also became more 'sophisticated' (e.g. Treinen, 1988). The increase in data had an effect on the development of

research into elements of exhibition design, such as labels (e.g. Miles, 1986; McManus, 1989).

Some studies still dealt with visitor experience and motivation (e.g. Doering, 1999; Thyne, 2001) and visitor learning (Falk and Dierking, 1992; McManus, 1993) but others tried to embrace visitors' lifestyles and their psychographic profiles (Todd and Lawson, 2001). Some issues such as multi-culture and ethnic diversity also came into audience research. For instance, a museum in Africa should have a very different function to that of one in western society, because 'whereas museum audiences in western society are generally educated, the visitors to some African Museums were often illiterate and had little formal education since they came from many tribal and language backgrounds' (ICOM-CIDOC, 1997)⁴. Thus, visitor studies of national museums began to allow cross-cultural comparisons of audience profiles, attitudes and reactions to museum contexts (e.g. Conaty, 1989; Robertson and Migliorino, 1996). A recently emerging area is non-visitor studies, allowing museums to obtain people's attitudes towards museums and the nature of the barriers that hinder them from becoming visitors (e.g. Schuster, 1991; Prentice et al., 1997). Another recent trend in audience research is the focus on new technologies that extend the possibilities of communication between exhibits and audience (e.g. Economou, 1998) and on museum website usage (e.g. Sarraf, 1999; Dyson and Moran, 2000).

At the end of the 1990s researchers began to be interested in the visitor's point of view. This is usually discussed in terms of a shift from a behaviourist approach to a constructivist one, which emphasizes the input of the learner in the meaning-making process. Falk and Dierking discuss the implications of this recognition

⁴ This issue was discussed in the 1996 conference of the International Committee for Documentation of the International Council of Museums (ICOM-CIDOC) titled 'Museum Documentation in (and out) of Africa'. "Africa is becoming more illiterate than in the past, perhaps it will never be fully literate", said Dr S. Somjee in a session on 'Documentation of Non-material Culture'. Then he questioned: "So, should we not be looking at other forms of documentation than text?" (ICOM-CIDOC, 1997)

for the kinds of learning that museums try to promote, which emphasizes what they call 'free-choice learning' (Falk and Dierking, 1998; Falk and Dierking, 2002; Falk, 2006). Although visitors had previously been asked such questions as "How did you hear about the museum?" or "What did you come to see?", they had never been asked to express what they hoped to get out of their visit. In place of such studies Falk and Dierking suggested (2000) that visitor research should be conducted into what visitors are interested in, what they do in their everyday lives, and what their other experiences are of museums and similar institutions. His challenge to delve deeper into the backgrounds, motivations and expectations of visitors became an important part of audience research throughout the next decade.

Museum Audience Research in the UK, Parts of Europe, and Non-Western Countries

There has been considerable research into museum visitors in the United Kingdom and some parts of Europe in recent years. Some interesting institutional research conducted in Britain is worthy of consideration in this study. For instance, N. Merriman investigated (1989a, 1989b) cultural phenomena in museums focusing on sociological paradigms. Merriman's basic contention is that although museums are usually seen and see themselves as educational institutions their educational purpose has not been achieved (Merriman, 1989a). He then seeks to explain the cultural functions of a museum by analyzing museum visiting as one of the leisure activities 'people are socialized into doing: they may go because it is "one of the things they do" in spite of sometimes finding the experience dissatisfying' (ibid.: 155). In 1985 Merriman carried out a large scale survey to examine people's attitudes to the past, to archaeology and to museums. Their attitudes and perceptions were then analyzed in relation to status, education and other social variables. Bourdieu's work (1968, 1984) is meaningful in Merriman's research because it is concerned with the reproduction of social relations, and specifically with the reproduction of power and domination.

Through the analysis of social phenomena such as education systems and cultural systems (including museums) Bourdieu demonstrates the interrelationships of economic and symbolic power. Likewise, Merriman used Bourdieu's work as a starting point for the construction of an explanation of patterns of museum visiting analyzed in the context of hierarchical social structures.

On the other hand, P. M. McManus took a different approach. In some ways her focus is narrower, limited to the investigation of how people learn in science museums. Her research is based on psychological methods and approaches and pays attention to the way individuals behave within particular environments. McManus observed and documented the reactions of groups and individuals to the displays of the Natural History Museum, London (previously known as the British Museum (Natural History) or BM) and other science museums (Lucas, McManus and Thomas, 1986; McManus, 1985, 1989).

In Britain, the work of government departments and bodies is sometimes very useful in tracking down information. Although much of the data is too general to be of use, some is vital, and often forms the basis for reporting in the national media. For instance, in the 1979 edition of *The General Household Survey*, produced annually, the subject of Chapter 7 was leisure in museums (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1979). Of more use in recent years has been *Cultural Trends*, produced four times a year. In *Cultural Trends*, volume 12 (Eckstein and Feist, 1991) one section provides very useful attendance data for British museums and galleries. The Office of Public Census and Surveys has also carried out a number of surveys on behalf of specific national institutions during the last ten years (e.g. Heady, 1984). These vary in interest and quality. The Policy Studies Institute, a government think-tank, published *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* in 1988 (Myerscough, 1988). The aim of this report was to demonstrate how the arts, in a changing policy framework, contributed to the economic life of the nation. The research was conducted in three contrasting areas of Britain: it included investigation into audiences for the arts, which incorporated museums and galleries.

In recent museum audience research in the United Kingdom the research carried out in the University of Leicester Department of Museum Studies and, in particular, the work of E. Hooper-Greenhill, British museum researcher (1992, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2000) were considered exceptional. She points out that many of the earlier studies were oriented to questions of whether the public had managed to grasp the expert information provided to them in the exhibition or not. However, she says that there have been shifts away from models based in behaviourist psychology and 'expert-to-novice [...] communication' especially over the last ten years, towards what she calls an 'interpretive paradigm' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 133). According to her, the interpretive paradigm includes interpretive analysis of visitor accounts, for example, paying attention to narrative structure or the employment of particular kinds of vocabulary (ibid.). Studies which Hooper-Greenhill singles out as an indicative of the interpretive paradigm also employed mixed methodologies, including a fairly substantial ethnographic contribution, and both direct observation and semi-structured open-ended interviews, usually with visitors in the groups in which they visited (Katriel, 1997; Macdonald, 2002). Her concept of the interpretive paradigm is in line with the meaning-making paradigm.

Some European centres for study can also be identified, notably, Holland, Paris in France and Karlsruhe in Germany. However, little of this work is available in English. The Swedish travelling exhibitions, 'Rikstutställningar', carried out a fascinating study of visitors to their exhibitions in the 1970s, which is still of value (Arnell, Hammer and Nylof, 1980).

Although a great deal of research on visitors has been carried out in western countries, audience research, particularly in east Asian countries, is on the increase due economic growth and the rapid of construction of new museums with strong policy support from their governments. Many aspects of the shifts in museum audience research that have been noted above can now also be seen in these countries (Korean National Commission, 2000; Hirakawa et al., 2005).

Accordingly, the educational role of museums in these countries and new methods of communication with audiences are constantly tested (see e.g. Jung, 2001; Kim, 2001; Lee, 2002).

In summary, this review of past visitor studies suggests that two broad models of museum audience research were employed throughout the twentieth century and up to the present day; one is a market research based approach; and the other a meaning-making approach. The former paradigm has been a popular analysis technique in museum studies since the early days of visitor studies and has a clear pragmatic purpose to attract new *consumers*. Such marketing-centered perspectives have influenced museum education. Museums expanded their educational role trying more varied ways, such as forums and lecture series, classes and tours, of engaging visitor learners. A growing understanding of museums as service institutions has also led to service delivery studies (e.g. Johns and Clark, 1993). As a result of market research based approaches, studies dealing with strategic planning and performance reporting for public service have begun to be published (Sullivan, 1998).

One might say that museum audience research is currently in the midst of a powerful paradigm shift to embrace the notion of meaning-making. Although market research has had a continuing impact on museum learning research since the 1950s, the visitor meaning-making research paradigm, supported by social and cultural theories, has also developed on its own. As an example, in their book *The Museum Experience* Falk and Dierking propose (1992) a comprehensive framework for understanding people's museum learning experiences from that approach. This framework, the 'interactive experience model', represents a dynamic process that occurs at the intersection of three contexts – the personal, the social, and the physical. By personal context, the authors mean that people visit the museum for their own emotional purposes (expectations and anticipated outcomes) including social-recreational, educational and reverential reasons, according to social context. They argue that greater research is needed into the social (e.g. families visiting, friendship, leisure and tour) and physical contexts for

museum visiting and discuss how various aspects of the museum, such as its type and structure, influence people's learning experience. Their findings provide support for the theoretical framing of meaning-making adopted in this study (see Chapter 3).

2.3 Museum Audience Research Application

2.3.1 The Meaning-making Paradigm

The meaning-making paradigm was originally adopted by many museum researchers in western society in order to investigate visitor experiences. In particular, recent museum audience research has shown a powerful paradigm shift to embrace the notion of meaning-making. A large number of studies on visitor meaning-making exist, including the following relevant studies: Scribner and Cole, 1973; Birney, 1988; Falk and Dierking, 1992, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, 1994, 2000; Ramey-Gassert, Walberg, and Walberg, 1994; Silverman, 1995; Schauble, Beane, Coates, Martin, and Sterling, 1996; Schauble, Leinhardt, and Martin, 1997; Falk, Moussouri and Coulson, 1998; Leinhardt and Crowley, 1998; Adelman, Falk and James, 2000; Stainton, 2001; Fraser, 2004. All of these studies agree with the notion that the meaning-making paradigm is critical to an understanding of the complete experience of visitors to museums. Fundamentally, museum meaning-making research has adopted a range of theories about where meaning emerges in the relationship between sender and receiver (see below). This can be illustrated as a 'continuum between two extreme positions: respectively, those of determinate meaning and completely "open" interpretation' (Chandler, 1995), thus;

- Objectivist: Meaning entirely a museum-oriented idea ('transmitted');
- Constructivist: Meaning in interplay between museum and audience ('negotiated');
- Subjectivist: Meaning entirely in interpretation by audience ('re-created').

Among these, the museum process that was mentioned in Chapter 1, which suggested that visitors to a design museum contextualize meanings about design by representing, socializing and institutionalizing the field, can be seen as a constructivist approach (variously referred to as a 'constructionist', 'constructivist' or 'social-interactive' model). Although two poles – objectivist and subjectivist – are discovered among visitors' meaning-making, even subjectivist meaning-making researchers refer to influences on the process of negotiation in making meaning (e.g. Stainton, 2002). This is also called 'preferred meaning', which is seen as emerging from 'interpretative communities' (Chandler, 1995). Individual visitors accept, modify, ignore or reject such preferred meanings, according to their pre-acquired knowledge, values, beliefs and purpose. The term 'inter-subjectivity' is sometimes used to describe this type of meaning-making process (Fish, 1980).

Even meaning that is constructed can vary among communities. Interpretation and the development of understanding are also variable and contingent. Thus Falk and Dierking see (2000) meaning-making as depending on prior knowledge (as well as interest, and the museum experience itself). According to Falk and Dierking, visitors not only arrive with expectations and motivations, but also with a wealth of previously acquired knowledge, interests, skills, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences (ibid). This knowledge and these interests and experiences can belong not only to the personal context, but also to the social context. Community, in this sense, can be regarded as a 'precondition to learning' (Liu, 1995: 14). Likewise, meaning is influenced by the social and cultural norms, attitudes and values that surround the community. Their interests, values and beliefs, shared interests, a common symbolic language, and mutual pleasures are features that these visitors share. Therefore, it is expected that common

discernible patterns will be discovered in the meaning-making processes of these visitors.

While differences in approach to the notion of meaning-making exist among visitor studies, most share the notion that people actively make meaning during their visit. Moreover, this notion, which has recently developed in the field of cultural studies, has quickly surfaced in a variety of other fields as well. This thesis also accepts this notion but deals with it in a more specific sense than does the existing literature on meaning-making in museum research. Firstly, the subject of the research is not a general visitor group but a specialized visitor group; secondly, the object of the research is focused and limited to a design museum and the pertinent field of professional design. These considerations are in line with the research aim, to discover the essence of the designer visitor experience through socio-cultural meaning, not through cognitive behavior, which has been the usual approach of many museum researchers.

2.3.2 Audience Identification in Museum Audience Research

The major trend in audience based research conducted under contract to museums and galleries has moved from broad investigations employing the demographic profile of the annual audience of the museum to focused investigations of target group visitor experiences, or specific investigations of the general public. Hence, the term 'general public' refers here to a 'differentiated' group. According to Hooper-Greenhill, visitors had been regarded as an 'undifferentiated' mass public, but this view has now changed and museums are beginning to accept visitors as 'active interpreters and performers of meaning-making practices within complex cultural sites' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006: 362). However, the notion of the differentiated group is different from the concept of target group or target audience used broadly in museum audience research. The concept of the target group or target audience, which originates in marketing, enabled the division of

museum visitors on the basis of demographic variables such as age, sex, occupation, education, disability or life-stage. The most famous study of this type, as Hooper-Greenhill notes (2006), is that of the French sociologist P. Bourdieu, whose comparative findings across four European Countries suggests important differences of *taste* in art held by different classes and class fractions (Bourdieu and Darbel, 1991). Other social differentiations, such as gender, age and ethnicity, have also been referred to in individual studies (Fyfe, 2006).

In order to articulate the concept of the differentiated group, some museum researchers have borrowed a theoretical concept, 'interpretive communities' (Fish, 1980), which will be also introduced in detail in the following chapter. The concept of interpretive communities took museum audience research a step further by focusing on the varying strategies of interpretation that differentiate visitor experiences of a museum. This type of museum research suggests that the socio-economic patterns that are discussed in Bourdieu's research are likely to be increasingly difficult to identify because visitors have more complicated backgrounds (see e.g. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

Recently, many museum audience researchers have tried to identify visitor types in order to gain insights into their visitors' needs and desires and the educational values of their museums. In the same way, an enquiry into visitor segmentation has provided insight into how specialist visitors could be identified. A series of existing visitor segmentation studies, developed by eight researchers, will now be selectively reviewed to explore different groups of real visitors and their information needs.

First of all, B. Booth validates and identifies (1998: 150) three groups of visitors; the *general visitor* who requires information on opening hours, prices, the museum's facilities, what's on, notable exhibits and navigation aids in the museum; the *educational visitor* who requires (in addition to the above information for general visitors) more detailed information to help plan visits, and project-based information; and finally the *specialist visitor* who requires (in

addition to the information for general visitors) detailed information concerning the museum's collections and access to its expertise, together with links to other sources of information.

F. Garzotto, L. Mainetti and P. Paolini introduce (1997: 38-47) a slightly different existing visitor classification. They experimented with visitors who were using a museum hypermedia system and suggested different applications according to the visitor type. The first is the *casual visitor* who passes by chance an information point such as a computer terminal or display screen. For these *casual visitors* Garzotto, Mainetti and Paolini suggested, for instance, a 'walk-up-and-use' system that is only intended to be used once, probably for a short time, and they concluded that the visitors differed in their experience of computers and hypermedia technology. Secondly, the *intentional visitors* have some knowledge of or at least a significant interest in the subject domain and want to learn more about it. They differ in their knowledge of hypermedia technology and in the amount of time available to explore the application. Finally, the *specialist visitors* are specialists in the subject domain, for example, researchers in history of art: again, they might differ in their knowledge of technology and in the time that they have available to use the application.

D. Knudson, T. Cable and L. Beck focus (1995: 251) on other visitor characteristics. They identify three types of exhibit visitors. The first type of visitor is the *skater*, who pays little attention to the displays, may read a few headlines, and is in a hurry. The second type is the *stroller*, who reads enough to understand the major themes, and thus has a better understanding of the big picture. The third type of visitor is the *studier*, who reads the fine print of every label and carefully examines every object.

In his book, *Anthropology and the Public* (1960), H. H. Frese maintains that museum visits could be a way in which new residents orient themselves to their recently adopted community. Focusing on the mass public and calling for a greater sensitivity to the predispositions and current interests of visitors, he puts

the majority of visitors into one of the following categories; *the lay-connoisseur*; *artists and designers*; *scientists and scholars*; *students*; *schools*; and *the mass public*. Among the many demographic visitor segmentations recorded in visitor studies, Frese's is the first and only one in which designers are directly mentioned and identified as real visitors to a museum.

Although specialist visitors are obviously *real* visitors as well, they have mainly been seen as professionals, who are already engaged with the museum and do not need to be incorporated in museum audience research paradigms. Thus, the study of such issues is relatively unfamiliar to the field of audience research. In terms of the marketing approach, most museum audience research has understood specialist visitors as regular and stable consumers. Likewise, to many readers, the discussions of specialist visitors may appear initially tangential to the topic of how museums engage more people. Moreover, *general/casual visitors* and *educational/intentional visitors* have been studied from the beginning of visitor studies, but postmodern approaches and the democracy of museums turns us away from an appreciation of specialist visitor studies. In fact, specialist audiences, such as designer visitors attending cultural institutions, have been regarded as elite major audience groups in visitor segmentation. Indeed, people with a high level of academic training have a greater tendency to visit museums. For instance, the Design Museum London's audience is far more design educated than those of most other museums that have surveyed their audiences, since the museum is positioned in a more specific field than art and science museums that have more general subjects (Design Museum London, 2008b).

However, as a *real* visitor to a museum, the experience of specialist visitor should be dealt with in contemporary audience research. A study of this group has recently been marginalized by researchers, whose criticism is that the study is about the predominant group when the focus should be on less significant groups, such as children or non-visitors. These researchers have focused on engaging the non-visitor, children and the older learner, or the empathy and experience of these marginalized visitors (see e.g. Schuster, 1991; Kirchberg, 1996; Schäfer,

1996; Prentice et al., 1997). As a result, however, recent audience research reveals the lack of investigation into a frequent visitor's real experience and the museum development strategy for this type of visitor. Accordingly, very little is actually known about who the specialist visitors are and, most importantly, why they visit. Audience data may suggest that they are the predominant group, however, they should not be confused with typical visitors. Typical visitors indicate that they are more familiar with the museum and that their subsequent visits, in fact, cause them to return. However, in case of specialist visitors there can be no assurance of subsequent visits. Even though they represent the largest proportion of visitors in audience data it is not possible to tell whether they are typical visitors to the museum. Interesting issues follow this fact: "What makes them visit the museum?" (even though some of them visit only once) and "What meanings do they make in the museum?" In this thesis designer visitors have been selected as the main foci of the research in anticipation that they might provide some answers to these questions.

As you can see, each of the existing visitor classifications introduced by the researchers mentioned above are differently validated and identified. There is no dichotomy grouping of characters between them. Whatever the visitors are called, exhibits are ideally required to be designed to meet the needs of every visitor type. To keep up with the requirement and keep pace with visitors, museums should remember that no visitors have fixed identification in terms of any visitor segmentation. Instead identification depends on the relationship between the museums and their visitors. Thus, only when designer visitors attend a design museum do they become specialist visitors. If they visit a science museum they may not be identified as specialist visitors. Therefore, investigating visitor groups requires, to begin with, some background knowledge of the museum, the visitor and the field that characterizes the museum.

2.3.3 The Audience-as-profession Approach to Design Museums

Likewise, the audiences in this study comprise only visitors who perceive the field of design as the design community. That is, the subject of the study is defined as professional designers in the practice field or design students, tutors and researchers in the academic field. Therefore, in the thesis, a 'professional' indicates a person in a profession (certain types of skilled work requiring formal training/education). According to S. Weil's definition of profession in Webster's *Third New International Dictionary*, 'a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive preparation including instruction in skills and methods as well as in the scientific, historical, or scholarly principles underlying such skills and methods, maintaining by force of organization or concerted opinion high standards of achievement and conduct, and committing its members to continued study and to a kind of work which has for its prime purpose the rendering of a public service' (1961). In particular, in museum terminology, these kind of people who visit a museum are defined as 'specialist visitors'.

Museum visitor studies structure and analyze audience according to gender, age, education, occupation, income etc. Research into museum education is inclined to be subdivided to allow an investigation of occupational groups (see e.g. Page, Herne, Dash, Charman, Atkinson and Adams, 2006). Occupation is basically classified as students, housewives, teachers, professionals and the retired. Many sociological studies of cultural activity also correlate participation with occupational level. Next to education, occupation is perhaps the demographic characteristic most closely related to involvement in the arts (DiMaggio, Useem and Brown, 1977: 21). Some authors, such as B. Gruengerg (1980), have also found occupational status to be a more significant predictor of attendance at cultural events and institutions (e.g. museums, concerts, plays and adult education classes) than income. In this way, the occupational approach has been largely applied to sociological museum audience research.

According to J. A. Walker and S. Chaplin in their book, *Visual Culture: An Introduction*, the existing field of the design professions encompasses some content from the field of visual culture – ‘urban design, retail design, corporate design, logos and symbols, industrial design, engineering design, illustration, graphics, product design, automobile design, design of weapons of war, transportation and space vehicle design, typography, wood carving and furniture design, jewellery, metalwork, shoes, ceramics, set design, computer-aided design, subcultures, costume and fashion, hair styling, body adornment, tattoos, landscape and garden design’ (1997: 33). The field of design continually enlarges as time passes and some fields of design form a focus for study by non-design disciplines. Accordingly, the content of the field has not only widened quantitatively, but also become more heterogeneous in that its boundaries are permeable. What especially distinguishes the artistic or cultural field from other fields is that knowledge and power are often symbolic: the field ‘consists of aesthetic achievements, high status, peer group recognition, and the award of degrees and honours’ (Walker and Chaplin, 1997: 32). This characteristic creates a special paradigm which makes power relations sustainable within society. The same can be seen of knowledge and power in a design museum.

The hypothesis of this study relies on this theoretical foundation and is related to the involvement of members of any category of design professional. On the assumption that the design professions nowadays account for design museum visits, either positively or negatively, as an extension of learning for practice or research (see e.g. Smith, ‘Design Scholarship Seminar: Students and Museums’ in the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design, November 21, 2007; Wisker, ‘Design Scholarship Seminar: Sources of Inspiration: the use of collections’ in the CETLD, March 5, 2008) the research hypothesis is that: design profession visitors (called specialist visitors in design museums) make meanings through their transactions with objects in design museums, which occupy a relatively high social status and power relation in the field, or make reference to star celebrities, and construct their identity through the visiting experience.

Thinking about the designer's relation to institutions in the narrower sense of specific organizations and, for instance, dominant accumulations of cultural power for institutions such as the Design Museum London, it may be true that for designers, whatever is outside of the discourses of design is in a certain sense meaningless, although that does not mean that there is no (political) meaning outside of the field at all. An example here would be A. Fraser, whose controversial essay *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique* (2005) was published in *Artforum* on critical art. Fraser argues: 'we cannot exist outside the field of art, *at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc*' (Fraser, *ibid.*: 279). Likewise, her version of institutional critique is clearly conditioned on the acceptance of a professional position in the established cultural field: one can be self-critical about one's professional identity, but only within accepted limits and without radically calling into question its own condition, the cultural field itself. However, she says that 'there is, of course, an "outside" of the institution, but it has no fixed, substantive characteristics. It is only what, at any given moment, does not exist as an object of artistic discourses and practices. [...] What we do outside the field, to the extent that it remains outside, can have no effect within it' (*ibid.*: 280). This shift has also had an influence on today's design museums throughout the world.

However, despite design-related museums in their modern form having existed for over one hundred years (for instance, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London was established in 1852) there is much that is not understood about why the design professions visit museums and, in particular, how professional designers and design students (who are critical of the social domains in the field of design distinction) make sense of this experience, or of how they make meaning in the museum environment. The major component of design museum audience studies, like other museum audience studies, has involved a comprehensive survey of the general adult audience. The survey was designed both to obtain a comprehensive profile of the general audience of the museum and to provide a context for a focused analysis of target visitor experiences, a profile of visitor

characteristics, their museum attendance patterns and the composition of the group that accompanied them. The present research is no exception. A growing body of public audience research provides insights into the demographic profile of design museum visitors. However, less well understood is what sense specialist visitors make of museums and what meaning they make of the field and the community of design through the visit. In order to begin to study the meaning-making of specialist visitors to a museum it is important to define a body of 'professional meaning-making' as abstracted knowledge. That is, a professional's meaning-making is a perspective on the abstract knowledge needed by professionals to perform social action in the professional field. Meaning is what a design practitioner or design student makes within their social life and is not to be confused with the skills that designers need to practice, or the tasks that designers are required to perform. It is the currency of a profession: it is 'what makes a profession legitimate and valued by the public' (Abbott, 1988: xii). In this respect, a professional meaning-making approach enables researchers to explore 'how modern societies institutionalize expertise' (ibid.).

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed past museum audience research primarily in western rather than non-western societies. It has indicated that, prior to 1900, published visitor studies are scant, but that because of many dedicated researchers new types of visitor studies began to be introduced from the early 1920s. From the review of museum audience research since the beginning of the twentieth century it is clear that museum professionals have become increasingly aware of the educational role of museums and have begun to evaluate their visitors' behaviour. This behaviourist research became the most common form of museum audience research until the mid twentieth century.

From the mid twentieth century to the present the trend of museum audience research has, however, moved from a behaviourist approach to a constructivist one. Many cultural analysts and professional researchers within museums have turned to visitors' own views and have begun to investigate visitor identities and motivations in various contexts. In order to do this they have adopted new methods, such as socio-cognitive research or socio-cultural theories of learning: considered contextual constraints such as history, politics, and culture: and employed analyses of unique and immediate situational constraints.

In recent years visitor studies have grown rapidly with a wide range of professional researchers, including G. E. Hein, C. Screven, L. Dierking and J. Falk, publishing in this area. Comparing the market research based museum audience research model the chapter has argued that these studies can be clearly situated within a powerful paradigm shift that embraces the notion of meaning-making. The implication of this trend is that visitor studies have become centrally concerned with the mapping of the activities of a 'diffused audience' (Ravelli, 2006) onto their life. Accordingly, the concept of interpretive communities has been highly regarded by recent museum audience researchers in order to relate visitors to their communities. This thesis situates designer visitors within the meaning-making research paradigm.

The chapter has also investigated, in particular, the ways in which specialized visitors to a design museum can be viewed in terms of audience identification methods used in museum research. Through a review of the main directions in past museum audience research studies and visitor segmentation the chapter has also sought to situate the research subjects (design profession visitors) and the object of the research (a design museum) within the context of the main directions in museum audience research, in particular, the meaning-making paradigm. Through its approach to 'audience as profession' the chapter has proposed the use of the terminology 'professional meaning-making' to describe the ways in which a professional who visits a museum makes sense of the pertinent museum

exhibits, as well as the tendencies to induce specific meanings that these types of specialist visitors make.

The following chapter will point to new theoretical directions arising from meaning-making research and will investigate in detail theories based on the meaning-making paradigm. Among relevant work in this area Falk and Dierking's understanding of the museum experience, seen from their publications such as *The Museum Experience* (1992) and *Learning from Museums* (2000), will be highlighted. The emphasis of their framework is on 'context': that is, a framework for understanding museum learning experiences embedded in various contexts. The very concept of the interrelationship of social ties and meaning-making will stem from a review of these contexts. In the meantime, sociological theories will be used as a way of viewing the meanings made in the museum, allowing an effective framework of designer visitors' meaning-making to be built. This will demonstrate the importance of some of the key qualities of museum visits (*Chapters 7 and 8*) and can also give new impetus to the educational function and role of the design museum, as well as the field of design (*Chapter 8*).

Chapter 3

An Interaction-theoretical Approach to Meaning-making

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, past audience research was reviewed to provide an overview of some of the main models of museum audience research from the early twentieth century to the present day. The main direction of this study has, as a result of that review, been situated within the context of the meaning-making research paradigm.

This chapter investigates an existing and general framework for examining how a visitor makes sense of the museum in a twenty-first century world. In order to do this, the chapter explores the three important contexts – personal, physical and social - suggested by J. H. Falk and L. D. Dierking in their study, *The Museum Experience* (1992) and *Learning from Museums* (2000) recalling the museum experience. Their investigations into the museum experience suggest that museum learning requires prior knowledge, appropriate motivation, a combination of emotional, physical and mental action, as well as an appropriate context within which to express itself.

In fact, these concepts are not exclusively limited to a specialist visitor's meaning-making, but generally based on the significance of personal, physical and social contexts in generic learning. This does not mean that the theoretical tools and principles around these contexts perfectly correspond with specialist visitors' meaning-making contexts. Therefore, in extending notion of generic learning to specialist visitors particular emphasis will be placed on developing a deeper understanding of the social context. The link between knowledge and cultural practice will be explored and the argument that meaning is an outcome of ritual practice will be examined through considerations of the concepts of 'interpretive community' and 'ritual' in museum spaces.

Consideration will also be given to the important mediating role in the social context that the concepts of personal self and physical environment play. For instance, rather than finding the physical view of context constraining and independent, the functions of the physical context as a bridge between the individual's sense of self (the personal context) and sense of community and society (the socio-cultural context) will be highlighted.

Although the focus of this chapter is on extending current conceptual understanding of the social context, the discussion here relies upon Falk and Dierking's proposition that meaning-making is at the intersection of the physical, socio-cultural and personal contexts. For that reason, all of the above contexts will be reviewed in this chapter.

Through a focus on social context in this and the following chapter two significant types of social theory will emerge: theories of interaction and theories of practice. The usefulness of them paves the way for a discussion of the meaning-making process, within a broad perspective, in contemporary museums. The theories will also contribute to providing a theoretical framework for understanding the meaning-making process of designer visitors, who see themselves as professionals in the design professions. In approaching the meaning-making framework this chapter will deal with the first of the theories on which this thesis is based. The

rest of this chapter will examine socio-cultural aspects of knowledge in museums using an approach based on theories of interaction and will then reconsider the concept of 'interpretive community' to explore visitors whose backgrounds are in the design profession. The concepts of role and 'role-playing' that derive from theories of interaction will be introduced and consideration given to the use of 'drama' as a metaphor for the museum visit using Mead's concept of 'role-taking' (1934) and elements of Goffman's 'dramaturgical sociology' (1959). Drawing on Mead and Goffman, the museum's role as a ritual space will be reaffirmed.

3.2 An Analysis of Theoretical Contexts for the Meaning-making Process

3.2.1 Personal Context Elements

Personal context is closely connected with the discussion of the previous chapter, since the concern for meaning in museum audience research is allied to the view that visitors have an important role in the evaluation of their experiences and learning. Likewise, context is of course relative to the person. This is a major reason why it is not possible to understand meaning-making acontextually. In relation to personal meaning within their discussions, five important notions, which are at the heart of the personal context that Falk and Dierking suggest (2000), will be discussed. These notions include: firstly, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation; secondly, interest, curiosity and flow; thirdly, prior knowledge; next, reflection; and finally, the transaction experience.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation

Falk and Dierking maintain that all learning starts from our perceptual system (2000: 16-22). So information should somehow be perceived – seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched, or in some way sensed (*ibid.*: 17). Meaning-making, however, requires more than perception: it also requires complex mental activity to judge what is worthy of remembering. For instance, it relates to questions such as; “Will this be important information in the future?”, “Does it relate to something I already know?” or “That idea reminds me of a previous project I did.”

J. Piaget, a pioneering Swiss philosopher, natural scientist and developmental theorist, calls this activity a ‘cognitive process’ (1981). This process includes perception and memory, abstraction and generalization, reasoning and problem-solving. They are ‘not independent and unchanging “abilities” or “functions” of human consciousness: they occur in concrete, practical activities and are formed within the limits of this activity’ (Luria, 1971: 266). In a similar way to Piaget, Hungarian-American psychologist, M. Csikszentmihalyi, and his research associate J. Nakamura also regard concrete and practical activities as human actions that involve the whole person, not only the intellectual but the sensory and emotional faculties as well (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura, 1989: 147). According to their research, if meaning occurs, that means that the human action is situated in the appropriate context and with the appropriate motivation (*ibid.*: 147). In addition, derived from Piaget’s concern with the cognitive process, a number of researchers have found that human beings are highly motivated to learn, especially when they are involved in a process of interaction with the environment (e.g. Deci et al, 1981; Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura, 1989; McCombs, 1991; Deci, 1992); when they are engaged in meaningful activities (e.g. Maehr and Archer 1987; Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura, 1989; McCombs, 1991); when they can overcome negative mental states (e.g. Diener and Dweck, 1980; McCombs, 1991; Baddeley, 1994); when they have choices and control over their learning (e.g. Paris and Cross, 1983; Pintrich and DeGroot, 1990; Covington,

1992; Paris, 1997); and when their skill can control the challenges of learning (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi 1990a, 1990b).

All these studies reveal that a basic dichotomy exists in motivations to learn; extrinsic and intrinsic. On the one hand, action is 'extrinsically motivated when the anticipated benefits are external to the activity' (Falk and Dierking, 2000: 19). On the other hand, extrinsic rewards 'might include getting good grades or a high salary, or the "benefit" could be avoiding punishment, like not being ticketed for exceeding the posted speed limit' (ibid.). Most learning in schools is, for example, extrinsically motivated (Chalip, Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984). In contrast, intrinsic motivation means that 'an activity is done for its own sake, even in the absence of some external reward' (Falk and Dierking, 2000: 20). Visiting a museum is an example of an intrinsically motivated activity. Of course, these two types of motivation are not mutually exclusive, nor are they good or bad in and of themselves. For example, visitors such as design experts who intend to derive special advantage from a design museum visit can receive extrinsic rewards from it. On the other hand, general public visitors tend to be intrinsically motivated when they are freely expressing themselves by doing something purely for the joy of doing it. This can also be said of meaning-making. Whether meaning-making occurs for intrinsic or extrinsic reasons, it has been shown to be a highly significant experience (e.g. Dewey, 1913; Gottfried, 1985; McCombs, 1991; Schiefele, 1991).

Interest, Curiosity and Flow

Over fifty years ago, psychologists began to realize that intrinsic motivation is a natural desire to learn (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura, 1989). However, it is complex to explain why everyone's intrinsic motivation is different. Many psychologists and educators view motivation as a somewhat ambiguous everyday term, of which interest is a component. Among them, psychologist U. Schiefele stresses that motivation and interest have complicated and multifaceted aspects

(Schiefele, 1991). It is important to clarify the notion of interest, because it is crucial to an understanding of what might motivate someone to make meanings from a museum exhibition, education programme or event (ibid.).

Interests, it seems, differ depending upon a range of variables, some of which are the result of individual experience, some of one's idiosyncratic personal history and some of which have a universal character: 'most people have an interest in food when hungry, in the opposite sex, in whatever gives them power or acclaim, in babies and pets' (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson, 1995: 149). However, beyond these universal areas of interest there are many others: for example, some people are attracted to design, others to ancient art history, some to science and others to literature. Most researchers distinguish this 'situational interest' from 'individual interest' (Krapp et al., 1992). Situational interest means the phenomenon whereby one encounters tasks or environments with a degree of uncertainty, challenge or novelty. These environmentally motivational states nourish curiosity and exploratory behaviour. In museums, visitors may attend to an exhibit with this situational interest, thereby influencing their knowledge or values even though it may have only a short-term effect (ibid.: 6). As a result, unobtrusive observation of how visitors allocate attention in an exhibition area has been used widely in museum visitor studies in order to assess visitor experience (e.g. Loomis, 1987). On the other hand, individual interests are characterized as having high levels of personal meaning (e.g. Dewey, 1913; Maehr and Archer, 1987; Schiefele, 1991). The pursuit of individual interest is usually associated with increased knowledge, positive emotions and the intrinsic desire to learn more (Krapp et al., 1992: 4-15). In *Interest and Effort in Education* (1913) Dewey describes the importance of individual interest in learning (see also Schiefele, 1991: 300).

Csikszentmihalyi is one investigator who has observed situations in which positive meaning-making takes place. He has observed that people exhibit a common set of behaviours when engaged in free-choice tasks for which extrinsic rewards are absent (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson, 1995). He calls this

common experiential state 'flow' experience, because it is generally described as a state of mind that is spontaneous, almost automatic, like the flow of a strong current (Csikszentmihalyi, 1985). Other research has also substantiated the importance of this positive state of mind for learning. For instance, McCombs states that 'in the absence of insecurity, (e.g. feeling afraid, being self-conscious, feeling incompetent), individuals are natural learners and enjoy learning. [...] Insecurities and other forms of negative cognitive conditioning interfere with or block the emergence of individuals' natural motivation to continually learn, grow, and develop in positive and self-determining ways' (McCombs, 1991: 119-120). In this way, negative mental states such as self-consciousness, depression, anxiety, loneliness or anger disrupt the flow experience, while positive mental states such as unselfconsciousness, joy, serenity, involvement and happiness encourage intrinsically motivated learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1985: 60).

In conclusion, both situational and individual interests are important factors in meaning-making that occur in and from museums. If a museum visit can result in interest or curiosity it is likely that intrinsic motivation will grow into an effective and meaningful experience. Of course, not all museum visitors attend an exhibition out of curiosity and interest. Even so, at some level, specialist visitors can be characterized as having something akin to these feelings.

Prior Knowledge

As the third notion which constitutes the personal context, Falk and Dierking suggest (2000: 26-30) that prior knowledge plays a prominent role in people's ability to make meaning. That is, in an exhibition people not only learn from the information provided by the museum, but also by recalling previously learned verbal or pictorial material and ideas.

Research on prior knowledge has forced a theoretical shift to approaching learning. For many years, it has been generally believed that meaningful learning takes

place when a learner is exposed to repetitive presentation of appropriate stimuli, the process of accumulating and absorbing information (Falk and Dierking, 2000: 27). However neuroscientists have proved that learning is fundamentally constructive. In addition to the process of accumulating and absorbing information, research into learning therefore started to accept new theories about how an individual deals with new information (see Strike and Posner, 1985; West and Pines, 1985). These theories propose that meaningful learning always stems from accumulative mental activity: activity in which the individual actively makes sense of and interprets the world on the basis of her/his pre-existing knowledge (see Bruner, 1990; Roschelle, 1995; Hein and Alexander 1998).

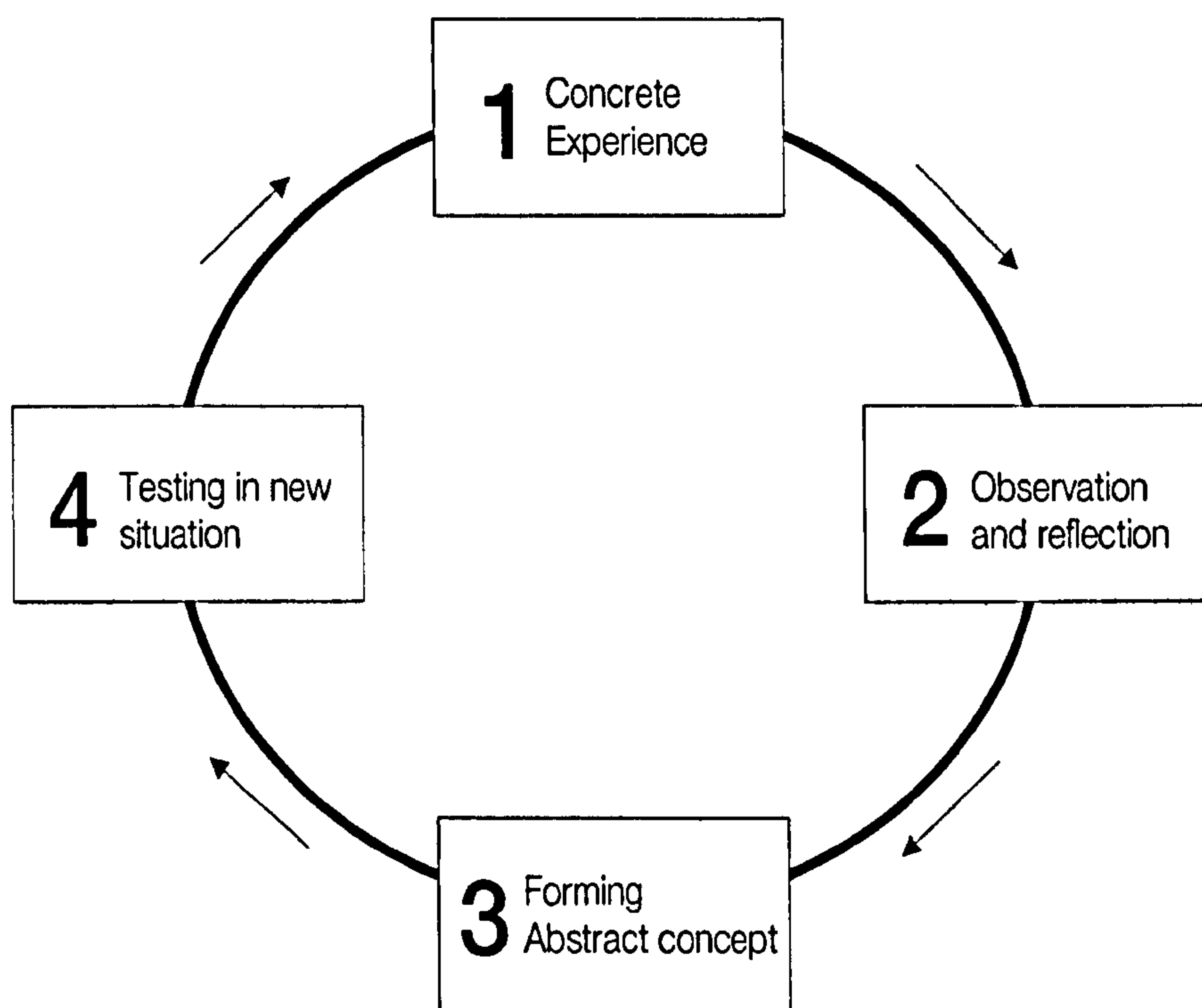
Consistent with this research, museum audience research on prior knowledge has also found that prior knowledge not only affects the way in which individuals approach and solve problems, but that it also significantly influences how people perceive an experience (see Silverman, 1995; Hein, 1998; Stainton, 2002). As an example, in a study of the National Museum of American History's major exhibition, *American Encounters* (Falk and Holland, 1994), interviews with visitors were conducted to explore the nature and extent of their meaning-making when viewing exhibits from Hispanic and Indian cultures. As a result, only a few visitors admitted that they had gained new information about Hispanic and American Indian peoples that made them change their existing understanding of them. During the interviews participant visitors gave a variety of examples of what they had learned from the exhibition, such as descriptions of museum objects and their history, as well as thematic details that illustrated Hispanic and American Indian peoples' struggles for their identity and economic survival. The exhibition influenced only a small group of the participants to change their mental structure and resulted in what they described as new knowledge. However, most of the other participants stated that the visit reaffirmed their prior knowledge rather than changing it. The findings from the interviews with visitors to this exhibition suggest that learning comprises incremental accumulation and reinforcement of prior knowledge that individuals construct.

However, prior knowledge sometimes prevents the acquisition of new knowledge. Researchers have revealed that the construction of new knowledge is a very slow, in fact, almost improbable event (see Roschelle, 1995). In his work, *Learning in Interactive Environments: Prior Knowledge and New Experience*, J. Roschelle (1995) maintains that the fairly negative view of these studies has resulted in part from inherent biases in the way psychologists and educators have interpreted data on prior knowledge. According to him, almost all prior knowledge research has focused on learning failure rather than learning success (Roschelle, *ibid.*: 37-51). Roschelle makes the criticism that these types of studies, which take a pessimistic view of meaningful learning, have fundamental problems of approach. According to him, these studies, mainly in cognitive psychology, did not consider the fact that the learners are also at least partially an artefact of the context in which they are situated (*ibid.*: 45-51). He goes on to claim that prior knowledge should be properly understood, not as a case of failure or success, rather as the raw material that fuels learning. Without denying the basic premise of what has been presented above – that learning often requires a reconstruction of prior knowledge, the mental accommodation of new ways of seeing, feeling and thinking about knowledge – it seems evident that meaning-making also occurs best when accompanied by supportive contexts.

Reflection

An extended dimension of the personal context, that will now be highlighted, is ‘reflection’. Reflection is a mental process which, applied to the act of meaningful learning, challenges learners to use critical thinking to explore presented information, make sense of one’s experiences within knowledge boundaries, question the validity of that experience, and interpret it against one’s view of self and world. This on-going process allows learners to link prior knowledge to their learning or work. Without reflection ‘learning is well short of the reorganization of thinking that “deep” learning requires’ (Ewell, 1997: 9). If a visitor’s meaning-making is a negative process it means that s/he has not been in

an effective learning situation. In a negative situation visitors can neither reflect on themselves nor can they incorporate information provided by the museum into their personal repertoire, which may be useful in the future. Therefore, when we use the word reflection we usually want to describe a process of thought that is meaningful as well as positive. The following Figure, 3.1, is a well-known way of describing this kind of active learning.



[Figure 3.1] D. A. Kolb's four stage learning cycle (Kolb, 1984)

The figure demonstrates, firstly, that a learner carries out an action and then sees the effect of the action on the situation. This gives a shape to the person's experience. The next step is not just seeing the effect of the action, but trying to understand things in the situation. At this point, if a similar situation occurs, s/he would also be able to reflect on preceding situations and predict what would happen. In the third step, these observations and reflections are combined to

form an abstract concept or 'theory' that has implications for future. The last phase is, then, to test the theory to be utilized in a new situation. The whole process can be described as iterative movement. In addition, all the steps may occur at one time. In this case, the process may be seen as a spiral of steps 'each of which is composed of a circle of planning action, and fact-finding about the result of the action' (Lewin, 1948: 34-35).

The concept of reflection is, in particular, critical to the meaning-making process of professionals in their learning. In *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), D. Schön, an influential American philosopher, in developing the theory and practice of reflective professional learning in the twentieth century, studied professional reflection in learning and practice and divided it into two types; 'reflecting in action' and 'reflecting on action'. According to Schön, the former refers to the way that we reflect on real, in-the-moment situations, whereas the latter is rather a formalized type of reflection that takes place after and outside the experience (Schön, *ibid.*: 33-34). He maintains that both types of reflection play a significant role in the learning process in that they encourage people to learn new information and thus influence their subsequent behaviour. Reflective practice refers to a mode that connects thought and action with reflection. It requires critical analysis of one's action with the aim of improving one's professional practice (Kottkamp, 1990: 182).

Schön's concept of reflection is valuable when examining the professional practice of 'designing'. However, if we investigate the design experts' practices, not in their work environment but in a museum, the approach to reflection may be slightly different. In their study on fieldwork education A. Alsop and S. Ryan suggest (1996) three metaphors to help understand reflection better, which involve looking back at events and asking questions (*retrospective*) and looking forward (*crystal ball gazing*) and then asking questions (*prospective*). They argue that retrospective reflection is like looking at a photograph or a video. It tells us about ourselves in the past (e.g. prior knowledge and personal experience) and this is most closely relevant to the meaning-making process. Prospective

reflection is like looking at a holiday brochure or surfing a museum website before we visit. We get ideas of what it might be like. It is almost like imposing ourselves into the imaginary picture. Using reflection of either sort, or a combination, helps us to make meanings in a museum or somewhere else that we intend to visit.

The Transaction Experience

As seen in the previous diagram, Kolb viewed (1984) reflection as the second and critical stage in the learning cycle. At this stage people take time to analyze the information provided, making sense of each experience or collection of experiences. In Kolb's diagram reflection occurs only in the early stage. However, the course of a thought process loops constantly while one is learning. In the meantime, experiential transaction also occurs. Roschelle reassess 'transaction' in *Learning in Interactive Environments: Prior Knowledge and New Experience* (1995), investigating Dewey's account of the learning process. 'Learners are not "in" a situation like paint is "in" a bucket' (Roschelle, 1995): 'rather experience is an active transaction that coordinates doing and undergoing' (Dewey, 1938). In most of life, we proceed smoothly from one transaction to the next, using and enjoying the objects of our experience.

However, experience is occasionally problematic. Dewey argues (1938) that experience includes negative emotions such as feeling confused, uncertain, incoherent or unable to act. We cannot adjust prior knowledge to meet the exigencies of the moment (ibid.). In this situation of problematic experience an individual is a free agent who achieves goals through her/his own interest, which Dewey calls 'inquiry' (1938). Inquiry is the reflective transformation of perception, thought, and action, and also re-unifies experience into a more satisfactory whole. The process of inquiry involves reflection on experience. That is, we apply tools like concepts, drawings and gestures to point to features of experience that are troublesome. At the same time we apply tools to project

possible solutions. Through these experiments both schemata and perception are slowly transformed to bring coherence, coordination and meaning to our transactions (ibid.).

Dewey claims (1938) that the process of inquiry involves psychological, social and physical interaction that gradually enables learners to transform the limits of prior knowledge mentioned above. Accordingly, in appropriate conditions, a learner situated in a problematic experience can undergo a transformation of prior knowledge. This transformation realigns her/his thinking, perception and activities into a more integrated and coherent whole (Roschelle, 1995: 44-45). In this way a problematic experience is engaged with prior knowledge, prior knowledge being invoked both in a problematic situation and in the new understanding.

The same can be said of looking at an exhibition. We actively direct our gaze and undergo a transformation of prior knowledge from the field where we belong. Experiential transactions have simple qualities that we can intuitively understand (e.g. they can be joyful, frightening, tasty, or harmonious) (Roschelle, 2007: 48). In transactions visitors are engaged with exhibits and with themselves in the situation and decide how to act properly towards others. This transaction process involves self-regard in an encounter in which the individual evaluates the situation against the values and attitudes that constitute her/his personal and social identity, and then decides how to react so that s/he maintains and displays a desired image of her/himself towards others. For instance, an exhibition that satisfies a visitor's expectation provides the visitor with a satisfactory image of her/himself. In contrast, if the museum experience results in an embarrassing situation the visitor's self-esteem and self-image will be reduced and s/he will conclude that the museum visit has given rise to a negative experience.

Transaction is, therefore, an integral part of the meaning-making process. It is also a continuing process, in that visitors reinforce their identity and self-image through the museum visit and interact with museum exhibits as well as other

people in the museum. Visitors stand in front of the display and make meaning during the exchange of the individual and the object, where the efficacy of the confrontation is weighed against past experiences (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 173-196). In the meantime, meanings emerge from the individual's activities in the transaction. The activities of the transaction include an evaluation of the object in its context, reflection of the individual's memories and application of their personal and community frames to meaning-making.

3.2.2 Physical Context Elements

Among the contexts presented here – the personal, the physical and the social – the physical context is the most frequently recalled and persistent aspect of visitor meaning-making and museum learning (Falk and Dierking, 1990; McManus, 1993). When visitors are requested to recall their museum experience, whether a day or two later or after twenty or thirty years, the most frequently recalled and commonly mentioned aspects relate to the physical context – recollections of what they saw, what they did and how they felt about those experiences (Falk and Dierking, 2000: 57-58). An individual's sense of who s/he is and what s/he represents is established socio-culturally and historically by the people s/he lives with and those who have lived before her/him, as well as aspects of non-self, such as the surrounding physical contexts.

However, in spite of the undeniable existence of the physical context, established learning research has neglected the importance of the physical context in its effort to define the process of learning (Ceci and Roazzi, 1994). In most of the literature the main stream of psychological theories in cognitive development has underestimated the significance of the physical context, whereas it has emphasized the role of basic cognitive and biological processes (see e.g. Cole and Scribner, 1974; Sternberg, 1985; Irvine and Berry, 1988). Even constructivist psychologists have de-emphasized the significance of the physical context (Ceci

and Roazzi, 1994). It is disappointing to see that a phenomenon is situation-specific when exploring universal truths: the emphasis on this position was mentioned by the psychologist U. Neisser when he maintained that perception and action occur in continuous dependence on the environment and, therefore, cannot be understood without an understanding of the environment (Neisser, 1976: 183).

Since the neurophysiologist G. Edelman's model of neural development was introduced (Edelman, 1987) the significance of physical contexts on cognition has been increasingly recognized, for instance, in the areas of memory research (e.g. Ceci and Leichtman, 1992; Ceci and Roazzi, 1994) and in particular situated cognition (e.g. Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989) as well as in the understanding of museum-based learning (Falk and Dierking, 1992). These areas have something in common, indicating that the need to make meaning of the physical setting is innate to humans and that the mechanics of aspects of motivation dependent on the physical environment is deeply embedded within our psyche. They also find meaning-making to be rooted in the realities of the physical world.

Similarly, it can be said that meaning-making in a museum also occurs when the physical context stimulates mental motivation. Meanings are made through the different levels of resources that are realized both physically (through the design and layout of the building, for instance) and discursively (for example, through narratives which the museum creates). Therefore, from now on this study will address how various levels of the physical context influence the overall visitor's meaning-making in the museum. For the sake of clarity the levels will be introduced and dealt with separately. To begin with, some aspects of the museum as a physical context will be addressed; firstly, the notion of museums as 'texts' and then the notion of the museum as 'place'. Through these approaches it will be argued that physical settings impact on the institutional level of meanings (that is the meaning of the museum) and that the institutional level of meanings also impacts on personal meaning-making.

Understanding the Micro Level of Physical Context

From the review of museum audience research (*Chapter 2*) it is clear that museum professionals have utilized the physical context in museums in order to produce outstanding results from exhibition and display design. A well-designed exhibition or a well-thought-out physical context stimulates visitor experiences. Likewise, meaning-making in a museum is not only facilitated by museum texts and exhibition design but also requires thoughtful design and appropriate texts. Museum space is formed largely through these components and when designed carefully and thoughtfully the space becomes the quintessential and appropriate physical setting for learning and meaning-making.

However, while ‘much progress has been made in designing the physical and aesthetic aspects of exhibition spaces, how the physical design affects the motivational, perceptual, affective, and learning potentials of unguided visitors in the informal museum environment is less well understood by museum and exhibit planners’ (Screven, 1986: 109). In approaching museum texts and exhibition design as a micro level of physical context elements, an equally important view is that the museum itself is a powerful and communicative resource and that all the written and verbal texts that take place in the museum can be read. This view has been the predominant form of pedagogy within the museum and has provided the definition of the museum experience as producing and communicating knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).

At the same time, the notion of museums as ‘texts’ in terms of physical context stimulate the development of exhibition and display planning symbolically, such as in the ways in which a particular exhibition can stimulate specific types of visitor interaction, can prioritize some meanings in the exhibition rather than others, and can draw a picture of what the subject matter is. These ‘texts’ provide meanings with various semiotic resources. In considering exhibitions and institutions as meaning-making texts, previous studies have attempted a similar exploration (see e.g. O’Toole 1994; Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Ravelli

2000; O'Toole and Butt 2003; Pang 2004; van Leeuwen 2005). The textual approach represents a move toward a field of enquiry that examines meaning-making and also has an impact on the meaning-making framework. While many of the textual approaches to this broader sense of meaning-making 'remain mysterious' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 4) their applications, nevertheless, become more critical to understanding the visitor experience than ever before (see e.g. Ravelli, 2006).

The approach to the notion of a micro level of the physical context aligns with Falk and Dierking's attention to the physical context of the learning environment with the additional emphasis that every apparently physical phenomenon (such as a building) is itself a meaningful construct (Falk and Dierking, 2000). Unlike this approach which focuses on an understanding of the physical context, pessimistic discourses have also emerged out of philosophical and socio-cultural considerations of the museum as place. One of these discourses is the so-called 'narrative of loss' or 'non-place' - the contemporary discourse on place, which considers the loss of meaning in places (Jacobs and Appleyard, 1987; Augé, 1995).

An essential and fundamental account of the analysis of the concept of non-place was suggested by M. de Certeau, a French cultural historian (1985). The notion of non-place was then theorized in detail by M. Augé in *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995). Augé defines non-places as 'spaces of transition absent of identity, human relationships, or the traces of history' (1995: 35). These places that have the conceptual label of non-place always discourage an individual's meaning-making. In this context, Augé suggests that contemporary museum exhibitions can be defined as non-places. Likewise, researchers considering non-places in sociological research see that individual meaning-making cannot occur in such a solipsistic vacuum.

In line with the concept of non-place, there is another pessimistic view of meaning-making in museums in terms of the physical context. In *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, T. Bennett introduced his observations on

the birth of the museum through a discussion of Foucault's concept of 'heterotopias' (Foucault, 1967), arguing, 'in line with Foucault (1967), that museums, as heterotopias, arose from uncertainty and incongruity and developed as distinct sites of social ordering' (Bennett, 1995: 159). Bennett views the tension within heterotopias as that between chaos and order and maintains that museums emerged 'as spaces of representation from the chaos of the cabinet of curiosities and its mode of ordering that sought to represent through spectacle and wonder' (ibid.: 159). He also draws 'a distinction between "geometric" space and "anthropological space" in the sense of "existential" space, the scene of an experience of relations with the world on the part of a being essentially situated "in relation to a milieu"' (ibid.: 173). Then, Bennett defines the loss of proper connection between places and the loss of meaning in relation to a politically constituted community with shared values (ibid.: 129). However, Bennett's comments about heterotopias, while illuminating, are somewhat brief and underdeveloped.

In spite of these pessimistic views on the museum experience, the view that people visit the museum with a great deal of prior knowledge and experience and leave with meanings made from the museum experience is still widely accepted. In this sense, a question such as "how does the prior knowledge of visitors combine with the museum experience?" requires understanding not only of what happens within the walls of the museum but also, and equally importantly, what happens beyond those walls. Wherever they are happening, subsequent experiences contribute considerably to visitors' resultant learning from the museum - some experiences strengthening that learning and others not. To raise the question, therefore, one must look dispassionately at the reality that museums are situated in part of a larger infrastructure of society, especially an educational one.

Understanding the Macro Level of Physical Context

In order to understand fully the meaning-making process that occurs as a consequence of the museum experience it is, therefore, necessary to situate museums within a larger context and to appreciate the fact that museums, as educational institutions, are part of a larger educational infrastructure. In general, the educational infrastructure ranges from elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools; libraries; print media such as newspapers, magazines and books; broadcast media such as radio, television, film and video, to non-profit-making organizations with an educational mission, such as community-based organizations and museums of all types; and recently and increasingly the Internet. According to the assumption proposed by museum researchers M. St. John and D. Perry, museums can be considered as part of the educational infrastructure that 'provides critically important support to a wide range of economic and social activities' (John and Perry, 1993: 60). The museum educational infrastructure provides structures and conditions and creates educational opportunities that are necessary to the functioning of everyday life. John and Perry stress the role of museums as part of the educational infrastructure, maintaining that 'just as the economic health of a nation depends on the strength of its transportation and utilities infrastructure, so too the educational level of the nation depends upon its educational infrastructure' (ibid.) in that the educational infrastructure assists the educational activities of communities and constructs a network of resources and information to support the learner.

Among recent related studies, research carried out by J. Falk, P. Brooks and R. Amin is interesting in the sense that it explores how the California Science Center was situated within the educational infrastructure of the large city of Los Angeles (2001). From face-to-face interviews in shopping malls and libraries, and a random sample telephone survey, Brooks and Amin demonstrated that the public does, indeed, piece together its understanding (in this case, understanding of science) from a wide range of resources (Brooks and Amin, 2001: 93-114). The research also found that adults refer to the following resources, in the following

order of importance, to keep up with science; books (not for school), television (public, commercial, and cable), newspapers and magazines, on-the-job experiences, museums, and to a more limited degree radio and the Internet (ibid.: 110). From these data the study concluded that the general public perceives museums as a significant but 'middle-tier' resource (ibid.: 111). According to the research more than two-thirds of the public were reported to have utilized some type of museum as a science resource, even though most people do not depend on museums as their primary resource for keeping up with science.

Brooks's and Amin's research findings suggest that the decision to go to a museum is about education, but not solely about that. Moreover, they suggest that museum-going is both an educational and a recreational activity, a personally enriching experience and an opportunity for social interaction and bonding. In summary, museums are not bounded educational structures, but also social and cultural structures. In other words, the museum experience is composed of various contexts that encourage visitors to make meanings. For that reason, in order to understand visitors' meaning-making, information can be drawn from many resources.

3.2.3 Socio-Cultural Context Elements

Before embarking on an analysis of the meaning-making of the design profession in a design museum it is worth considering how the museum experience becomes part of our personal repertoire. To begin to answer this question it is helpful to recall some essential facts about why people care about some experiences but not others and choose to learn some things but not other things. "What makes us select what to memorize and what to skip over? Literally, how do we come to be attracted by some things and not others?" Of course, some of the things we choose to learn strongly depend on what we face in the physical world, as previously indicated, concerning the physical context. However, more

importantly, humans make meaning in interaction with other people (Falk and Dierking, 2000: 82). In this respect, the social production of meaning will be more critical than ever. It is no accident that meaning-making includes a strong socio-cultural component. Consideration will now be given to the view that humans and human learning are most fundamentally shaped by other humans - that is, what we refer to broadly as the socio-cultural context. The thesis understands the social world as a fundamental building block of the meaning-making process.

In order to explore the implications of elements of the socio-cultural context consideration will be given to the way in which museums have accepted various perspectives of knowledge, and to how the concept of interpretive community has emerged in the socio-cultural context of museum meaning-making.

Changing Notions of Knowledge

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the dominant view of knowledge in the museum was a positivist one – that is, that ‘knowledge was absolute, certain, factual, objective and value free’ (Fraser, 2004: 36). Investigating museum epistemology in his work on meaning-making in museums, J. W. Fraser, whose model of meaning-making will be referred to in Chapter 4 section 4.4, states that at that time the idealized museum displayed its collections symbolically, ‘showing the structure and objectivity of knowledge’ (ibid.). According to him, ‘the Science Museum in London and the Royal Museum in Edinburgh for instance were ordered by scientific disciplines [...] and were arranged to elucidate both the wonders of science and the correct descriptions of the laws of the universe’ (ibid.). This idea dominated western societies and expressed their sense of dominance over other peoples of the world. Their sense of superiority in science and technology seemed undoubtable, as did that in western art. ‘Rational investigation using the Linnaean or Darwinian models provided support for the view that humans are superior to other creatures and that Europeans were superior

to their colonies' (Duncan, 1995, cited in Fraser, 2004: 37). The exhibits in European museums provided a rational description of progress and established that superiority. In this way museums existed for the conveyance of knowledge on the basis of scientific and historical fact. A similar trend was observable in art galleries in the way that they displayed evidence of the aesthetic achievements of Europeans and the superiority of western art. The positivist view of knowledge was underpinned by the premise that there was an underlying order to nature that could be known and that aesthetic values were based on universal truths.

However, in the beginning of the twentieth century a new sociological concept, which had influence on the contemporary views of the nature of knowledge, was introduced. This concept altered the fixed idea that the truth of a statement depends on correspondence to some objective reality. Since that time context has constituted an important domain of the sociology of knowledge. Contextual approaches to knowledge, such as social, historical and cultural, then began to adopt pragmatism. The sociology of knowledge in terms of context was developed mainly by American pragmatist philosophers such as J. Dewey and G. H. Mead. In particular, Dewey supported (1938) the idea that knowledge rests more on practical experience, and applied the concept to the characteristics of all facets of human behaviour, than on a theoretical description of knowledge. From the pragmatic point of view the human mind is considered as part of a complex of practices in which humans are always already involved and mental attitudes are believed to have a significant effect on the transformation of knowledge into action. Pragmatists believe that knowledge and experience are coterminous: 'they arise and develop simultaneously in human acts' (McCarthy, 1997: 4). These acts occur between individuals in society and among groups in communities. Mead argued (1934) that people do not just passively respond to others' responses, but continually interact with others who do not simply accept their reactions. Instead, people assess others' responses and construct them into a unified whole in the mind. This is the societal process that Mead defines (*ibid.*). Mead maintains that just as the self is a social product so is the mind (*ibid.*).

Throughout the twentieth century, in contrast to previous belief that knowledge is finite and fixed, researchers in different academic disciplines have increasingly perceived that knowledge is closely connected to societal processes and that knowledge is defined as a social product of the prevailing interests, values, culture and beliefs that determine standards of quality and criteria of knowledge. Accordingly, ideas about the interpretation of knowledge and meanings that arise from knowledge have also been stressed in this changed view. Researchers have come to regard the interpretation of knowledge as persisting in physical and semantic artefacts within a culture (Fraser, 2004: 44-46). They believe there is a dynamic relationship between embodied meaning and knowledge. This close relationship between the interpretation of knowledge and assigned meaning challenges the 'body-mind dualism' introduced by the French philosopher, R. Descartes (1996), 'where meaning, as something purely mental, is ontologically distinguished from and epistemologically divorced from the physical world' (Stahl, 2003: 523). This challenge holds that 'meaning is neither purely deducible from the object itself nor exclusively constructed by the audience (by consensus), but that there is a dynamic relationship. From this point of view, describing an artefact a priori (per se) is not possible. It is only possible to interpret the meaning 'situationally' (Allert, 2004: ch. 2.3). This changed understanding of knowledge, that sees meaning as acculturated and situated, will be taken forward and expanded on in the following section.

Interpretive Communities

This chapter has examined and moved from a positivist view of knowledge to a situated view of knowledge and has maintained that the creation of knowledge and meaning depends on culture and social environment. Any culture shares meanings within society so that people can live together and understand each other. As a result, people in the same culture create signs, symbols and systems to communicate with one another and these signifying systems provide society with shared meanings. Of course, objects in a museum – including text, display,

lighting, exhibits, space, location and architecture – form one of the languages or signifying systems that museums use to convey their meanings. In this sense, the museum is a semiotic space that frames objects by allowing them to be contextualized in displays where they are related to and juxtaposed with other objects.

From a positivist view of knowledge, the museum provided an ideological frame for objects and their interpretations. However, contemporary studies have begun to pay attention to the way in which visitors relate to each other and to the objects in the museum (see e.g. Hensel 1987; McManus 1985, 1989, 1993; Silverman 1990; Perin 1992). In these works, which have roots in social psychology and in cognitive science, researchers provide frames for the building of social relationships among visitors. ‘Framing’ is an inevitable process of selective influence over the individual's meaning-making. An individual's frame in this sense encourages certain interpretations and aids individual visitors to understand and respond to events. On the basis of an individual's life experiences and culture s/he will develop a series of behaviours, values and expectations, which become a frame of reference referred to in Chapter 1 section 1.1). This frame of reference operates on her/his new experiences. In the light of her/his culture and life experiences s/he can frame new experiences.

If members of a community have experiences in common and have established a shared culture they will also share similar symbolic systems that they deploy as interpretive strategies in making meaning. In this way, people from similar socio-cultural backgrounds are sometimes referred to as an ‘interpretive community’ (Fish, 1980).⁵ This concept is significant in understanding museum

⁵ The phrase ‘interpretive community’ was used by the American literary theorist, S. Fish, in an article of 1976 entitled *Interpreting the Variorum*. It refers to those who share the same strategies for reading texts and assigning meaning. In his work *Is There a Text in This Class?*, S. Fish (1980) asserts that meaning is not inherent in the text, but is brought into being through the interpretive strategies used by the reader. However, this does not mean that meanings are individually subjective. They are just controlled by the strategies of the relevant

visitors because 'it implies that an individual's interpretation is a shared occurrence and that while each individual makes sense of their own experience, the interpretive strategies they use emerge through prior social and cultural events' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 122). In her study of adult museum visitors and their responses to the Native Americans' Hall in the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, C. Perin maintains (1992: 192-220) that variations in meaning are strongly dependent on characteristics of visitors' membership of different interpretive communities. That is to say, groups of people who share particular culture and life experiences or interpretive methods tend to make similar meanings. Perin describes visitor meaning-making as 'taking place through repertoires of frames of reference that are constituted systems of meanings, ideals, myths, beliefs and prior understanding' (ibid.: 195).

In her work *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (2000), Hooper-Greenhill generalizes the concept of interpretive communities within museum studies. She maintains that when visitors view museum displays their private interpretations are reconciled through the communities to which they belong. In summary, while the process of meaning-making seems to be individual the meanings that individuals make are not independent outcomes but are those that are allowable for the interpretive community. In response, interest in museum meaning-making has grown and the significance of interpretive communities and prior knowledge has attracted considerable attention from current museum researchers. This has started to change the conceptual approach to learning in the museum, enabling museum researchers to consider museum learning within a broader social analysis framework.

Furthermore, Hooper-Greenhill's work (2000) reminds us that the museum's familiar general public is in fact a differentiated group. In applying the notion of interpretive communities to museum visitors Hooper-Greenhill takes the concept

interpretive community. According to his definition, meaning doesn't exist in the object or exhibition in a museum, but depends on viewers or visitors.

of target group (the marketing term that enables the division of museum visitors on the basis of demographic variables such as age, disability or life-stage) a step further, to focus on the interpretive strategies that every visitor uses in their meaning-making of the museum experience. The idea of interpretive communities also takes the notion of differentiation a step further by focusing on the varying strategies of interpretation that visitors use to make sense of their experience of the museum.

In acknowledging the concept of interpretive communities, visitors' meaning-making can be seen as an active process whereby visitors construct their own experience of the visit according to their own strategies of interpretation, and in that way communication within the museum can be understood as a social interaction between the visitor groups and between visitors and museum staff. Museum staff as well as visitors are influenced by their interpretive communities in this sense. The interpretive strategies of both of groups are based on the interpretive goals of solidifying, for instance, the personal biographies of the viewers and of the exhibition arrangers, their status in society, and their cultural competence. In particular, the museum's interpretation of any object in its exhibition seeks to use these interpretive strategies in considering the interpretive communities. Likewise, research into interpretive communities and a range of preferred strategies lead to an understanding of cultural practices within interpretive communities.

These 'interpretive communities can be identified where the same systems of intelligibility are being used, the same categories of understanding are employed, and the same significant entities are recognized' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999: 6). The same systems of intelligibility mean shared common frameworks for making sense of subjects among members of the same interpretive communities. For instance, a group of professional designers share some interpretive ways of making sense of what is significant and what is trivial in their field. They speak a common language and share common frameworks for making sense of their subject-matter, that is, systems of intelligibility. At a micro level, however,

every individual, although in the same group, situates her/himself at a variety of levels. The interpretive strategies are still valid if these individuals are encouraged to frame and formulate meanings within a specific social context, as well as to shape institutional frameworks that support the system of intelligibility by creating the social order which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Museum professionals, therefore, should consider the social consciousness of differentiated visitor groups, who operate within their own interpretive communities to frame their expectations of the exhibition, but also make meanings through their personal interpretive strategies. Any attempt to make sense out of learning in design museums also requires an effort to understand the interpretive communities embedded in the social contexts at both micro and macro levels. The concept of interpretive communities, as an alternative frame with which to consider designer visitors from the field of design, will be examined in the chapters that discuss the empirical research.

3.3 Theories of Interaction and Meaning-making

3.3.1 Overview

As stated in Chapters 1 and 2, a critical meaning-making approach has been adopted in order to understand designer visitors' experiences in a design museum and this approach will also be directed to the empirical research in the latter part of this study. Before proceeding to the empirical research, two contemporary social theories will be discussed: theories of interaction and theories of practice. These will be discussed in this chapter and in Chapter 4 respectively. Examining these theories may be useful as both provide an insight into how to approach meaning-making in a design museum. Although the two approaches are based on

different theoretical traditions, they have something in common in that both regard meaning-making in a museum as involving social contexts. Both theories also, on the one hand, suppose that meaning is structured by the objective conditions in which the individual develops, but, on the other hand, acutely point out the limitations of objective conditions in meaning-making.

A theoretical approach using theories of interaction will now be discussed in connection with meaning-making. This thesis does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of interaction theories, rather aims to discuss these theories in terms of meaning-making. For that reason a brief account of theories of interaction and symbolic interactionists' applications of these theories to concepts including role-taking, and the museum visit as a particular type of aesthetic drama and ritual, will be discussed. The meaning-making process in a museum will then be examined in terms of the theories.

3.3.2 Symbolic Interactionists' Notions of Meaning-making

One of the theoretical orientations in reading the socio-cultural context in museum meaning-making is derived from an interpretive school of thought, 'symbolic interactionism'. Symbolic interactionism has developed especially from the work of the American social psychologist, G. H. Mead. In 1934, in his book *Mind, Self, and Society*, Mead argued for a non-individualistic view of people's behaviour. Mead maintained that people are social products and that selves are created in interaction with others. H. Blumer, a student and devotee of Mead, outlined the term, symbolic interactionism and put forward three core principles of the theory; 'meaning', 'language', and 'thought' (Blumer, 1969). Blumer argues that the first principle in the development of ideas surrounding symbolic interactionism is that humans interact with people and the physical world on the basis of the meanings that they have given to those people or artefacts. In this way symbolic interactionism assumes meaning as a core factor in human behavior.

The second principle in the development of symbolic interactionism is 'language'. Symbolic interactionists believe that language enables humans to negotiate meaning through symbols. At this point, Mead's influence on Blumer becomes apparent, in the sense that Mead believed that naming assigned meaning and that naming was, therefore, fundamental for organizing society and measuring the boundaries of knowledge (Mead, 1934). Meaning emerges from the social interaction that occurs between individuals. Its intrinsic value is not embedded in objects. Instead, it is formed in negotiations between individuals through the use of language. This is of secondary importance in symbolic interactionism. The last principle is 'thought', or the idea that we interpret something in different ways through our own thinking process. During a conversation, through the thought process, we take on the role of the other and try to understand different points of view. These three principles – meaning, language and thought - influence the learning of individuals and lead to the 'creation of the individuals' selves and socializations into a larger community' (Griffin, 1997: 32) in which the individual lives in a variety of contexts.

Symbolic interactionists emphasize the socio-cultural context since they regard learning as a type of shared meaning-making process and stress collaborative aspects of learning in their theories. In symbolic interactionist terms, thus, meaning-making is 'not understood as a psychological process that takes place in individuals' minds, but as an essentially social activity that is conducted jointly, collaboratively, by a community, rather than by individuals who happen to be co-located' (Stahl, 2003: 523). That is to say 'meaning-making practices do not merely take place within a "context of joint activity," as actions might take place within the four walls of a room. Rather, the context of joint activity is those practices, the practices form the context. Similarly, the meaning is not merely transferred from mind to mind by the activities, but the meaning is constructed by and exists as those activities. Similarly, artefacts are not simply instruments for conveying independent meanings, but are themselves embodiments of meaning' (Stahl, *ibid.*: 524).

Goffman (although he claimed not to have been a symbolic interactionist) is also recognized as one of the major contributors to this perspective. E. Goffman was an American social psychologist whose work offers a new paradigm for interpreting modern society. Goffman especially concentrates on the circumstances in which people spend most of their lives, for instance, in intimate activities involving others, where these may be day to day social situations within formal structures, such as jobs or schools, or uncommon social situations, such as accidents, weddings and funerals. He provides guidelines on how to examine these social situations and develops the metaphor of the reality of social interaction (Goffman, 1959). In the guidelines he employs a 'dramaturgical approach' to social interaction (ibid.: 240).

For symbolic interactionists from Mead to Goffman, meanings emerge from and are negotiated and transformed by interpretation. For these theorists human beings' actions also come from the interpretation of the meaning of events. In this way, symbolic interactionism is of importance in understanding not only personal meaning, but also collective behaviour and the organizational communications of larger communities (Howard and Hollander, 1997).

The concept of interpretive community previously discussed in the section on social context can be also supported by symbolic interactionist sociology. Of great theoretical and practical importance, here, is the fact that symbolic interactionists consider contemporary society as a functionally differentiated society. They argue that meaning arises out of the social interactions that people have with each other. Accordingly, meaning is 'not inherent in objects, but negotiated through the use of language, hence the term symbolic interactionism' (Babbie, 1983: 45). In a symbolic interactionist approach, therefore, the concept of interpretive community implies that meaning is not made exclusively by the individual, but is contextualized by collective experiences in which the individual shares and with which the individual interacts. That is to say, people 'negotiate meanings and social relationships' (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001: 10) 'within the interpretive community frame' (Goffman, 1974) in which they are involved.

Thus, these theorists have aimed to uncover the subjective meaning of human behaviour and place particular emphasis on the role of interpretive community in our interactions with others.

Role-taking

Therefore symbolic interactionism should be understood as a paradigm of social psychology that proposes that the self is constructed through communication with others. This way of understanding the self reminds us of an evolutionary perspective of public historian, L. Silverman, who states that ‘in every realm of activity we seek and make opportunities to create, express, and affirm who we believe ourselves to be – our sense of self’ (Silverman, 2004: 233). However, ‘once [we] see that the ability to access and use your skills varies a lot with the context, [we] realize how discontinuous your sense of self and your abilities really are’ (Gallagher, 1993: 12). In line with this understanding of the sense of self, meaning-making can be regarded as a significant process that enables an individual understand and, as far as possible, distinguish the self from non-self (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Leinhardt and Gregg 2002; Leinhardt, Tittle and Knutson 2002; Falk 2006).

Mead advanced the concept of the self ‘not as a substance, but as a process’ (Mead, 1934). He deconstructed the self into the ‘I’ and ‘Me’ (ibid.). ‘I’ refers to the reflective inner self and ‘Me’ represents the more explicit social self (ibid.: 175). Both parts of the self merge together through the process whereby ‘the self *takes on social roles*’ (ibid.: 176) in that the reflective ‘I’ leads the active ‘Me’ during the interaction. This concept of ‘role-taking’ was first created by Mead. For Mead, the self is part of a larger social process in which interactions with others are rehearsed by an individual. According to his definition, role-taking is important in understanding the self because a person sees her/himself as an individual, but perceives their role in relation to others (ibid.). He also maintains that the process of role-taking can be regarded as reflective thinking in that the

process shapes the structure of the self by stimulating individuals to reflect on themselves (ibid.: 140).

The seeds of other symbolic interactionists' work on the presentation of self and roles in everyday life can also be found in Goffman's work. One of the earliest pioneers of role theory, Goffman, pursued the idea of role-taking but formulated it in a more dynamic way. Following Goffman, it has been understood that what people do in social situations is 'performance'. In his work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman states that the performance of an individual is: 'all activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers' (ibid.: 22). More than just presenting oneself to others, as in Goffman's pioneering description, roles have also come to be understood as an aspect of the social construction of knowledge. According to Goffman, the roles that people construct are not prescribed but constituted by the individual (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, role-taking is not only employed for the self to construct and respond to reflective thinking, but is also used as the means of making meaning of a situation. By taking roles people can act self-consciously, understanding how their actions will be perceived by others.

Roles also provide people with an organizing framework so that their actions can meet the needs of the social setting (Goffman, 1974). Predicting the needs of the social setting is important for people in deciding how to act in a particular situation and how to be consistent with roles. Thus, people within roles choose predictive actions and interact with others and with themselves. In this way in every decision-making situation individuals make sense of the behaviour of others as well as that of themselves. In addition, with experience they can predict the behaviour of others and that of themselves as well. The roles that are acceptable within the organizing framework mentioned previously, as well as within a situation, are thus perceived as appropriate to people and give them a point of view from which they can make sense of their own behaviour as well as that of others, and provide them with the ability to perceive who they are in a situation

and how they fit into it.

The interaction-theoretical approach is helpful to investigations into the behavior of designer visitors in the design museum, as we can see how the museum provides the individual with possible roles - things that visitors can enact as well as desire. However, theories of interaction maintain that people are not locked into a particular role structure, defined and limited by the museum, but have the capacity to create new ones. Visitors may use roles within museum settings as a resource from which to make meaning of the situation and may transact with museum objects as well as with other visitors. Through these transactions they may attempt to modify or reinforce their self-esteem if their emotional response is a positive one.

The interpretive community, dealt with earlier in this chapter, also encourages designer visitors to define their roles and to consider the extent to which they will embrace those roles. Individual visitors may incorporate a variety of roles in relation to a single museum visit. For instance, at an external level a visitor might take the role of a mother or designer, while at an internal level she might take values, ideals and knowledge from her interpretive community. These levels in turn could indicate individual self and social self. In this way the concept of roles is associated with the interpretive strategies that individuals share. That is to say, roles are not only a resource that provide individuals with a sense of how to behave in a particular situation, but an externally provided set of requirements that attempt to prescribe the way in which one should behave. Therefore, the notion of role-taking indicates that visitors not only make meanings from aspects of their identities, but also construct meanings through the process of taking roles in society and interpretive communities.

The Museum Visit as a Particular type of Aesthetic Drama and Ritual

As a series of inter-connections between the self and others, through which meaning emerges, meaning-making is, in this section, situated in terms of what Goffman has defined as the 'social drama', the cultural domain of the actors (Goffman, 1959, 1974). Goffman has taken the metaphor of a drama as the framework for his dramaturgical model for social life in the late 1950's. Using metaphors of the stage, for instance, actor, performance, script, and repertoire, he has described how people use social situations to give performances according to a script and as if the social stage was a setting for their performance (Goffman, 1959). He initially focused on those situations where social meaning is attributed to a person in ordinary everyday interaction. Later he went on to apply his theories to social groupings and institutions 'any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place' (ibid.: 239). Goffman's dramaturgical model (1959, 1974) shows how the persona, on and off a stage and with various audiences, is manifested through performance and roles. According to his model, actors give meaning to themselves, to others and to their situation through the drama. Interactions, which are seen to be performances before observers, deliver impressions to others according to the actor's goals. In this context, information is exchanged to confirm identity and the significance of behaviour.

Other theorists of symbolic interaction have also used the metaphor of drama to describe the way that individuals interrelate in society. V. W. Turner, a British social anthropologist who developed the study of social dramas in diverse areas, elucidates the characteristics of social drama with regard to the social tension that emerges from the public sphere when the interests and attitudes of groups and individuals are in conflict with one another (Turner, 1974, 1982, 1986). He maintains that performance allows the resolution of tensions by providing strategies to reconcile tensions in which 'loyalties, values and ideals of the interpretive communities, the power, influence and support for the individual actors and the purpose of the drama, all play significant parts' (Turner, 1986: 45-

56).

In a similar manner, the museum visit has been compared to a social drama where the visitors move through the scenes and are not static in relation to objects and other visitors. For instance, C. Duncan begins by comparing the idea of the art museum visit to a 'ritual' drama. In her work, *Civilizing Rituals Inside Public Art Museums* (1995), Duncan examines specific museum visits in the United States, Britain and France and claims that individual visitors, as actors in a social drama, passively perform roles that are indicative of proper things prescribed by the museum. According to Duncan, the 'script' in the drama could be said to be written by the museum professional in the way that curators choose the objects, write the labels and with the help of designers create the displays (Duncan, 1995). In that sense, visitors must perform properly in accordance with the expectations of the script. If they fail in this they may be regarded as 'out of character' and will be considered to fail to make meanings. Visitors are not free merely to act in the way that they want, as society only allows them to play certain roles and not others. Hence, they are required to present social selves and different roles in proper contexts.

For symbolic interactionists the presentation of self in a museum is also a social process of meaning-making through the museum ritual. For instance, Goffman maintains, along with the metaphor of a drama, that a ritual provides symbolic meaning to participants and organizes the presentation of self (Goffman, 1974). According to Goffman, all social encounters result from rituals (ibid.). When a ritual occurs, individuals are united in an encounter that has mutual agreements, common understandings and shared emotions. The ritual interactions result in the subsequent meaning-making of those who are involved in them. For symbolic interactionists museum visits, therefore, would also be a kind of ritual practice that 'visitors engage with intellectually, emotionally and aesthetically, in transactions with ritualized objects through the frames of their interpretive communities' (Fraser, 2004: 133).

Through museum visits museum curators and educators also expect visitors to reinforce and strengthen the communities' collective knowledge and position in the world and, in a more general sense, to keep the memory of its most significant and widely accepted values and beliefs. Thus, the concept of interpretive communities encourages curators and museum educators to develop museum ritual programmes that could give members of interpretive communities the opportunity to use their preferred and existing areas of knowledge. The members of interpretive communities could then celebrate and idealize meaningful experiences from the ritual programmes. In this way, the museum ritual can produce a type of meaning process through which participants shape and share subsequent behaviour, thought and feelings.

However, critical to this process is the need for participants to have a mutual focus and shared mood in a specific situation. Goffman describes (1974: 43–44) the specific situation into which participants enter as a particular feature of the interaction, which composes the mutual focus for the ritual that emerges. He then suggests that 'keying' is the resource that enables participants to perceive each other in this interaction (ibid.:44). Once a key is provided to them, participants can construct a structure of the interaction process where ritual is activated. Furthermore, with the help of keys, participants not only adopt ritualistic behaviours but also make meanings. These keys provide participants with a type of framework for interpreting the world and deciding what aspects of the self should be displayed. By using the framework museum visitors can also shape the expectations that participants have from other visitors and exhibits.

In addition Goffman claims that rituals teach perception, feelings, dignity, pride, consideration, self-attachment and self expression (ibid.: 111). The more formal the ritual the more it will constrain the participants' behaviours and self presentations. People are therefore constructed from requirements established in the ritual organization of social encounters (ibid.: 111-112). This issue calls attention to the idea of the museum as a ritual space that reinforces the power, authority and status of museums as cultural symbols within society. In museum

ritual, Duncan points out that ‘museums resemble older ritual sites not so much because they borrow from past architecture references but because they too are settings for rituals. Like most ritual space, museum space is carefully marked off and culturally designated as reserved for a special quality of attention – in this case for contemplation and learning’ (Duncan, 1995: 10).

3.4 Chapter Summary

The aim of the inquiry into designer visitor meaning-making in this chapter has been to discover the qualities (or contexts) that compose the museum experience. The chapter has reviewed a series of books by Falk and Dierking, who claim that the museum visit is an individually constructed interaction between the personal, social, and physical contexts. Analysis of these writings demonstrates that various contexts encourage visitors’ meaning-making in specific ways and that understanding meaning-making in museums requires an understanding of these contexts ‘before the visit, during the visit, and after the visit’ (Falk, Heimlich and Bronnenkant, 2008: 56).

Having reviewed these personal and physical contexts the chapter then focused on social contexts for meaning-making. In considering these social contexts, the chapter first investigated changing notions of knowledge, as it is essential to find out what knowledge and experience visitors bring with them to a museum. Without knowing this, it might be impossible to discover whether their museum experiences connect effectively and productively with their previous experiences. This investigation, of the knowledge that visitors bring with them to a museum, allows a clearer understanding of the kind of knowledge that they use in the museum.

After looking at the notion of knowledge, consideration was given to the concept of interpretive community that most visitors generally bring with them. This concept has encouraged a more dynamic theoretical approach to an understanding of visitor meaning-making. Following from the preceding discussion of interpretive community, this idea has three significant consequences for museums and for the argument presented in the thesis. Firstly, it indicates that people may have different types of knowledge that will influence the meanings that they make in the museum depending on their religions, customs and value systems. Secondly, it implies that the knowledge of museum curators can no longer be objective, but should be considered as socially constructed through their own sets of values, beliefs and education. Lastly, it suggests that just as museum curators do, visitors self-consciously construct knowledge from the museum visit rather than just passively receiving it.

From a special consideration of these notions about the social context, two types of social theories emerged, one of which has been introduced in this chapter. The study has divided these two theoretical approaches because one of them, theories of interaction, is in line with Falk and Dierking's view of museum learning from constructivist perspectives, although theories of interaction emphasize a social constructivist approach to how meanings and understandings grow out of social encounters, rather than the cognitive constructivist one in which Falk and Dierking stress the personal and physical context.

Linking with symbolic interactionists' theorizations (mainly with Mead's and Goffman's) the chapter has specified how individuals attain a sense of self through meaning-making and take on roles that illuminate differentiated meanings. Furthermore, symbolic interactionist sociology serves to remind us that the interpretive community is significant in the process of meaning-making because it implies that the interpretation of knowledge is not carried out exclusively by the individual, but is contextualized by collective experiences that the individual shares with others. The idea of role-taking and the notion of interpretive community moved the discussion about museum meaning-making towards an

examination of how designer visitors from interpretive communities behave in the museum. The interaction-theoretical approach suggests that visitors take an active role in making their own meanings on the basis of the values and beliefs of their interpretive communities. It also indicates that far from being passive visitors are actively engaged in making meaning in the museum environment, and that this has the potential to add to their knowledge, reinforce their identities and increase their self-esteem.

Other aspects of theories of interaction, ritual and drama, have provided a meaningful premise about meaning-making in the design profession: that the design museum visit is, as with visits to other museums, a kind of contemporary pilgrimage especially for a visitor from a profession. The intention of this type of journey is for design profession visitors to seek authenticity away from everyday life and to present the self. In this way, modernized institutions, such as museums and galleries, are rapidly institutionalizing the needs of these types of visitors, who want to look into others' professional lives, especially those of members of a higher class or group in the profession. Design museums provide an example in the way in which they organize a star designer's exhibitions, talks, and seminars for their visitors.

The following chapter will focus on the opposing theoretical approach, that is, a power-theoretical approach. As T. Lovell maintains 'Bourdieu's work is at times bleakly pessimistic' (2000: 27): this approach has been considered by critics as a 'pessimistic view' in that it sees individuals as passive meaning-makers. However, this idea will also be considered critically, with regard to the meaning-making process that gives meanings to design profession visitors, as well as to the design museum. In particular, the chapter will examine the way in which the cultural settings of the Design Museum encourage the creation and attainment of social roles by designer visitors, which correspond to ways of behaving that they have learned from their interpretive communities, especially shared practices that relate to the field of design.

Chapter 4

A Power-theoretical Approach to Meaning-making

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter three existing contexts – personal, physical, and social – were reviewed using Falk and Dierking’s model, which considers these contexts as essential dimensions of visitors’ meaning-making that are central to the learning process. The chapter suggested that these three aspects are not in any way contradictory or mutually exclusive and argued that the study of meaning-making in the museum should be considered in a sociological sense, so that the meaning-making process can be underpinned by theoretical understandings of personal, socio-cultural and physical contexts.

Chapter 2 noted that much of the existing audience research concerning visitors’ meaning-making has been carried out under the influence of institutions and government. Accordingly, this must have had an effect on the approach and findings. Under the control of these institutional organizations some of the audience research on the subject of meaning-making could be biased towards a market research based approach. Therefore this chapter will consider the socio-political context for meaning-making, which is missing from the existing research and the contexts referred to by Falk and Dierking in their study, but which has a

major impact on the meaning-making process and intensifies the association between contexts when examining the meaning-making process. Moreover, the chapter argues that the socio-political context interacts and overlaps with other contexts that constitute the experience that we call meaning-making. Thus, this chapter will move from theories of interaction to theories of practice, of which concepts such as 'habitus' can substitute the concepts from the theories of interaction such as 'self' when considering the individual as an interpretive community member who perceives the professional field.

In considering theories of practice the major theorist used in this chapter is Bourdieu. The design museum and its specialist visitors will be investigated using Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus and terminology. Consideration will be given to the extent to which these Bourdieuan concepts can support analysis of museum knowledge and the social world of a profession and explore how, in viewing the design museum visit as a ritual of the design profession, theories of practice have been applied to related museum studies.

The latter part of this chapter will investigate how people bring their culturally inscribed dispositions and toolkits with them into a museum, linking the culture of the design field to the broader social order. In this chapter, however, the limitations of theories of practice, which provide links between the field and the formation of meaning-making through the field, are also dealt with in terms of theories of interaction investigated in the previous chapter. Finally, the chapter will review existing meaning-making models and discourses, based on general museum learning paradigms, to attempt to extend the boundary of existing theoretical analyses of visitors' meaning-making conducted in museum studies.

4.2 Theories of Practice and Meaning-making

4.2.1 Overview of Bourdieu's Notions

Field

Chapter 2 hypothesized that design profession visitors make meanings in transactions with powerful objects that occupy a relatively high social status or reference design celebrities and construct their identity through the visiting experience. Anyone who has occupied a position in the design profession will recognize a reflection of her/his own experiences in the French sociologist and activist Bourdieu's account of the structure of a 'field'. He has given us an influential analysis of the conditions by which one is authorized to enter a field and compete there for cultural and symbolic power. In particular, his inclusive conceptions of 'field', 'habitus', and 'practice' give considerable descriptive and explanatory power to the analysis (see Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1989, 1990a, 1991, 1993a). Furthermore, his sub-conceptions of 'academic, cultural, social and symbolic capital' are also indispensable to an understanding of the different forms of power that constitute class relations within a field (see Bourdieu, 1985, 1989, 1990a, 1993b).

For Bourdieu, the modern social world is divided into what he calls fields. According to Bourdieu's definition of 'field' in *Sociology in Question* (1993a) he conceptualizes a field as the arena in which competition operates between social agents. Accordingly, he maintains that every member of a field competes with other members for positions in the field. This way of viewing fields provides an insightful proposition - that individual positions do not exist without a field for them to exist in. That is to say, the professions of design, which will be

described, can only exist because the field of design has already been constructed. In the same way, in order to give it a role and a label, for example, 'product' designer, a particular field should exist first.

Another Bourdieuan way of looking at the field is that there is a 'social space' in which an individual's behaviour is played out (Bourdieu, 1985, 1989, 1993b). For instance, culture is the space over which society's symbolic battles are fought (Bourdieu, 1989: 14-25). Thus, according to Bourdieu, this space builds covert and implicit barriers to prevent access to the upper class in order to support the existing class system by raising an obstacle to hinder social movements between classes (ibid.). Consequently, the upper classes can keep control of their power and retain society's material and symbolic rewards. That is to say, the competition for social status and power is critical as every social position battles to wield a higher degree of power. This principle can be applied to the field of design. On the one hand, the expanded nature of the field of design requires that design students learn about more and more subjects and on the other hand requires them to specialize in order to enter the field. Bourdieu acknowledges that new positions in the cultural field always have potential. However, what is at stake in entering the field or acquiring a position is the field's structural relations with other social positions 'that are both occupied and manipulated by social agents which may be individuals, groups or institutions (Bourdieu, 1993b: 29). In this regard, it is obvious that the notion of the institution corresponds to Bourdieu's notion of the field, not just referring to physical organizations such as galleries, museums and art and design schools, but also more inclusive social systems embracing these organizations.

Habitus

Within Bourdieu's notion of field, his word 'habitus' means 'a socially structured, and structuring structure' (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a: 76-86). In other words, it is a structure of understandings about the nature of things that structures psychological

phenomena and is itself structured by social practices. Furthermore, the concept of habitus has the function of unifying symbolic behaviours entering the field or competing for social status and power, as mentioned above. According to Bourdieu, all of one's symbolic behaviours in the field depend not only on their position in the field but also on the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a). He sees the relationship between field and habitus as one of 'ontologic complicity' (Bourdieu, 1991: 47) and maintains that the relation between habitus and field operates in two ways; on the one hand, they are in a correlation of conditioning; that is, the field constructs the habitus, which results from what a field or hierarchy inherently requires from members of the field; on the other hand, they are in a correlation of knowledge or cognitive structure: that is, 'habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and with value, in which it is worth investing one's practice' (Bourdieu, 1989: 44).

When the habitus is established an individual works as an agent under the influence of the habitus. Such phenomena enable the reproduction of the objective conditions of which the habitus is born. Likewise, when people enter a museum (*an institution*) they bring their habitus and relation to broader social structures with them. In completing organizational tasks people act on the basis not only of formal organizational rules, but also of the habitus.

The actor or self, explored in the last chapter, can also draw upon Bourdieu's concept of habitus. In interaction-theoretical approaches to meaning-making it has been recognized that meaning-making in a museum can influence a person's identity and their sense of self. Approaches of this type suggest that visitors use museums for 'identity work', defined as '[...] the processes through which we construct, maintain, and adapt our sense of personal identity, and persuade other people to believe in that identity' (Rounds, 2006: 139). The interaction-theoretical perspective has also shown that the prior knowledge that visitors bring into a museum can lead to subtle changes in their view of themselves, their identity and meaning-making, both individually and collectively.

However in a power-theoretical approach the habitus, unlike the self, is structured by the objective conditions in which the individual develops (Hallett, 2003: 130). These objective conditions inculcate dispositions and tastes that reflect the individual's position in objective social space and these tastes and dispositions structure the individual's subjective actions, experiences and meaning-making (ibid.). In this way, the habitus enables and constrains meaning-making, while 'the self remains a characteristic of the situation' (ibid.: 132). Therefore, the habitus is not a 'self' literally.

Practice

Together with field and habitus, Bourdieu stresses that we can understand the operation of the habitus better by observing the enactment of dispositions in 'practice' (Bourdieu, 1977). He maintains that 'a person's practice – their "corporeal hexes" and their "style of expression" (Bourdieu, 1988: 56) is the empirical manifestation of the dispositions located in the habitus' (Hallett, 2003: 130). Likewise, when people enter a museum they bring their relation to the broader social order with them and each individual's practice within the museum is informed by the habitus.

Practice, Bourdieu explains (1988: 97), 'always implies a cognitive operation, a practical operation of construction which sets to work, by reference to practical functions, systems of classification (taxonomies) which organize perception and structure'. For Bourdieu practices therefore play an important role in the reproduction of classificatory schemes that are cognitively acquired and subjectively modified by a social agent. Likewise, Bourdieu's concept of practice is tied to his view of the broader social order, providing a link between micro actions within fields and macro social structures. The starting point, when exploring individuals' practices using a Bourdieuan approach, is to consider who wins the higher position in the field and obtains power in the social structure.

As Bourdieu argues, 'the artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces' (ibid.: 30). In order to investigate the field of design and social practices within the field, this thesis takes architecture as an example of a profession within the wider field of design. In his book, entitled *The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction* (1998), G. Stevens denies the possibility of an absolute and objective evaluation of an individual's achievements. Instead, he maintains that the relative fame of architects actually depends on power relations, which determine who has social, cultural and economic superiority. In order to analyze this, Stevens applies Bourdieu's concepts of 'field' and 'habitus', 'symbolic capital' and 'taste', and through the contribution of Bourdieu's theoretical attainment, analyzes historic patterns to show how elites have been produced within the field of architectural distinction, which includes practice, theory, research, education, institutions and society, etc. In particular, he refers to the 'star system' in architecture, whereby other architects respect, admire or even support the system at the same time (both explicitly and implicitly).

In the same publication (1998) Stevens illustrates how architectural education has played a role in the creation of architectural elites and the reproduction of the 'star or celebrity system' as a kind of mythology of the hero. According to Stevens educational institutions are a kind of incubator that cultivates the social class system. From this point of view the design profession, like the architectural profession, can be contextualized within an institutional structure that produces power relationships. This kind of power exists only in societies in which elite membership is legitimized or acquired by professional status. Considered in this way this power can be understood as a specialized form of privilege that has control within the industrial state. The profession's power over the museum and its exhibits has the same form.

The museum ritual, which has been dealt with in the previous chapter, can from this perspective be viewed as a mode of practice. Just as Bourdieu's conception of social space is one in which social practice emanates from the cultural

knowledge system (1977: 96-158)⁶, the following discussion attempts to conceive of the museum environment as a form of social ritual practice that operates in social space. For Bourdieu, rituals may be a means of expressing social and, implicitly, power relations⁷.

In her overview of the studies of ritual today, in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* C. Bell suggests (1992) that all existing theoretical discourse on ritual is based on the opposition between thought (such as beliefs, symbols and myths) and action (the enactment of such cultural templates). Bell argues that this basic distinction has generated homologized structural patterns in ritual theory and rejects the related ideas of, for example, V. W. Turner's 'communitas' (1969) or C. Geertz's 'fusion of ethos and worldview' (1966). Bell focuses on the notion of ritual practice inspired by Bourdieu, as 'a term that is designed to represent the synthetic unity of consciousness and social being within human activity, to be a powerful tool with which to embrace or transcend all analogous dichotomies' (Bell, 1992: 76). Such a theoretical replacing of ritual on the map of practice underlying the functioning of strategic power has significant implications for its study. Bell suggests that 'ritual systems do not function to regulate or control the systems of social relations. They are the system' (ibid.: 130). Elaborating on Bourdieu, Bell goes on to present a notion of ritualisation, which is 'the natural logic of ritual, a logic embodied in the physical movements of the body' (ibid.: 199). In other words, ritual is undertaken only in those perfect scenarios when it is strategically the most effective option among competing agents.

Bourdieu's notion of social practice is also clearly of importance in understanding museum visitors' meaning-making, in that visitors are positioned relatively passively in relation to the knowledge displayed: that is, visitors are supposed to

⁶ Bourdieu argues (1977: 219) that knowledge is not equally distributed between the members of a society and that distinctive forms of cultural knowledge exist in social space.

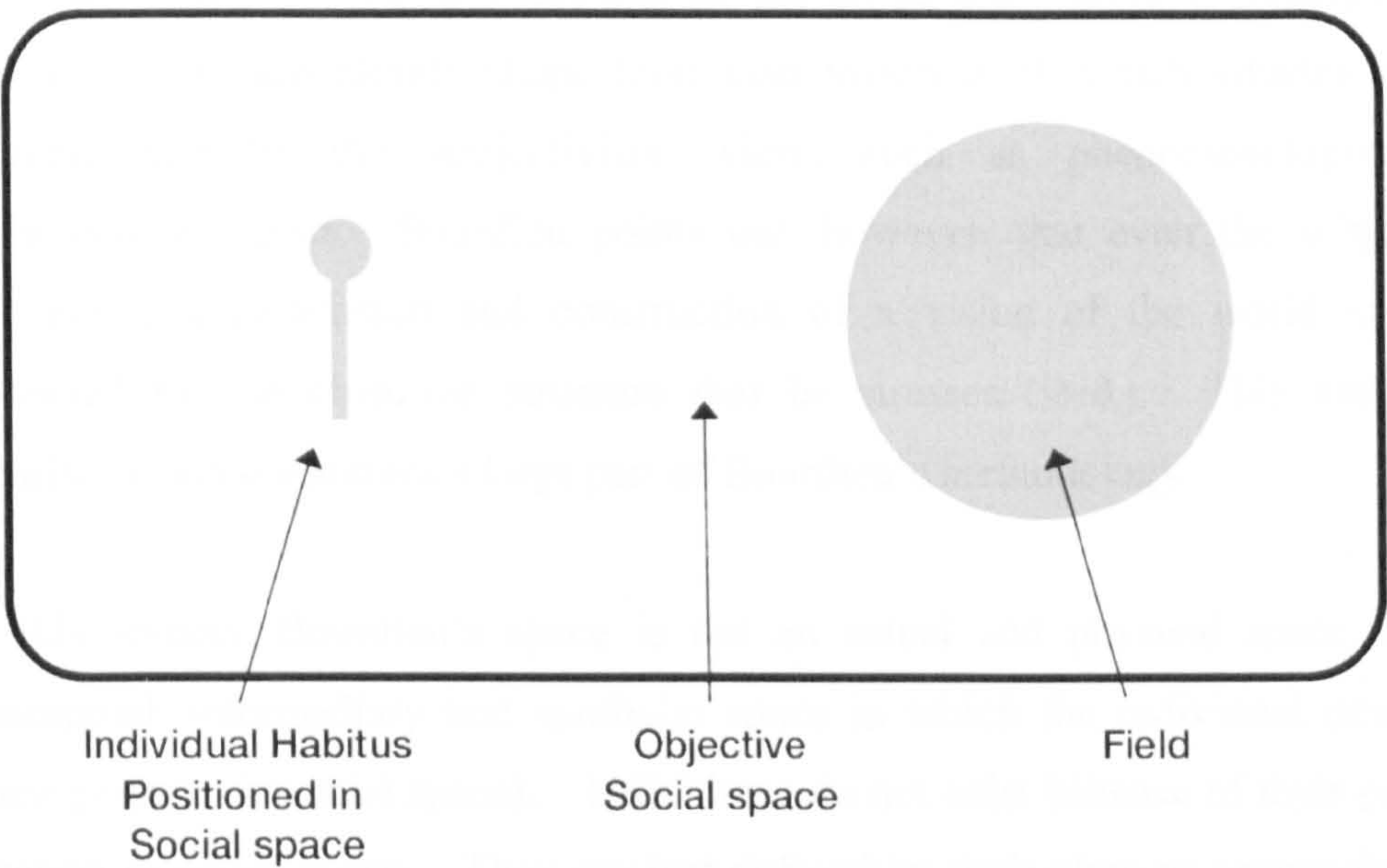
⁷ Although Bourdieu does not focus on ritual in his larger work on social knowledge, his continuing passing references to ritual have caught the eye of a number of people interested in ritual.

absorb this knowledge without questioning it at an institutional level. The museum arranges its objects and spaces in a symbolic way, to lead visitors to engage in aesthetic and social rituals. A series of approaches to discourse on rituals in relation to meaning-making reinforces this view. In the language of D. M. Ruiz in *The Four Agreements* (1997) ritual functions as a resource to enable us to make meanings under the agreements that we have made for ourselves and our relationship to the world. Parkes also maintains that 'rituals are practices that cultivate who we are' (Parkes, 1995: 93) whereas Plutschow believes that rituals relate '[...] to reality in a multi-dimensional symbolic way, making life meaningful by reaffirming one's understanding of life' (Plutschow, 1999, cited in Brown, 2007: 62). Kluckhohn argues, in line with Parkes, that the meanings of rituals depend on the interpretation of those who practice them (Kluckhohn, 1949).

4.2.2 Bourdieu's Model of Society and Meaning-making

With his major concepts such as 'field', 'habitus' and 'practice', Bourdieu's work has become central to contemporary understandings of society and culture. In line with these concepts, his view on the relationship between meanings and society is critical to an understanding of meaning-making. Bourdieu describes society as social space that displays all of the concepts' boundaries and, in this way, takes a visible perspective on society. In *Social Space and Symbolic Power* (1989), within the context of his discussion of meaning, Bourdieu maintains that meanings, firstly, exist not in a symbolic system but in the social space itself and are thus placed outside the minds of people or the agent; secondly, nonetheless, such agents also exist in space and moreover construct the space themselves. In other words, social space is not just an objective site that can be investigated by neutral researchers, but is actively defined by individuals' practices and beliefs (see Figure 4.1). Bourdieu describes this view of meaning-making, marking out a position that he terms 'structuralist constructivism' (Bourdieu, 1989). This has also been called 'generative structuralism' by other researchers (e.g. Vandenberghe,

1999). This is named after Bourdieu’s belief that objective structures that support meanings are generated by people’s everyday practices.



[Figure 4.1] Dispositions reflecting a positioning in border social space carried into the field (drawn from the original figure of ‘Dispositions reflecting a positioning in border social space carried into the organization’ depicted by T. Hallett, 2003)

In this figure, social space is an ‘objective social structure existing independently of the conscious will of agents’, while ‘guiding and constraining their practices or their representations’ (Bourdieu, 1990a: 122). However, Bourdieu posits that people are able to move through this social structure, supposing that these movements are manifestations of the habitus (ibid.). The habitus is also controlled by the objective conditions, by inculcating dispositions and tastes that reflect the individual's position in objective social space. According to Bourdieu, the operation of the habitus can be understood by observing the enactment of ‘systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 22) in practice. The individual’s practice involving even subjective reactions followed by emotional experiences is structured by these dispositions. Likewise, their meaning-making

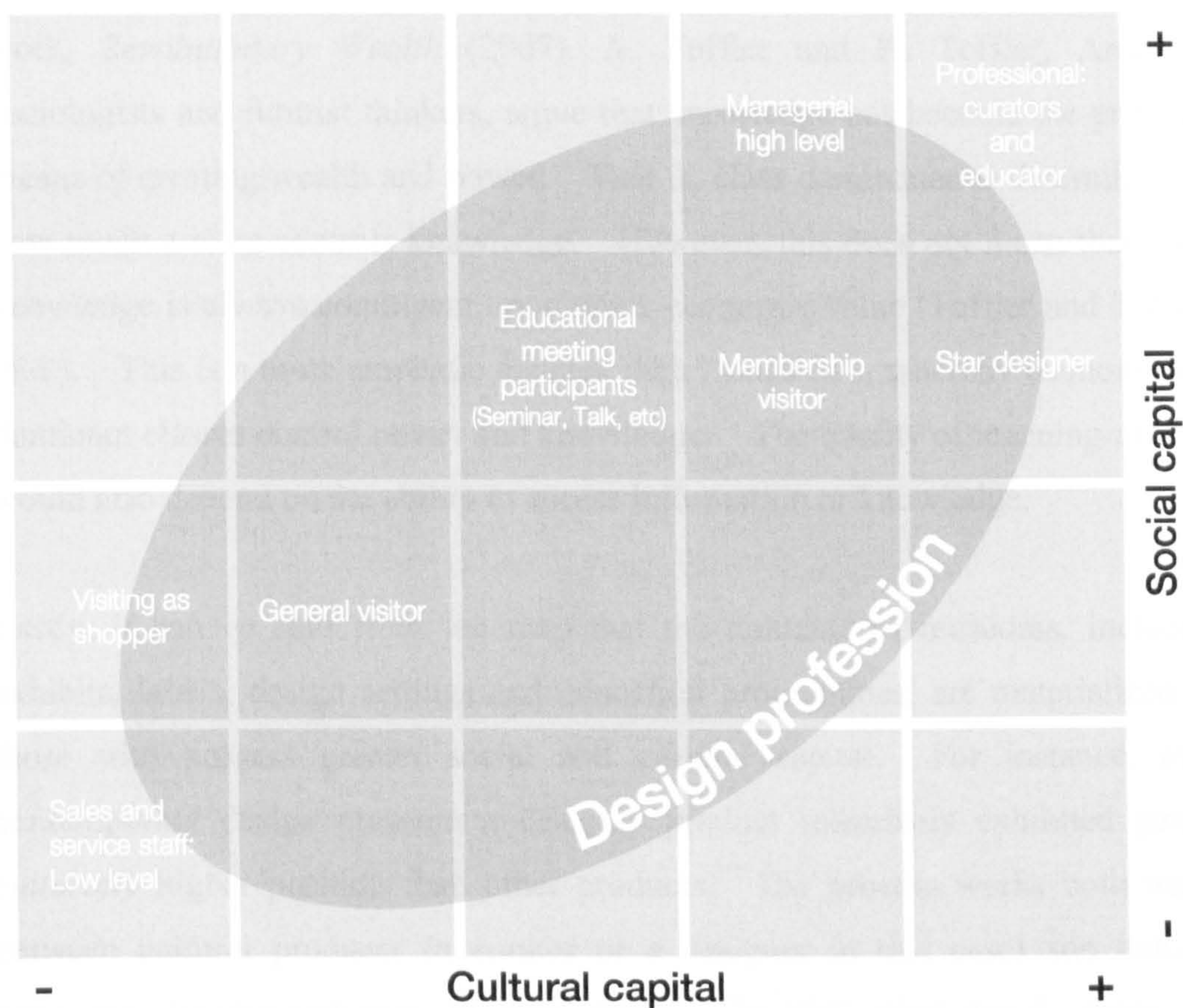
process also acts on a set of dispositions acquired in their relation to social structures.

Bourdieu admits (1990a) the fact that people do have an active apprehension of the world and accordingly shape their own vision of it, which situates at the extreme end of the subjectivists' view, such as phenomenologists or ethnomethodologists. Bourdieu points out, however, that even the subjective and active apprehension and construction of a vision of the world is only restricted by the objective structure that he stresses (*ibid.*). This notion is significant and constitutes a large part of Bourdieu's methodology.

In this respect, Bourdieu's space is not an actual and physical space, but a conceptual, intermediary and symbolic space in which the individual develops (their position in social space). Individuals do not exist because of their present location in social space. They are just defined by their class or groups in their habitus. In Bourdieuan terms, the class is a group of people occupying similar positions in social space (Bourdieu, 1994: 1-16). Bourdieu therefore argues that society can be identified through a two- or three-dimensional space in which the class and groups are situated (*ibid.*). The variables that determine the dimensions are 'economic capital, cultural capital and social capital' (see Bourdieu, 1986, 1989, 1990a). According to Bourdieu society can be seen as a social space in which individuals relate to each other (primarily) depending on their 'economic capital, cultural capital (such as credentials, titles, tastes, dispositions), and social capital (such as networks)' (Bourdieu, 1990a). In this space, classes or groups are positioned relationally, as being above or below each other in terms of the capital they possess. In this way, the concept of capital is used to model society in which social agents such as classes, groups and institutions are positioned (Bourdieu, 1984, 1988). Since social agents in each field are struggling to get more of each variable - more economic capital, more social capital, and more cultural capital - society typically generates dominant and subordinate classes. The capital is determined by the degree of 'the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized

relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986: 249). That is, the capital is determined by a varying degree of social participation. In this sense, participation in design and the field of design, like other forms of social participation, can be seen as a form of a capital that serves to reproduce class hierarchies and societal structures of domination.

However, whilst Bourdieu emphasizes that economic capital dominates cultural and social capital, he tends to disregard the importance of social capital and cultural capital in the formation of society. Even in his museum visitor studies, for example, Bourdieu and Darbel's classic 1991 study of European art museum audiences, *The Love of Art*, economic capital featured widely. However, apart from the economic issues the relationship between social capital and cultural capital is of particular importance in terms of visitors' *true* engagement and participation, which contemporary museums aim for. In recent times, the concept of social capital has become important in museum studies and especially in debates about visitor participation. For that reason, an attempt has been made to analyze social space in the case study museum using axes composed of these two factors – social capital and cultural capital - which are mapped as individuals' roles that classes occupy contextually in the museum (see Figure 4.2).



[Figure 4.2] Social space in the Design Museum London mapped as spatial and contextual roles (referenced from P. Dimaggio and M. Useem, 1978)

In this map, the positions of design profession visitors are placed according to the two capitals. One of the interesting findings from this map is, first, if cultural capital is used to increase social capital (through participation in events that have been deemed worthwhile or useful) it could well alter one’s networks and subsequently one’s work and even leisure activities. This could in turn affect one’s stock of cultural capital through a continuing education process that Bourdieu fails to acknowledge. Visitors, such as members of the museum (called ‘Friends of the Design Museum’), or regular attendants of a special event could fall into this category.

The second thing worth noting from the map is that the decisive factor that makes the class's social inclusion possible is accessibility to knowledge. In their recent work, *Revolutionary Wealth* (2007), A. Toffler and H. Toffler, American sociologists and futurist thinkers, argue that knowledge has become the principal means of creating wealth and power. That is, class dominance is determined by how much a class controls knowledge. However, this does not mean that one's knowledge is always contingent upon one's economic value (Toffler and Toffler, *ibid.*). This is a more emphatic concept than Bourdieu's, whereby economically dominant classes control power and knowledge. The quality of meaning-making would also depend on the ability to access information or knowledge.

Lastly, it can be said from the map that the contents of museums, including exhibits, labels, design settings and education programmes, are materialized by those who possess greater social and cultural capital. For instance, in a contemporary design museum a designer product selectively exhibited gets a *culturally* higher position than other products. The process works both ways, between cultural producer (a curator or a designer in this case) and cultural consumer (visitor/audience in this case). On the other hand, there are occasionally special exhibits that cannot be explained by the logics of utilitarian or class interests. These may relate to the individual interests of curators. Even so, these exhibits cannot be properly understood without reference to their habitus, for example, their 'institutionalized' habitus.

Bourdieu's work has alerted museum research to the links between space, (not only physical but also symbolic) power, and knowledge. Thus, the environmental agendas of the museum, associated with institutionalized power, have been explored by recent museum researchers such as S. Macdonald, T. Bennett, N. Dias, T. L. Teslow, A. Barry, P. Harvey, M. Bouquet, and K. Arnold in *The Politics of Display*, first published in 1998. In particular, Macdonald, who attempts to theorise the subject of the spatial capacities of museums, argues: 'museums not only exist within a particular time and space, they also help articulate particular temporal and spatial order' (1998: 8). Within this social order approach, political

power struggle between the museum and visitors is a critical concern. Although Bourdieu is not a specialist in politics, he is a specialist in society as a whole, of which politics is but a part. So when his concept is applied to museum meaning-making, he would define it as a political action and award priority status to subjective points of view and life experience. This point of view also legitimates knowledge obtained not from the new information offered by the museum, but from personal experiences that were rarely considered in traditional museum research.

4.3 The Limitations of the Approaches

Of central importance in Bourdieu's thinking is the intertwining of theories about society with his theory of field. However, his theory of practice has some limitations. The first flaw in his theory of practice is that his approach can be regarded as deterministic, in that meanings are also determined as being subject to social force. Bourdieu's theory of practice suggests that power and resources are substantively unequal between the weak and the strong and that as a result the weak's own meanings are, in fact, treated as meaningless. That is to say, advocates of the theory of practice are skeptical about meaning-making.

Secondly, Bourdieu overlooks the importance of the existence of the territory outside the field. Bourdieu argues that social existence is only conditioned on entrance into an established field (Bourdieu, 1993b). While analyzing the design museum as a particular field (or sub-fields) is not new, his theory of practice is less comfortable with the idea that the design museum experience impacts on all visitors situated in various social spaces – not only in the field but also out of the field – simultaneously. Moreover, Bourdieu did not address or try to analyze what for some is the urgent problem of how to *exit* the field (Ray, 2007). Exit is neither withdrawal into isolation and passivity nor the abandonment of social

activity and modes of living (ibid.). Otherwise, practices within the field reproduce meanings which are only meaningless. In addition, they can never be personal but just belong to the field itself. This notion is an important turning point in considering meaning-making.

At this point, it might appear to be better to invent new institutions or kinds of institution rather than accepting and acknowledging existing institutions, established by people with powerful positions in the field, because these existing institutions cannot play an educational role under the hierarchical structure of the field. We might, in response, also ask whether there is an alternative role for the design museum and whether the meaning-making process operates only in this field.

A power-theoretical approach suggests that the most fundamental aspects of people's practices are socially structured. In other words, the meaning influenced by the practices of people within society is also structured. These practices are obviously different from the interaction-theoretical approach, which argues that practices 'concerned with production and the exchange of meanings help people to give and take meanings between members of society or a group and consequently have social effects' (Hall, 1997: 22) or that the practices give members of the group their sense of identity, of who they are and with whom they belong (Silverman, 1995: 161-170). In fact, the basic concern that Bourdieu has with the interaction-theoretical approach to meaning (and broadly symbolic interactionism) is that it focuses on the communication of meaning at the expense of an analysis of the structural relations of power.

Bourdieu's critical stance toward the interactionists' approaches is but one exemplification of his general rethinking of the nature of social action. From Bourdieu's perspective the nature of social action emerges from the 'practical knowledge' (Bourdieu, 1977) employed by actors, opposed to the 'theoretical knowledge' (ibid.) constructed by scientists or researchers. He recognizes the inherent limitations of the objective structured knowledge of an essentially

practical and phenomenological subject matter, and stresses that in contrast to practical knowledge the *objective* relations that constitute the practices and the social structures embedded in individuals should be studied. However, the symbolic interactionists, according to Bourdieu, have tried to elicit the representation of these objective relations. For the symbolic interactionists, all social relations are thus defined by communicative relations and the researcher's main task is to decode the underlying messages. For the same reason, therefore, Bourdieu has a critical view on how such an approach as symbolic interactionism works, because the approach is conducted completely outside the real world of social activities being observed and tries to draw a representation of practices from a set of statistical data, informants or research subjects. As a result of this stance Bourdieu claims that an observer should regard the object of study as being structured by an underlying code. Ironically, however, according to Bourdieu's critics Bourdieu's argument is also controlled and structured by the code - social relations (see Garnham and Williams, 1980; Calhoun *et al*, 1993).

In spite of the limitations of his argument Bourdieuan analysis of meaning-making is full of suggestions. First of all, he suggests that making meaning is meant to achieve 'cultural competence' (Bourdieu, 1993). Likewise, cultural capital can be described as cultural competence (Lawley, 1994). Along with economic capital, cultural capital carries legitimacy that Weber calls 'the psychological reassurance of *legitimacy*' or the 'feeling of worthiness' (Weber, 1993: 107). While the legitimacy in economic capital is generally regulated by governmental and financial institutions, the legitimacy of cultural capital is mainly controlled by educational and artistic institutions. For Bourdieu, therefore, developing meaning-making would imply an individual's ability to take advantage of cultural capital and especially to be able to interact with others through culture.

On the other hand, returning to theories of interaction, consideration has been given to the idea that people have active and dynamic interpretive strategies for the processing of knowledge, as well as differentiated agendas that they bring to

cultural practices in the negotiation of meaning-making. Unlike Bourdieu's view of knowledge, interactionists believe that knowledge is not single or finite but depends on sources that would be considered as less real or authentic and so the meaning would be created and changed depending on the situation. That is to say, the individual's cultural activities rely on different and various realities and hence different forms of knowledge within a culture.

Thus, this thesis suggests that each of the theories referred to in Chapters 3 and 4 presents only a partial or one-sided view of the meaning-making process, and that in order to understand the whole process both perspectives need to be considered. For that reason, the two main types of theory will be brought together in the following study of meaning-making. This will allow the practice of meaning-making to be viewed as a manifestation of a set of dispositions reflective of a person's habitus, and an interactive transaction between the individual and the group through its social and cultural (or socio-cultural) milieu. Thus, a consideration of theoretical foundations suggests that the complex links between elements embedded in the meaning-making process can be investigated using a socio-cultural framework (*from* the theories of interaction) and with reference to wider or deeper social processes (that is, micro and macro aspects *from* the theories of practice).

4.4 Models of Meaning-making

The following section of the thesis will briefly review existing perspectives on museum meaning-making and theories of museum experience offered by key figures including Worts, Silverman, Hein and Fraser, before moving on to the case study and suggesting a hypothetical model for a meaning-making framework in the following chapters. The implications of the meaning-making models in the museum field will illuminate critical directions for a new age for all types of

museum, 'one in which museums are relevant and diversely meaningful to people' (Silverman, 1995: 161).

First of all, although Worts does not go so far as to outline a theory of meaning-making that would support a theory of learning in museums, the practical approaches applied to a case study in the Art Gallery of Ontario to encourage meaning-making are clearly inspirational. D. Worts, a veteran American museum researcher with a strong background in issues of museum education and visitor research, points out the potential of technology in museums, stressing the necessity of accepting a new paradigm of understanding of visitors and their experiences. In particular, the issue of the impact that visitors make on museums is developed in three of Worts's papers; '*In Search of Meaning: Reflective Practice and Museums*' (1990), '*Visitors Make Their Own Meaning*' (1996) and '*Measuring Museum Meaning: A Critical Assessment Framework*' (2006). In these papers (1990, 1996, 2000) Worts describes how people rarely consider the museum as a centre for transforming human attitudes and behaviour, then imputes the museum with not knowing how to persuade visitors of its legitimacy - the legitimacy that museums work as practical, instrumental and societal resources.

Worts also claims (2006) that museums need to encourage visitors to use the space not just for leisure-time activity, or for academic reasons, but as a site that can have an influential impact on their everyday life. In order to do this he suggests that museums should interest their visitors in an endless process of creative meaning-making (ibid.). He also suggests 'if the museum is truly the place of the muses, then museum professionals must realize that the physical and intellectual aspects of our current operations must function more symbolically as triggers that support visitors in activating the muses within all of us. It is this inner space that, in my view, is the real museum' (ibid.: 45). Worts is concerned that some will see his vision as idealistic and unachievable (ibid.: 45). However, he makes the criticism that current museum professionals are not asking fundamental questions about how the museum experience adds societal value (ibid.: 46). Activating this value, writes Worts, necessitates the creation of a new

paradigm and new theories of meaning-making to engage visitors' thinking beyond the current emphasis on exhibitions (ibid.: 46).

Secondly, L. H. Silverman, Associate Professor of Recreation and Park Administration and Director of the Center on History-Making in America at Indiana University, submitted her doctoral dissertation in 1990. The thesis proposed a meaning-making framework in which the interpretation of symbolic objects is viewed as a creative and audience-focused process that happens within the context of the social and relational meaning of one's companions. In her dissertation, Silverman asserts (1990) that museums can be used as case studies to explore the social construction of meaning, particularly through an examination of people talking with one another. In addition, Silverman regards social context as a filter for museum experience (ibid.). In other words, the museum experience is influenced by the social context and so meanings arise from the socially constructed experience. As a result, existing sender-receiver or linear one-way communication models for the transmission of intended meaning or messages are no longer available in this context. Visitors themselves value 'reminiscing, associating personal experiences, recognizing their taste, appraising the worth of objects they own, expressing their competence, and expressing their identity' (ibid.: 269).

With regard to meaning-making, Silverman indicates (1990) that ways of viewing visitors as meaning-makers may be seen as either a loss of power or a possible democratizing of the museum experience in the sense that both visitors and museum professionals could learn more about how *things* come to have *meaning*. As a result of this, she sees it as a challenge for museum professionals to consider the new perspective of a more democratic and responsive relationship between visitors and the museum (ibid.). This suggests that museum professionals should learn more about visitors, not to find out whether the outcome of their visit was as they had expected, but to discover the real reason why they visited the museum.

By extension, Silverman generalizes (1995) the nature of meaning-making in museums by asserting that the behaviours that appear to foster subjective meaning for visitors are not unique to visitors: they are basic to *humans* – museum personnel, visitors, and non-visitors alike. Silverman goes on to suggest ‘self-identity’, ‘companions’, and ‘leisure motivations’ as the critical visit factors that facilitate a different context for meaning-making in the museum (ibid.: 165-170). As a result, her meaning-making model illuminates the visitor’s active role in creating the meaning of a museum experience through the context s/he brings, influenced by the factors – self-identity, companions and leisure motivations. By stressing the way in which visitors find personal significance within museums, Silverman puts forward the idea of a variety of meaning-making behaviours that reflect basic human needs.

Silverman’s meaning-making model is clear and well-defined. Her account of the meaning-making paradigm indicates the importance of fashioning a better fit between people and museums in two critical areas; ‘firstly, between human meaning-making and museum methods, and secondly, between human needs and the purpose of museums in society’ (Silverman, 1995: 169).

Thirdly, G. Hein, American educationist and museum education programme developer, has carried out a wide range of research on the subject of social constructivism (1998, 1999). In particular, his investigation of the relationship between museums and museum visitors led him find that visitors’ learning experience can be maximized when they are allowed to actively make their own meanings, not in instructive environments, but in free environments that make all aspects of the museum experience socially and intellectually accessible. This idea is not only a challenge, but also an opportunity for contemporary museum practitioners because they need to rethink their approach to exhibits as well as to visitors.

In his work in *Learning in the Museum* (1998), Hein emphasizes the importance of the physical, social and intellectual accessibility of museum exhibitions to

every visitor, to enable all visitors actively to construct their own knowledge and learn effectively. He then asserts that contemporary museums should aim to be ‘constructivist museums’ as he calls them, which can provide such a learning environment. According to Hein, ‘...[t]he Constructivist Museum will provide opportunities for learning using maximum possible modalities for both visitor interaction with exhibitions and for processing information’ (ibid.: 81).

Hein applies this constructivist approach to the investigation of museum meaning-making: ‘constructivism carries meaning-making further, it views personal meaning-making not only as necessary but also as desirable: not only something that needs to be tolerated, but a human attribute that can be exploited to enhance learning. From the constructivist perspective, meaning-making is learning. The goal of an educational setting (such as that of a museum or science centre) is to promote learning and therefore facilitate meaning-making’ (Hein, 1999: 15).

In his constructivist model, Hein concludes that each visitor brings a unique perspective and will receive a unique meaning-making experience from their visit. Despite providing a theoretical basis for museum meaning-making (Hein, 1999) his study does not actually provide a model of meaning-making directly, but is a significant and practical guide for all museum professionals on how to adapt museums to maximize the physical, social and intellectual access to meaning-making for every visitor.

Lastly, in approaching research around which to structure the meaning-making framework, consideration has also been given to themes that might be of particular relevance in the research project carried out at the St Mungo’s Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow by J. W. Fraser (2004) based on her PhD dissertation, *Museums, Drama, Ritual and Power: A theory of the Museum Experience*. In Fraser’s model, authority, power and the task of creating knowledge are shared between visitors and museum professionals. She claims that ‘if the museum embraces this epistemological shift, and recognizes the complex transactions of ritual, drama and power, it could enable visitors to experience not

just learning but growth, and greatly increase the educational and cultural value of museums' (Fraser, 2004: 21).

The importance of the work of Silverman and others, namely, the construction of paradigms of museum meaning-making, is that they provide critical insights to enable museums to become more relevant and meaningful to people. Instead of examining visitors' needs for individualism or community, they strive to acknowledge, understand and facilitate many other ways in which museums are used and reasons why visitors find value in museum visits: 'in effect, to fashion a better fit between museums and human behavior' (Silverman, 1995: 165).

Many questions, however, remain to be answered: in particular, how the specialist museum can take account of the meaning-making strategies of specialist visitors and how the museum can create meaning-making opportunities that value personal and subjective meanings. In addition, it is necessary to examine which meaning-making model would fit the contexts from the specific environment. Clearly, at this point, a new approach to discourse around the museum is required: this notion will be embedded in the approach to the empirical research for the case study museum in the following chapter.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has adopted the approach proposed by Bourdieu, who focuses on the reproduction of power in fields, and has proceeded from his conceptions to a focus on professional knowledge reproduction. In particular, three key concepts from Bourdieu's theory of practice - field, habitus, and practice - have been employed. Firstly, according to Bourdieu, a field is defined as a system structured by the activities of those who are involved in it, taking into account

both the social rules that govern the field and the power relationships between actors. People follow a number of systems, fulfilling a number of social roles in each field, fields which, however, cannot exist without interaction with each other. Secondly, the habitus plays an important role in this interaction. An actor interacts with the habitus instead of presenting a self, since it is too difficult to control every movement s/he performs. Lastly, the concept of practice, the central theme of Bourdieu's sociological work, refers to social activities that lead to the formation of competitive social spaces in terms of mechanisms of social domination and reproduction. These practices are the struggle of social actors trying to occupy dominant positions within the field, which are treated on a hierarchical basis.

Consistent with Bourdieu's conceptions, a political power-theoretical approach aids the analysis of meaning-making, locating it in the recursive link between micro actions within a field and broader social structures. The chapter argued that museum participation should also be taken as social, not just relating to each person's experiences, but to their ongoing social and political relationships. In this respect, the chapter has suggested that the design museum also contributes to the generation of social and political power relationships within the field of design, and the designer visitor's habitus.

Bourdieu's focus on structured social practice in society has also been used to reflect on and analyze museum rituals. According to his principles museum visiting can be analyzed as a ritual and can be seen as the reproduction of the rituals of visitors. Bourdieu's notion of ritual in conjunction with his theory of practice provides a picture of the social setting for museum visitors that extends the notion of visitor access to the museum beyond physical access.

In this final theoretical chapter the epistemological gap between theories of interaction and theories of practice, from which knowledge is viewed and understood, have been explored. In particular, as a result of the investigations the chapter argued that the socio-political context has an influential impact on the

function of prior knowledge (personal context), cultural practice and ritual (socio-cultural context), and design features and space (physical context). Therefore, the limitations on an understanding of meaning-making evident in the interaction-theoretical approach were addressed in a more plausible way.

However, the chapter finally proposes a hypothetical position, namely, that the way to make both theories helpful to an explanation of meaning-making (i.e. making the theories of practice less functionalist and/or deterministic, and making the theories of interaction deal with social power embedded in communication) is to restructure them so that the investigation of meaning-making takes into account not only the dispositions, but also the interactive dimension of social activities. Drawing on this approach, the chapter has argued that when visitors face objects in a display, whatever may be known or unknown, they have an opportunity to make new connections and to make sense of the artefacts in the light of their own life experience (*in terms of* the theories of interaction). Furthermore, at this moment, habitus, although it faces previously mentioned limitations, affects their meaning-making (*in terms of* the theories of practice).

The plausibility and feasibility of this argument will be examined in the following chapters, through an investigation into designer visitors attending the displays in the Design Museum London which increases the potential for designer visitors to make connections with the design objects as well as the field of design in this way.

Chapter 5

Research Methods for Empirical Research

5.1 Introduction

Chapters 3 and 4 described theoretical approaches to meaning-making using three aspects of the contextual model of learning, and extended these approaches through the application of the related theories of interaction and theories of practice. Unlike the earlier chapters, which situated this thesis within the domain of theoretical research, this chapter and those that follow locate it within the context of empirical research. The aim in doing this is to address the research question, ‘what is happening?’ (Foucault, 1988: 121) that was outlined in Chapter 1, and then to investigate visitors’ real meaning-making in the museum. Thus the work moves from theoretical research to empirical case study research consisting of observations and interviews.

This chapter identifies a possible type of research method that might yield useful results. It presents auto-photography and photo-elicitation as critical, flexible and visual methods that can collate visitor participants’ spontaneous interpretations of the museum experience. The role of visitor is important in this approach. It is not only critics employed by the mass media (Walker and Chaplin, 1997: 74), but also audiences themselves that contribute to the experience of culture by interpreting, evaluating, using and consuming various

types of products, which could be identified as learning, or as a process, or as a commercial product provided by cultural institutions or by producers such as artists, designers and curators. In this respect, visitors' photo-taking activity in a cultural institution can be seen to be interpreting, evaluating, using and consuming these types of products. This study considers the photo-taking behaviour of visitors during their museum visit and considers their photographs as critical consequences of interactions between production and consumption within museum practices. The reasons for choosing these research methods to investigate meaning-making processes will now be reviewed and discussed, along with the ethical considerations that affected the development of the research.

5.2 The Selection of Research Methods

5.2.1 The Research Approach

This research adopts an empirical rather than prescriptive approach to how visitors make meanings. Empirical research is research concerning the physical, practical aspects of everyday life and this has an important meaning academically. Unlike prescriptive research, the theory of empirical research emphasizes the fact that it is the research subjects that construct knowledge. When embracing sociology, empirical research functions as a tool for breaking through ordinary consciousness to demonstrate real, everyday life knowledge in social reality. Bourdieu, whose theoretical writings have previously been referred to, drew on a series of influential empirical studies of art and artistic institutions in order to investigate culture and the power embedded within the institutions, starting in the mid-sixties with *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Bourdieu, 1990b).

The empirical research goal is to develop a framework that can present a process of meaning-making. This research process involves five main stages; 1)

photographic findings; 2) interview data analysis; 3) developments of categories; 4) evaluation; and 5) specification of theories.

The first stage of the case study is to analyze photographs taken by the research subjects. This approach facilitates the observation and recording of empirical and visual phenomena, in that the acts of photography take place in economic, social and cultural contexts that contribute to them and stimulate meanings from them (Bourdieu, 1990b: 19). The act of photographing is basically an optional and non-essential activity that requires no training for practitioners, but 'its images appear remarkably standardized within cultures' (Chalfen, 1987: 32). This standardization can be plausibly explained by the assumption that when people take photographs of subjects that they know very well, they will experience a satisfying reception. In this sense, it can be maintained that photographs show how people make sense of their anticipation and decide their favourable behaviour. For the same reason, photography can be defined as an act of self presentation that 'involves the photographer, the photographed, and the expected audience' (Jacobs, 1981: 114). All of those involved in the photographs are already aware of the contexts embedded in them (Lesy, 1980: 38-40). Therefore, acts of photography enable photographers to present their identities and communicate social meanings to people viewing the photographs, as well as to the people in the photographs (Bourdieu, 1990b).

The second stage, interview data analysis, is used to build up coding and to develop categories. The interview data described throughout the remainder of this thesis embodies the main aspects of the meaning-making process. The fourth stage, evaluation, compares the formal categories with new ones. The purpose of the evaluation is to verify the validity of the research findings and extend them. These stages exist in order to create a framework of the meaning-making process. At the final stage the research findings are combined with the theoretical research examined in the early chapters in a discussion of the final categories that contribute to an understanding of meaning-making as a powerful paradigm of museum experience. These stages will be examined in detail in the

current chapter and in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

5.2.2 The Type of Research

This empirical research is oriented towards general types of research, both experimental and observational, but aims at being experiential and participatory. Meaning-making research that employs an empirical approach is ‘intrinsically participatory and a democratized activity’ (Silverman, 2000: 8) or way of researching interpretation and audiences. The research allows participants to put more into the process and, therefore, to achieve greater understanding of complex issues. The research subject’s participation can be characterized through a number of empirical research methods - informal interviews, photographic observations, analyses of personal photographs and self-analysis during the interview. In addition, the empirical research aims to make an intellectual ‘tool’ for the experiential task: that is, photo-taking that people can use to improve the museum experience. Through this experiential task, which gives camera control to participants, participants naturally collect data in their photographs and then process the information to make meanings from it. In this way, the research has experiential and participatory factors that can provide the case study with practical soundness.

The type of empirical study chosen involves visitor participants with a background in design, who are still working or studying in the field, to investigate their meaning-making process, which especially presents their socio-political status and power relationships within the professional world. Through individual interviews with twelve designer visitors, the participants identified the photographs that encouraged their meaning-making in the case study museum. Whilst being interviewed with their photographs, within the specific and socio-cultural setting, participants reflected on their values, shared realities, collective meanings, needs, and visiting goals. Through these deliberate reflections knowledge is generated and meaning is regained.

5.3 The Qualitative Methods

5.3.1 Overview

The research methods of this study comprise 1) auto-photography; 2) photographic observation; and 3) photo-elicitation interviews. These methods are, as stated above, characterized as experimental (for the researcher) and experiential (for the research subject). In addition, these methods are usually considered to be types of qualitative research, although both quantitative and qualitative data analysis can be used with them. As qualitative methodologies generally do, they allow categories of findings to be created as the need arises (as opposed to fitting responses into pre-established categories) so that they can yield information that may not emerge in statistical analysis. The three methods used in this empirical case study were, therefore, designed to permit a naturalistic, qualitative and interpretive approach to the ethnographic contents of visitors' verbal interviews and visual material. These methods, which have been used in a number of relevant research studies, will now be reviewed.

5.3.2 Auto-photography

This empirical research attempts to view visitors' experiences from the visitor's perspective. In doing so, it explores the associations visitors construct between specific exhibits, areas, and the museum as a whole, and the events, issues and emotions of their personal and professional lives. For this reason, museum professionals as well as exhibition designers in museums are increasingly turning to interpretive, naturalistic research to collect and analyze data. Among these methods of inquiry, auto-photography has been applied infrequently in educational research or program evaluation (see e.g. English, 1988; Ziller, Vern, and de Santoya, 1989; Armstrong, 2005; Noland, 2006). Auto-photography,

especially, offers much promise in collecting holistic and consistent samples or records of critical phenomena. Auto-photography is ‘a process whereby in the beginning a person interprets the content of photographs (photographs he or she has taken or photographs the person is asked to critically reflect on) of both people and places that are actual or metaphoric examples of his or her life world’ (Armstrong, 2005: 34).

The viability of this method was first documented in anthropology and sociology (see e.g. Byers, 1964; Garfinkle, 1967; Becker, 1986; Collier and Collier, 1986). Pioneers in the use of auto-photography in their case study based research view the use of self-generated photographs as ‘a natural extension to the traditional verbal inquiries into the self concept’ (Ziller, 1990: 76). For instance, R. C. Ziller regards photographs as agents that show how the research subjects understand and interpret the world and themselves within it (ibid.). J. Collier also recommends a process of photographic tracking and selective response to ‘peaks of information’ where and when they happen (Collier, 1979). Collier says ‘this is a flexible approach, one that can be responsive to unpredictable and uncontrollable behavior in social and cultural field settings. It is a process in which selectivity is not an immaculate and mechanical exercise, but a manifestation of human sensitivity, one that rightfully portrays significant research as an accomplishment of human judgment’ (ibid.: 163). Likewise, auto-photography has been a critical ‘tool kit’ for various types of social science research, such as; family photography research (e.g. Chalfen, 1999), tourist photography research (e.g. Ziller, 1990; Aitken and Wingate, 1993; Jenkins, 2003; Urry, 1990) and adult education research via photographs (e.g. Harper, 1994; Taylor, 2002; Armstrong, 2005).

Auto-photography, as a recording and an illustrating method, has also been employed in literatures in museums making socio-cultural investigations into visitors’ meaning-making. One example is that of the research team from the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh. In the report, *Voices and Images: Making Connections between Identity and Art* (2001),

they conclude that they found auto-photography useful as a tool for research and evaluation in museum research. A series of studies on information-seeking visitor behaviour in museums also makes use of this method for a similar purpose (see e.g. Fleck et al., 2002). These studies show that the images that arise from the photo-taking activity in a museum, provide a rich source of information about visitor responses to exhibits as well providing a way for participants to get in touch with their emotions, because visitors select for themselves what to photograph. As an example of museum studies of this type, *Listening to Young Children in Museum Spaces*, carried out at the University of Western Sydney, included the use of photographs, with children using digital cameras to photograph museum spaces from their own perspectives and produce their own record of experiences and interactions (Kelly et al., 2006). Another report, *Rememberer: A Tool for Capturing Museum Visits*, also asserts that photographs are very important because of their strong appeal as records of an experience (Fleck et al., 2002).

However, the use of museum visitors' photographs in research data is controversial, but nevertheless considered significant; controversial because in previous museum audience research photographs have not been considered as a product of meaning-making; significant because they encourage research subjects to make new meanings from the photographs when they look at them. By looking at the photographs as data, looking for patterns of object, or structure, or context etc., they begin to make secondary meanings about how they see and understand the world and their relationship to it (Ziller, 1990: 88-111). Moreover, 'we should not forget that photography has a long tradition of theorisation and analysis, which many of the papers underline and rely on in their case studies' (Knoblauch, Baer, Laurier, Petschke and Schnettler, 2008: para. 7).

The thesis, therefore, builds on the creative method known as auto-photography to examine designer visitors' photographs, illustrating their perceptions of themselves and the environment. Despite the availability of various methodological approaches, such as the use of video recording tools in multi-

modal research, the use of participants' drawings, comment cards that are generally used in museum audience research, and a self-diary technique in anthropology, the research method employed in this case study is most suitable for the following reasons.

First of all, the photographs form a power and knowledge relationship. The research has not been designed to find relationships between designer/design students' meaning-making and their practices/researches, as the results generally seen in cognitive and empirical design research are, but to examine how the social values and ideas embedded in the field of design are *consumed* by individual visitors in the design museum. For that reason, the photo-taking activity is useful: the photographs give shape to the museum visit because they are the outcome of an active signifying practice, which those taking the photographs select, structure and identify. Thus, when visitors explain the photographs that they have taken in the museum they become amateur semioticians. In that way, the photographs taken by visitors during their museum visits become a language or 'signifying system to convey their desires' (Taylor, 2002: 135).

Secondly, photo-taking can be seen as an example of the 'ritual-like activities' defined by C. Bell in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992) and this idea becomes increasingly important in terms of twenty-first century tourism. While professional literature has tended to emphasize the importance of digital photography and its application to branches of design research, its impact on the multi-faceted associations with designers' informal activity in design research has been marginalized. Whereas photographs or produced images are now widely used within user research in design, activities such as photo-taking during designers' learning have not been associated with their behaviour.

Lastly, photographs taken by visitors indicate viewers' desires for self-expression, identification and connection with the museum, which links to the first reason above. Auto-photography works not only to 'trigger memories' but to make new meaning and to inspire 'new understandings of the self' (Taylor, 2002: 4). Case

studies in C. M. Noland's article, *Auto-Photography as Research Practice: Identity and Self-Esteem Research* (2006), demonstrate the use of photographs in studying identity and other dimensions of culture and self. In her research, female participants took photographs of their environments. This task required each woman to contemplate her identity and think about how she wanted to represent it. Then, the participants carefully selected each image and found symbols of their identity there.

This enables us to distinguish auto-photography studies from studies that employ straightforward interviews. Although identity matters are too complicated to identify, photographs given to participants make them reflect on themselves and explain how they wanted to exhibit themselves at that moment. In the application of photography, C. M. Noland and M. Jones employ this view in their study of the self-esteem of adolescent girls, combining auto-photography and a self-esteem scale (Noland and Jones, 1998). Demonstrating the use of auto-photography in studying identity and other dimensions of self, their research asserts that auto-photography can be of benefit to those involved in identity and self-esteem research by circumventing obstacles involving language issues, marginalization and age. In that respect, photographs have been proved to enrich the interview findings.

Therefore, auto-photography appears to yield richer data than that usually obtained from verbal interviewing procedures alone. Photographs trigger recall, make participants focus on the interviewing process and enable researchers to investigate intended as well as unintended aspects of meaning-making. Thus, auto-photography generates more authentic data because it enables researchers to observe the participants' world through the participants' eyes (Ziller and Smith 1975; Ziller 1990). In other words, this approach permits others to view the world critically from the view of the observed person (Taylor, 2002). Moreover, auto-photography 'gives the participant control of the camera and responsibility for taking photographs' (Ziller, 1990: 70). Therefore, it can be said that auto-photography consists of photography and autobiography (Armstrong, 2005: 33).

In that way auto-photography can be seen as a visual narrative photographic technique that allows researchers to learn more about how participants understand and interpret their world.

Within the context of this thesis the use of photographs has been extended to incorporate the thinking of designer visitors critically reflecting on their professional field through the photographs taken by them at the museum. In that way, the photo-taking activity – of being seen and recorded, and of seeing others and recording them – is used in the study to exemplify the research subjects' reflection on their work or the field that they are involved in as well as their ritualistic behaviour.

5.3.3 Observation

Photographic observation is used as a preliminary analysis process that documents the auto-photographic findings. From the very first photographic observation, the research investigates how participants feel about the spaces of the museum and these initial findings are organized into provisional categories. Photographic observation is an extension of auto-photography, in that the researcher is not responsible for taking the photographs, but has the analytical task of interpreting them. The photographic observation is a peripheral process that functions as a small but useful part of the empirical research and makes it easier to assess the degree of representativeness of the photographs in participants' meaning-making. The scheme for codifying the photographic observation is introduced in Chapter 7.

5.3.4 Interviews

Photo-related interviewing is particularly useful in uncovering how meaning-making contexts are socially and psychologically constituted (Erickson and Mohatt, 1982). The case study interviews took the form of in-depth unstructured interviews with participants. This type of interview-based method has been

widely acknowledged in recent socio-cultural studies on meaning-making and educational studies; for example, gender studies (e.g. Aldoory, 2001, 2005; Vardeman, 2005), adult education studies (e.g. Harper, 1994; Taylor, 2002) and, of course, museum visitor studies (e.g. Callanan and Soennichsen, 2002; Sfard and Prusak, 2005).

Examples of interview techniques that try to empower the visitor and examine their meanings have, until now, been those in which visitor conversations are taped or recorded as they wander through the galleries, with visitors selecting for themselves where they wish to go and what to see. Silverman's work on interviewing visitors in pairs (Silverman, 1990), which was previously referred to, is one example: another is that of the research team from the University of Leicester, who interviewed individual visitors in Wolverhampton Art Gallery (Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri, 2001). A distinguishing feature of the interviewing in that empirical research was the use of photographs. The images were used as an original source of evidence and, later, as a stimulus to gather additional data in an interview. The photographs were, therefore, arranged in a way that was intended to provide for efficient interviewing.

The use of photography as a research methodology and the impact that still photography can have on participants during the interview process have been examined by museum and adult educators (e.g. Harper, 1994; Taylor, 2002). For instance, when E. W. Taylor researched the concept of meaning-making, he conducted an exploratory study into how still photography can elicit often hidden beliefs about teaching (Taylor, 2002: 123). He concluded that still photography can offer participants an outlet for expressing these views and showing their own critical reflection. Although Taylor did not provide a concrete definition for the term meaning-making, his study on photography is beneficial to the field of adult education and useful to the empirical research in this study.

Since photo-interviewing was pioneered in the fields of sociology, anthropology etc., the original procedure for photo-interviewing has developed and been

modified. Photographs are used in this study as more than original data sources, although even as original evidence they are powerful. In this thesis, photographs themselves serve as a stimulus for encouraging interviewees in meaning-making and grounding and illustrating meaning-making contexts.

One of the efficient and widely used research methods to use photographs is 'photo-elicitation', which is sometimes referred to as 'photo feedback'. Photo-elicitation was first introduced by J. Collier (1957), a photographer as well as a researcher, who was at that time involved in Cornell University's multi-disciplinary research team. In his research, Collier proposed the use of photography as an interview tool to examine mental health in changing communities in the Maritime Provinces in Canada. His photographic survey method solved a problem that the research team had had, the difficulty in agreeing on categories of quality of housing to be used in the research area, and also enlarged the possibilities of conventional empirical research.

D. Harper (2002) defines photo-elicitation as the following: 'photo-elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview. The difference between interviews using images and text, and interviews using words alone lies in the ways we respond to these two forms of symbolic representation. This has a physical basis: the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information. Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words: exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words. These may be some of the reasons the photo-elicitation interview seems like not simply an interview process that elicits more information, but rather one that evokes a different kind of information' (Harper, 2002: 13).

Photo-elicitation is an effective technique that prompts participants to follow the interview process using still photographs (Harper, 1994; Taylor, 2002). J. Collier and M. Collier indicate (1986) that an interview in which the interviewee

(informant) and the interviewer (researcher) share physical and visual objects is the key element of photo-elicitation. They write, ‘we were asking questions of the photographs and the informants became our assistants in discovering the answers to these questions in the realities of the photographs’ (Collier and Collier, 1986: 105). In this way, still photographs provoke emotional reactions and ‘dredge the consciousness and subconsciousness [*sic*] of the informant and in an exploratory fashion reveals significance triggered by the photographic subject matter’ (Taylor, 2002: 127). Moreover, Collier and Collier maintain that photo-elicitation diminishes the emotional pressure of being research subjects that many interviewees may feel: ‘instead, their role can be one of expert guides leading the fieldworker through the content of the pictures’ (Collier and Collier, 1986: 106), allowing them to tell stories spontaneously. This self-generated and voluntary activity enables them to represent their self-identity and to explain what the objects in the photograph mean to them (Harper, 1986).

This method has been used by researchers as a main resource in recent social research (see e.g. Harper, 1986; Gold, 1991; Blinn and Amanda, 1991; C. Z. Smith and Woodward, 1999; Guschker, 2000). As an example applied to museum audience research, visitors to the London Transport Museum were asked to express ideas, images or thoughts that came to mind related to transport in London (2001). Their responses formed the bases for open-ended interviews that were conducted before and after a visit to the displays. In these interviews photographs were used to encourage the visitors to express their feelings.

The following two chapters will show the whole process that was conducted using these research methods – auto-photography, photographic observation, and photo-interviewing using the photo-elicitation technique. Before introducing the case study, practical and ethical considerations relating to the empirical research will now be considered.

5.4 Practical and Ethical Considerations

The ethics of obtaining permission vary in different research contexts, according to project aims and the agendas of researchers, informants and other interested parties. The type of data used in this case study research led to an important issue of data collection, which is worth noting here: that is, seeking the consent of the individuals photographed. In general, official permission is required. In most field research contexts formal permission is needed before photographing a specific place or event. However, not all types of museum research require permission — in some cases, for instance, if you are interested in analyzing something that is available publicly you do not necessarily need the permission of the authors. In the case study museum, the Design Museum London, individual photography was freely permitted at certain exhibitions at the time that the research was conducted in 2007⁸. So, at that time participants did not have to get individual permissions from the museum. Although the Design Museum London allowed visitors to take photographs freely, the photographs taken by participants are used in this study with the agreement of the museum principal and each subject. Thus, all the photographs and interviews were collected and conducted after each consent form was completed by the case study museum and the individual participant. Furthermore, permission was also granted by the Kingston University Research Ethics Committee. Current privacy legislation has strict requirements on how to collect, store and use personal information⁹. This research was approved by an ethics review committee to make sure that it did not violate any of the University's conditions.

⁸ Since 2008, new guidelines about filming and photography at the museum have been set up. All filming and photography must be arranged and permission must be given in advance by the Design Museum Press Office.

⁹ In the UK, specific privacy guidelines for the museum research industry are being designed by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Another issue was the condition of anonymity. During the research process participants were informed that the research findings would be anonymous and confidential. Thus, participants were assured that their identity would not be revealed to anyone who was not directly involved in the study. To identify participants, information (name, phone number or address, or recorded image) was collected and kept separate from the data: access was restricted by security measures.

The last ethical consideration relates to the cost of participation. In terms of material requirements an auto-photographic project requires each participant to have a camera that s/he might not own. Therefore, before people were invited to the case study museum, they were asked whether they had a camera and, if not, were provided with one. One concern about the researcher providing a camera is the level of anxiety that this may cause the participant, particularly if it is a sophisticated model. Most auto-photographic research advises the sacrifice of some artistic potential and use of a 'one-touch' simple camera, even a 'throwaway' camera. However, it was felt that taking pictures might be more than a matter of recording for participants in this study and that participants' interest in aesthetic issues might be inherent to their photo-taking activities in the museum. Possible aesthetic concerns about their photographs were, therefore, also considered.

5.5 Chapter Summary

As a form of research practice, the empirical research portion of this study uses spoken materials (interview data) and visual materials (still photographs) as the main modes of data collection. The chapter has discussed the research approach, research type and methods in detail and highlighted the intrinsic value of visitors' informal and casual photo-taking activities and the photographs themselves.

These methods offer a practical way forward, allowing the design of the research project to incorporate the insights of social theories that underpin an understanding of the meaning-making of designer visitors.

This sort of methodological approach has recently been used within the expanded context of several branches of social science, such as educational studies, tourism studies, and museum audience research. The chapter has demonstrated the usefulness of photographic methods in these empirical studies and has argued that they can add validity and reliability to this study.

Based on these considerations, the qualitative research methods, which are based on latent areas of human activity - auto-photography, photographic observation and photo-elicitation interviews – advocate not a positivist philosophy but an interpretivist philosophy that enables the realization of certain features within given theoretical contexts and theories outlined in the preceding chapters. The following chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of some of the major characteristics of the case study museum, the Design Museum in London and introduce a research scheme to codify the observations and interviews.

Chapter 6

The Case Study: Overview

6.1 Introduction

As the theoretical groundwork of this thesis theoretical contexts for the meaning-making process were analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4. Unlike these chapters, the empirical research focuses on a case study museum in order to investigate real meaning-making practice of designer visitors within a museum. In this chapter, the environs, historical background and role of the case study museum, the Design Museum in London, will be first investigated to clarify why the museum was selected for this research: a brief history and description of the Design Museum will be provided for reference, along with some images of the building, the exhibits, displays, exhibition area and floor layouts, the city of London where the museum is located, and its relationship with broader design contexts.

The previous chapter demonstrated the general use of the visual methodologies - auto-photography and photo-elicitation - in studying meaning-making and other dimensions of culture and self. From the review of these studies, it seems clear that the fact that research participants carefully select each occasion for taking a photograph separates the work in auto-photography studies from other research that uses straightforward interviews. By using these visual methods it is expected that the space afforded to participant visitors will enable them to think

about how they want to represent themselves as well as the exhibits. The latter part of this chapter describes how the research methods were employed and modified during the research process: the research process basically consisted of preparation, data collection and data analysis.

6.2 A Brief Overview of the Chosen Museum

6.2.1 Macro Perspective: The City of London

London, the capital of England and the United Kingdom, occupies over 620 square miles and is the most populous city in the European Union. London's population is heavily concentrated (at about 4,539 people per sq km/11,568 per sq mi) and it was estimated to be 7,172,000 on the last Census Day of April 2001 (National Statistics, 2001)¹⁰. This represents 14.6 per cent of the total population of Britain. The population in 2007 was thought to have been about 7,518,000 (ibid.).

This capital is a major centre for international business and commerce. Enhanced by diverse ethnicity, work in London draws from a broad pool of people with many and varied skills, languages and cultural backgrounds. Over 300 languages are spoken in multi-cultural London. This makes the city one of three 'command centres' for the world economy, along with New York City and Tokyo (Sassen, 2001). For instance, London has a 50% share of all European banking activity and is the second largest city economy in Europe: as the world's largest international banking centre it generates approximately 20% of the UK's GDP

¹⁰ The most recent census published by National Statistics was on 29 April 2001. Plans are being made for the next census to take place on 27 March 2011. Available at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/>

every year (Oxford Economic Forecasting, 2005).

Moreover, London transformed into a mostly service-based economy earlier than other European cities, particularly after World War II. The success of London in the service industry and in business results from the fact that its language, English, is the native and dominant language of the business world and that it has a close relationship with the U.S. and various countries in Asia, having been the capital of the former British Empire (Oxford Economic Forecasting, 2005). In addition, the cultural diversity of London and the fact that English law is the most commonly used contract law in international commerce have contributed to its success in the industry (*ibid.*). The more service-based nature of London's economy resulted from government policies including low taxation, particularly for foreigners, a business-friendly environment, good transport infrastructure, particularly its airline industry, and a deregulated economy with little control by the government (*ibid.*).

More than 85% (3.2 million) of the working population of Greater London is employed in service industries (Oxford Economic Forecasting, 2005). However, the number of employees in the manufacturing industry in London has greatly reduced over the last three decades, mainly due to competition with low-cost areas and improvements in technology (Seall, 2008). Nevertheless, more than 15,000 manufacturing businesses still exist in London (such as clothing, printing, fabricated metal, furniture and wood products and food and drink) because of its advantageous geographical location, access to huge markets, large science and knowledge base, physical assets, diversity and role as a centre of design and creative industries (Seal, *ibid.*).

In particular, design has come to be regarded as a source of innovation, which helps to underpin the economy and the culture of modern Britain. Since the immediate post-war years, television has played a significant role in the diffusion of design's economic, social and aesthetic value to a wider audience than ever before. This was achieved 'through the promotion of the importance of *good*

design, not only in educational programming, but also in the sets and furniture used within studio backgrounds' (Jones, 2003: 308). In addition to professional services, there are many media companies in London and the media distribution business is its second most competitive industry (Oxford Economic Forecasting, 2005). The BBC and other broadcasters have headquarters in and around the city. After 1946, the BBC and the Council of Industrial Design co-operated to assist in policy-making for design promotion in the early period of television. The collaboration between the two organizations developed in line with the BBC's ambitions to use television, as it had used radio, as an instrument of national improvement. However, differences of opinion emerged between the Council and the BBC as television began to create its own identity and attitude towards design.

Tourism is also one of London's prime industries and employed the equivalent of 350,000 full-time workers in London in 2003: annual expenditure by tourists is around £15 billion (Visit London, 2006). As well as playing a research role many museums, galleries, and other institutions in London are major tourist attractions. Popular destinations for tourists, the Natural History Museum (biology and geology), Science Museum, and Victoria and Albert Museum (craft, fashion and design) are located in South Kensington's 'museum quarter'. The city houses extensive art collections, primarily in the National Gallery, Tate Britain and Tate Modern. As well as the Victoria and Albert Museum, London has the most imaginative museum of design, that is the Design Museum London: both museums attract visitors from all over the world. In addition, every year more than 300,000 tourists visit the London Design Festival to join over 200 events and activities across the capital, celebrating all aspects of design (<http://www.londondesignfestival.com>). The Festival's website is visited by 70,359 unique web-users annually (ibid.). The festival consists of large shows including 100% Design, Tent London, Designersblock London and small events such as fringe shows, pop up shops, talks and one-day events. A wide variety of visitors from all over the world experience the festival and many who are here to do business with London-based designers also visit the festival.

6.2.2 Micro Perspective: The Design Museum London

The Design Museum is situated on the south side of the Thames near Tower Bridge in London. It was founded in 1989 and claims to be the first museum of modern design. It is a small museum, having exhibition spaces over two floors of the building and a special outdoor exhibition space by the water front, called the Design Museum Tank. The current Director is D. Sudjic, who succeeded A. Rawsthorn in 2006.

In contrast to most large museums in London, the Design Museum London charges an entrance fee because it is not subsidized by the Government. Hence, it is funded by charity and ticket sales. Likewise, most exhibitions in the museum are financed by the income from ticket sales and corporate sponsorship from companies. Ticket sales are considerable, as the museum attracts 200,000 visitors every year ([http://www. designmuseum.org/](http://www.designmuseum.org/)). The museum now receives financial support from many companies, designers and benefactors.

History

This brief history of the Design Museum London draws on the following sources; www.designmuseum.org; www.designweek.co.uk; and Usherwood 1991, 1995. This specialist museum traces its roots to the 1980s. The museum was mainly designed by the Conran Foundation. In 1980 T. Conran, one of the world's best-known designers, restaurateurs and retailers, as well as the current Provost of the Royal College of Art in London, established the Conran Foundation, a charitable fund dedicated to educating the public and British industry on the values of industrial design. As a result, in July 1989, almost three years after closure of its predecessor, the Boilerhouse, which opened in the basement of the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Design Museum London opened in a former Banana Warehouse at Butlers Wharf on the south bank of the Thames, close to Tower Bridge.

Since its foundation in 1989 the Design Museum London has been internationally renowned for its exhibitions on modern design history and contemporary design, for the award of Designer of the Year, and for championing new design talent. Moreover, people use the museum as a source of information and knowledge and its website is visited by more than two million people every year (<http://www.designmuseum.org/>).

Since it first opened the museum has gradually expanded the theme of its exhibitions from industrial products to furniture and fashion and it now focuses on architectural design. The reasons for these thematic changes relate to the museum's personnel history, which has been characterized by resignations (Design Week, 2004): for instance, the museum's first director, S. Bayley, resigned upon the completion of the building in 1989. Then, in 2004, J. Dyson, the British inventor in the field of design, resigned from the board of trustees, of which he was chair, criticizing the museum's emphasis on form and style over function. This occurred after the exhibition of the 1950s flower arranger, Constance Spry, organized by the Director, A. Rawsthorn, who also resigned in 2006 (ibid.).

Role

The Design Museum is significant as the first museum in the world to be dedicated to the promotion and examination of design and to focus on the exhibition of mass-produced items. It also has a celebrated collection of everyday objects from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For that reason, the Design Museum provides visitors not only with a means of reminiscing about the past, but also with the opportunity to explore innovation for the future. Since the museum founder's initial interest in British people's contemporary aesthetic experience, the museum has been working to place design at the centre of contemporary culture. Since its establishment it has emerged as an institution of

international status and significance, playing a vital role in making design and architecture a part of the cultural agenda. It reveals the richness of the field of design and its importance in all forms of culture system. Furthermore, for the past twenty years, the Design Museum London has received global attention and has reflected the city of London, functioning as a tourist destination, especially for people from the design professions. Therefore, the role of the Design Museum London is not only to publicize, educate, celebrate and entertain the general public, but also to provide a means of improving the field of design for the design profession.

Museum Space Description



[Figure 6.1] Entrance to the Design Museum. Courtesy of the Design Museum

The museum is typical of many city museums in terms of size, audience composition and methods of interpreting exhibits. One of the museum's most striking features is the exterior, built in the international modernist style of the

1930s. B. Usherwood, in her publication on the relationship between the form and funding of the Design Museum, *The Design Museum: Form Follows Funding* (1991), says '[d]esigned by Stuart Mosscrop and Richard Doone of the architectural firm Conran Roche, the museum, a converted 1950s warehouse, rises as a shining white, blockish building in angular ocean-liner style from the debris of half-developed riverside' (1991: 77) (Figure 6.1).

Riverside Hall (Floor plan 1)



[Figure 6.2] Lobby in the Design Museum. Courtesy of the Design Museum

The ground floor, called Riverside Hall, is the foyer of the museum and is composed of the admissions desk, museum shop and café, where twenty highlights from the collection are now featured, as well as the only toilets in the building, which were designed by Australian product designer M. Newson. Usherwood describes the Riverside Hall: 'there will be few surprises for those acquainted with the esthetic associated with Conran's commercial enterprises; the Museum's retro-modern architecture; the monochromatic grandeur of the airy

entrance hall, with its white walls and gray marble counters; and the carefully poised cafe-bar, selling basil and mozzarella baguettes. The entire museum is a paradigm of modernist style' (ibid.: 78).

This lobby shows some of the ways in which design has been interwoven with many aspects of everyday life behaviour. For instance, the Design Museum shop seems reminiscent of T. Butler's essay, *Souvenirs and the Museum Store* (2005). Butler expresses the cultural phenomenon of the museum store in this way: 'the commercial space of the store offers a kind of refuge for the less savvy or aggressive museum-goer. The store and the practices and expected behavioral norms of shopping that occur within in it are familiar to the average visitor and consumer and there seems to be significantly less of a climate of regulation and surveillance. Merchandise in the store presents the contents of the museum, but in a manner that is accessible. One may not take the unique exhibit home with them, but there is the option of taking ownership of the mass-produced copy. As souvenirs, cultural objects are simplified and diluted for the purposes of easy and ready consumption by a trusting mass audience' (Butler, 2005).

The rest of the ground floor area, except the museum shop area, is often used for selected special visitors. In a description on the museum website, the museum says that 'with its white walls, marble floors and floor-to-ceiling windows opening out on to the riverfront, the Riverside Hall on the ground floor of the Design Museum is a blank canvas to be transformed into the ideal setting for special events. Guests have direct access to the Design Museum's riverfront terrace to enjoy unrivalled views across the River Thames to picturesque Tower Bridge and City of London's dramatic skyline. The galleries can be made available for special guests to enjoy exclusive private views of the Design Museum's critically acclaimed exhibitions' (<http://www.designmuseum.org/hiring/riverside-hall>).

First Floor (Floor Plan 2)

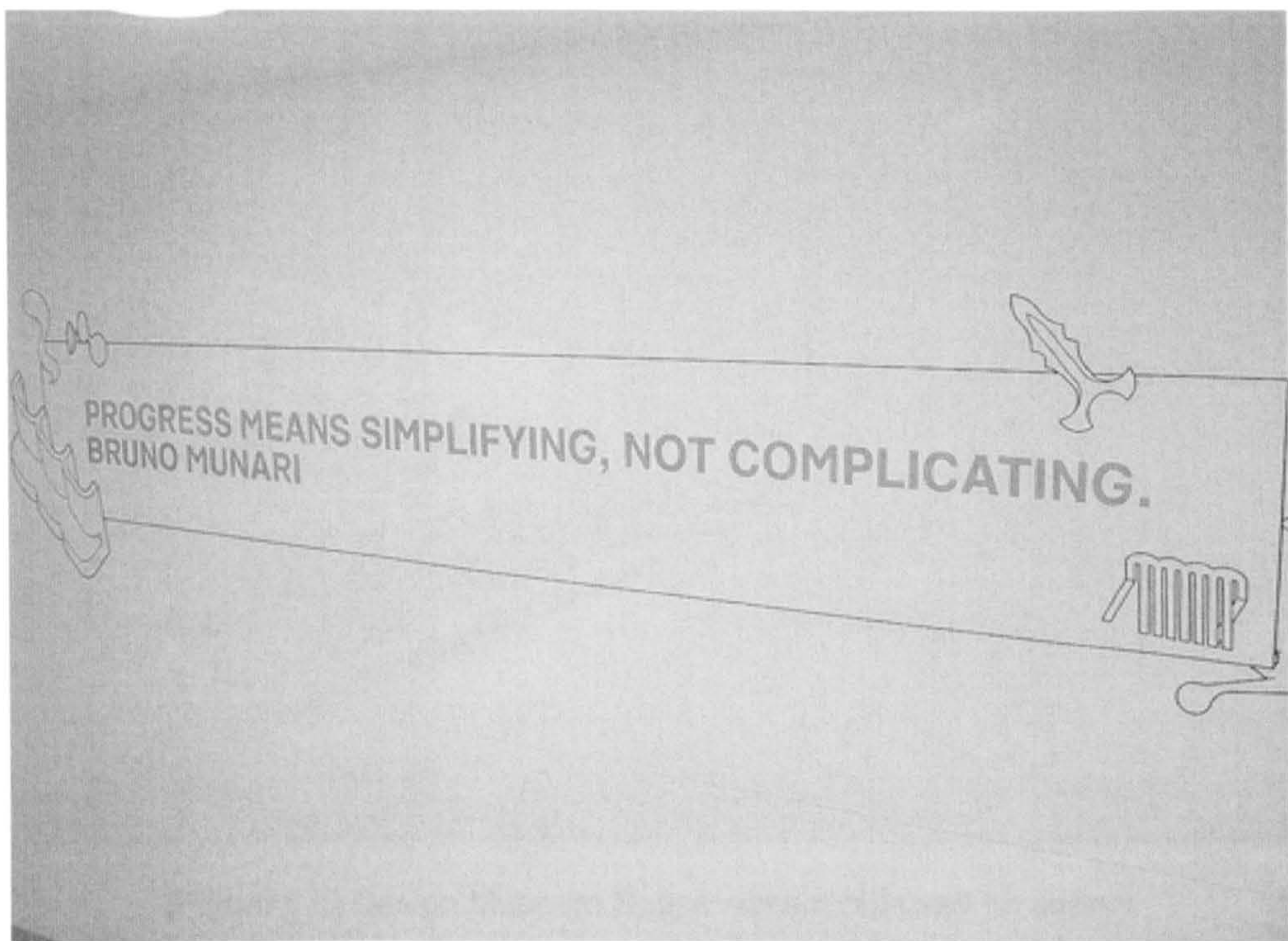


[Figure 6.3] First floor exhibition space used for temporary exhibitions.

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The Design Museum as a whole is relatively small in size, but the first floor, dedicated to only one themed exhibition, is spacious (see Figure 6.3). Thus, the first floor is used for the main attraction of the museum, temporary thematic exhibitions. Each temporary exhibition generally lasts four to six months, using the space with an open floor plan or multi-dimensional partitions. Previous exhibitions here have included retrospectives of celebrity designers, such as A. Aldridge's illustration and Matthew Williamson's fashion design, and 'Design Cities - Architecture and Design'. The case study research was mainly conducted on this floor and the top floor.

Also on the first floor is the Blueprint Café, one of Conran's many restaurants, which has scenic views of the River Thames and Tower Bridge: the café is not connected to the museum directly.



[Figure 6.4] Slogan on the staircase between the first and the third floors.
Copyright by author permission granted by the Design Museum

Moreover, as seen on the photograph in Figure 6.4, slogans by celebrity designers appear on the walls of the staircases leading from the ground floor to the first and third floors.

Design Museum Space (Floor Plan 3)



[Figure 6.5] Design Museum Space, vacant but used for events.

Courtesy of the Design Museum

Design Museum Space is located between the first and second floors and the general public is not allowed access (see Figure 6.5). This space is employed for a wide range of purposes ranging from lectures and workshops to major multimedia exhibitions. The museum website describes the space in this way: ‘with a private riverfront entrance and stunning views across the River Thames to Tower Bridge, the City of London and Canary Wharf, the Design Museum Space is a dedicated events space for conferences, product launches, away-days and creativity sessions as well as exclusive receptions, lunches and dinners. Available for exclusive use by our clients throughout the day and evening, the glamorous, versatile Design Museum Space offers a large balcony area spanning the length of the room and is equipped with state-of-the-art AV technology and classic Charles Eames chairs, and can be divided into flexible break-out areas’ (<http://www.designmuseum.org/hiring/design-museum>).

Second Floor (Floor Plan 4)



[Figure 6.6] Front view on the second floor showing an exhibition.

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The second floor is actually the third floor and top floor from the outside. However, Design Museum Space is not accessible to the public from the staircase, so from the inside appears to be the second level of the building. This floor is a bright, naturally-lit modern space with panoramic views of Tower Bridge, the City of London and Canary Wharf. The space is divided into three sections: a front space next to the window, a rear space, and a smaller space at the back separated by wall. The front space is used for a semi-permanent exhibition on historic design (see Figure 6.6). Generally, the displays in this space are themed. In contrast, the rear space contains permanent exhibits. The objects in the Design Museum's renowned classic design collection are placed where they can best be viewed, singly and from their best vantage point, with beautiful simplicity. The website explains 'its permanent collection is based in the museum's store, and includes over 1000 pieces of contemporary and 20th century design, as well as a handling collection and a number of archives. The collection include selections

of domestic artefacts such as radios, computers, typewriters and, chairs. In addition the museum is taking on the Conran Foundation's collection, and is archiving work commissioned as part of its Designers in Residence programme' (<http://www.designmuseum.org/collection>). The smaller space at the back of the floor is the Education Centre, which caters for visiting groups of school children and for families at weekdays.

Education and Research

The website describes its education programme in this way: 'at the heart of our education programme is the ambition to support and nurture the next generation of creative professionals, celebrating and exploring the role of design in everyday life' (<http://www.designmuseum.org/schools-and-colleges>).

The traditional role of education in museums was to support the objectives of the museum (ICOM, 2007). Due to their historical work and achievement, museums are still thought of as authorities and centres of excellence in their fields. For instance, Tate Modern, the Science Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum are, respectively, considered authorities on modern and contemporary art, science and technology and design even by people who have never visited them. Similarly, the Design Museum London has attracted a loyal audience with authoritative exhibitions ranging from product design to fashion and from architecture to graphics. Thus, the Design Museum has offered dynamic programmes of continuing professional development opportunities to secondary school Design and Technology and Art and Design Teachers, primary school Design and Technology Subject Leaders, and postgraduate students with careers in the museums sector and creative industries.

In addition, the Design Museum is particularly known for its influential programmes, which have a good reputation among the design profession. For instance, its master's degree course in Curating Contemporary Design, led by the

Design Museum's exhibition team and Kingston University's academic team, illustrates the museum's commitment to academic excellence enabling students to 'explore the special nature of contemporary design curation as well as the interpretative, educational, marketing and financial aspects of the discipline' (<http://www.designmuseum.org/schools-and-colleges/courses>). Moreover, the 'Design Stories' programme, led by the museum, offers 'inspiring opportunities for AS/A2 design students to learn about the real world of design from its rising stars; innovative young designers talk about their design education, early career paths, creative processes and exciting current projects; and creative approaches to teaching Design and Technology with a stimulating mix of sessions from leading designers, curriculum specialists and classroom practitioners, as well as hands-on workshops, provide teachers and all primary Design and Technology Coordinators with creative approaches to teaching design and technology' (<http://www.designmuseum.org/schools-and-colleges/colleges>).

Until now, museums have tended to focus their knowledge and research on activities within their own institutional and academic disciplines. Recently, however, museums have redefined their relationship with the public through the expansion and enhancement of their education programmes. Moreover, the advance in digital communication technology now provides museums with challenging opportunities to disseminate information and research to a wider public. In particular, the internet is the most dynamic medium for providing access to museum information resources. It is insightful that, after Google, the Tate and the Design Museum were selected as the second and third favoured research sites, respectively, of UK art and design students surveyed in a recent Times Higher Educational Supplement research study (Times Higher Education, 2005). This means that if museums keep expanding their online research resources, the museum will be seen as an efficient source of highly accessible information, rather than merely a physical space containing valuable collections for occasional visits. The Design Museum has also tried to provide online research resources concerning collections and exhibitions. The online archive on the Design Museum's website offers online visitors relevant and accessible general

information on their areas of expertise in a friendly and attractive way that redefines the relationship between museums and the public. For instance, the Enterprise in Design Education resource, a standalone teachers' pack for use in the classroom, is now available free for all schools to download (see <http://www.designmuseum.org/schools-and-colleges/secondary>). The resource is designed 'to support and extend existing schemes of work, to add an enterprise element to the D&T curriculum throughout the school, or to run special competitive enterprise days across a year group' (ibid.). 'It will support [you] in delivering the statutory Enterprise strand for KS4 in an exciting and innovative way, via the design process within Design & Technology' (ibid.).

The impact of the museum's educational role on the Design Museum's audience has been significant in 'doubling the number of students and teachers visiting the museum in formal education groups in the past three years to 20,567; doubling the number of independent student visits to the museum in the past three years to 28,840; involving over 17,000 students in outreach projects last year alone including a national Web Design Challenge funded by Culture Online; and encouraging a wider cross section of the community – particularly young people at risk – to forge a relationship with the Design Museum' (Design Museum London, 2008b).

The Design Museum's education strategy also supports the museum's strategic mission to broaden and extend its audiences by 'revitalising formal education resources at the museum for students at all levels and launching national outreach projects; launching dynamic informal learning programmes for all ages; and developing community projects for young people at risk and other disadvantaged members of local and wider communities' (Design Museum London, ibid.).

Another research project that the museum is currently focused on is the archiving of the permanent collection. Describing the stated aim of the museum, the museum stresses: 'the collection is a key part of the museum's future plans for growth and development, and is currently undergoing a comprehensive

restructuring, that includes improvements in cataloguing, a new database and new storage facilities' (www.designmuseum.org/collection).

6.2.3 Reasons for Choosing the Museum

Initial interest in the Design Museum as a focus for the case study was in the museum as an *institution*. For that reason, the relationship between the museum and allied communities has been emphasized. Of these communities, the design community and its field, in particular, have great interest in and expectations of the Design Museum. For that reason, the Design Museum is a useful case study since the subject matter intensifies the potential for design profession visitors to become engaged with the exhibits and to make meaning. Until now, however, questions about the justification for the existence of the Design Museum, and about its direction, have been constantly posed by the design community (e.g. article from *The Design Week*, 11 November 2004; article from *ICON*, June, 2007: 151)¹¹. Although there has been much discussion, plausible answers to these questions have not yet been provided. Besides, it is as yet unclear how the museum is perceived by members of the design field. In this respect, the Design Museum London can be used as a valuable case study to investigate how designer visitors perceive the museum, and to address the connections that visitors make to their own personal and group identity within the field, which are significant

¹¹ 'What's being celebrated here is a very narrow definition of design based around an equally narrow idea of good taste. It's not that there is anything wrong with the choices, just that they are utterly predictable and devoid of any sense of surprise. This is a shame because the origins of the Design Museum were less predictable and more iconoclastic. It's probably the fate of most cultural innovations to become the new orthodoxy, but the Design Museum seems to have ended up creating its own officially sanctioned canon. All of which is a long way from its more itinerant beginnings as the Boiler house project, started up by T. Conran and S. Bayley in the basement of the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was a genuinely radical move to incorporate commercial and contemporary design into the halls of the V&A at that time. Conran and Bayley then moved the project to its current, curiously retro home near Tower Bridge' (Charles Holland's criticism about Exhibition 25/25, *Icon*, June, 2007: 151).

factors in the meaning-making process.

In addition, the scale of the Design Museum London has made this carrying out this empirical research study possible and manageable. It would be very hard to use other sites as ensuring consistency in data collection would pose problems. The study would also face significant practical difficulties if carried out at multiple sites.

6.3 The Research Process

6.3.1 Data Collection

In the research hypothesis formation, data collection and theory building rely on each other inter-connectedly. For this reason, the thesis deals with these processes together.

Initially, starting from January 2007, eight pre-case study workshops were conducted to optimize the conditions for data collection. Interviews and photographic data were gathered from these eight workshops, comprising thirty eight participants organized into groups of four or five. Each workshop used a different data collection method, such as digital recording technology in order to track visitors' instant reactions during their tour, conducting group interviews, and having discussions with the groups until the final strategy for collecting data was decided (see Figure 6.7). All of these workshops were beneficial in terms of preparation for the 'real' case study but not all of them contributed technically to the research outcomes because they proved to cause secondary cognitive issues among the participants rather than social meaning-making issues. Although this is naturalistic research which takes a synthetic, interpretive, holistic, exploratory approach, this method of data is designed to be both consistent and framed.



[Figure 6.7] One of the pre-case study workshops with participants conducted in the private meeting room of the Design Museum London

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After these several trials, the first actual interview for the case study was conducted in October 2007. All participants in the case study were requested to bring their own digital camera. Otherwise, they were provided with digital cameras for the case study. Then, they were briefed in a written document and again through conversation with the researchers. They were asked to take photographs as they normally would on a visit. When they came out of the exhibition the participants returned the cameras to the researcher. In almost all cases the photographs were then returned to the participants and they were asked to describe each photograph and what it meant to them. Thus, the visitors' interactions with their participatory photography were investigated through an examination of their conversations about the exhibitions at the Design Museum London during the summer of that year.

The aims of this research technique were to; 1) gather data that the researchers would not have been able to gather for themselves; and 2) allow the research subjects to represent the activities and objects that were of significance to them (within the above guidelines). On a more theoretical level, it was felt that this approach would allow the researchers to explore how activities and objects are objectified as representations of meaning-making. In this way, the study proposes a discussion of designer visitors' photo-taking activity as a 'self-curating' tool enabling them to realign the site experience. The designated subjects were professional designers and MA design students with design work experience, who as a matter of course bring a digital camera as their own research-practice tool. This means that artificial manipulation of their behaviour is eliminated.

The basic structure of the on-site case study consisted of 1) warming-up session; 2) exhibition tour session; and 3) visual self-diary talk session. After agreeing to participate, all visitors signed consent forms that described the research and promised confidentiality. They were asked to view the exhibition and take pictures as usual. Participants were then asked to 'think aloud' about their photographs and their comments were recorded.

The case study includes the following collected data: introspective interviews with visitors about their self-taken photographs from the exhibition visit, and the photographs themselves. Photographs were categorized and included in cases where they represented the categories of the framework or where participants' photographs overlapped. The related interviews were transcribed and categorized. Representative photographs and interviews were included in the following chapters to represent these categories. In this case, photographic information not only shows the interior display of the museum and the details of artefacts exhibited different areas, but also has semantically significant implications.

The participants consisted of MA students studying design at university (mostly from Kingston University) who already had work experience in the design

profession, and others who are currently professional designers (mainly from design companies in London and Seoul such as Samsung Design Team). They were invited to participate in the study because they have a background that pertains to one or more aspects of the visitor background that forms a focus for the study: that is, each participant had a high level of design or museum experience. The total number of participants was twelve and their profiles are as follows:

[Table 6.1] Distribution of interviewed participants

Participants	Occupations	Remarks
Participant #01	Product designer	Design Museum member
Participant #02	Design student	Design Museum member
Participant #03	Lecturer in architecture	N/A
Participant #04	Fashion designer	Design Museum member
Participant #05	Fashion curator	Design Museum member
Participant #06	Design student	Design Museum member
Participant #07	Illustrator	N/A
Participant #08	Communication designer	Design Museum member
Participant #09	Product designer	N/A
Participant #10	Design student	Design Museum member
Participant #11	Design student	Design Museum member
Participant #12	Product designer	N/A

Table 6.1 details the stratification of participants’ occupations and their relationship with the museum. All of them were identified for detailed investigation by a survey questionnaire (see Appendix 1).

The interviews conducted with each participant were digitally recorded and the whole process lasted for approximately an hour and a half for each participant. Firstly, a specially designed interview protocol was developed and used to probe the nature and character of the visitors' museum experiences in two distinct key dimensions; positive and negative experiences. This division was considered important for three reasons. Firstly, the division arises from the two social theories - theories of interaction and theories of practice. Secondly, it reflects current thinking on the basic experience of learning from several perspectives, including; socio-cultural, cognitive, aesthetic, and motivational. Thirdly, these dimensions have been examined by researchers (Serrell, 1991; Henry, 2000) and understood to be important in creating a meaningful visitor experience.

Sample Selection Issue

After identifying the frames, the researcher interviewed a single person inside that frame. At the conclusion of the interview the respondent was asked to recommend two other participants - other designers or MA design students – to join the research study. All further participants were provided on the recommendation of previous participants on the basis of a 'reference sampling' technique. They could be at different stages in their careers and have worked in a variety of school and field systems in different geographical locations. When each of the frames either began giving the same references over and over, or respondents in the frame provided the same answers, sampling was concluded in that frame. In this way, the researcher could be confident that accurate depth of meaning and context had been achieved.

Accurate sampling is a first step to good qualitative research. For this, selecting a proper sampling technique according to the characteristics of the research is a prerequisite. The case study adopts a 'reference sampling' technique. Reference sampling is a technique where the participants being studied define themselves. This sampling technique is clearly not intended to be representative

of any larger population. Indeed, it does not even claim to remove the self-selection bias. Instead, reference sampling actually seeks out self-selection in an effort to provide depth of meaning among like-minded or similar people (Blau, 1964; Berg, 1998). At the sampling stage, most of the prospective participants' previous experience of the Design Museum was unknown to the researcher: however, only MA design students or professional designers in design companies were selected as participants. They were all volunteers who were influenced by their personal relationship with the researcher or related person, which may give rise to a missing data problem. Therefore, a reference sampling technique was used, in which the group being studied defines and selects itself.

The actual mechanism of the reference sampling technique is quite clear. The researcher interviews a single person, and then, at the end of the interview, the interviewee is asked to recommend two more people who would be willing to be interviewed. If s/he can provide the researcher with details of two more potential participants the recommender either calls them direct or lets the researcher use the recommender's name when contacting them for future interview. The problem of sample size in this case is settled when the respondents repeatedly recommend the same candidates or provide the same answers to the researcher's questions. In this way, this case study was able to achieve a valid sample size with twelve participants as the empirical saturation point was reached and it was possible to pursue accurate and in-depth research outcomes.

In the use of reference sampling, the important thing is to identify the frames in which each participant is involved. Firstly, all the recommended participants are categorized when first introduced by the former interviewee. However, if the participant provides information that belongs to a different category, the participant could then be re-categorized (Berg, 1998). Only the researcher would be allowed to move a participant into a different category, with 'explicit attributes in mind' (ibid.: 98).

The purpose of reference sampling is to provide a systematized method whereby participants can be selected and researcher selection bias can be removed. In qualitative research the critical problem is not whether a sample is representative, but whether it accurately reflects the meanings of those studied (Berg, *ibid.*: 99). Instead of a reliance on sample size, qualitative methods stress that by selecting and observing participants in a meaningful way the data will reflect accurately those studied. Hence, in qualitative studies sampling becomes an integral part of removing bias in the selection process as well as a method of investigating and removing bias and gaining valid and accurate data. Likewise, reference sampling becomes essential in ensuring repeatable results and is necessary to assure the accuracy and validity of responses that investigate the highly personalized and contextualized meanings of participants.

6.3.2. Data Analysis

Rather than adopt a quantitative approach, a decision was taken to adopt a qualitative approach to the analysis of photographs taken by participants during their visit to the case study museum. Occasionally in research projects involving quantitative analysis photographs are coded and analyzed by researchers: however, in qualitative analysis, researchers often use participants' descriptions of the photographs as data (Ziller, 1990). In qualitative analysis, therefore, the participants are interviewed about the photographs, as indicated.

The initial process of analysis employed a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is the qualitative research method developed by the sociologists B. Glaser and A. Strauss, which basically consists of three stages; firstly, making categories which explain the data; secondly, exploring as many cases as possible in order to find the relevance among them; and lastly, developing these categories into a more scientific form (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). After taking an overview of the photographs taken by participants during their visits the interviews were divided into categories using grounded theory. It was hoped that the emerging categories

would enable an understanding of the relationship between the visitor and the museum, the visitor and other visitors and their interpretive communities.

However, the application of grounded theory, which was selected for the initial part of the analysis, proved limited. Instead, an interpretive and naturalistic approach to analyzing the data was adopted and this is detailed in the following chapter. An interpretive and naturalistic research approach ‘solicits and documents the multiple realities of the researcher and respondents; values and attends to local context and its history; recognizes that knowledge is partial, positioned, and incomplete; and values and celebrates subjective interpretation while recognizing that these interpretations are socially constructed and influenced by the researcher's position and perspective’ (Schwandt, 1994: 122). In this way categories were determined, as far as possible, by what the participants said, rather than the theoretical framework, although that can never be wholly absent.

6.3.3 Research Credibility

To verify research credibility, J. W. Creswell’s eight procedural recommendations were followed. Five of the eight techniques suggested by Creswell are listed here; 1) engagement; 2) debriefing; 3) clarifying researcher bias; 4) member checks; and 5) rich and thick description (Creswell, 1998).

1) *Engagement*. First of all, Creswell maintains that to establish research credibility the researcher should make the participants feel that the researchers are reliable (Creswell, *ibid.*). Communication channels with participants were kept open from the early stage of the empirical research process until the end. Secondary material was also produced for the participants to ensure informed consent. This consisted of an informed consent form, which elucidated the research aims and procedure to encourage the participants to have trust in the researchers (see Appendix 2). Before the interviews, participants were also

provided with the career background of the researcher (design education researcher and curator) to make them feel comfortable and encourage them to speak freely.

2) *Debriefing*. External checks on the research process were conducted by two research advisors, Professor C. McDermott and Dr. W. H. Jefferson, as well as the Head of Education at the Design Museum, H. Charman. According to Creswell, the debriefer is 'an individual who keeps the researcher honest, asks hard questions about the methods, meanings, and interpretations, and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher's feelings' (1998: 202).

3) *Clarifying researcher bias*. A practical issue related to researcher bias concerns the selection of the participant group. Researchers are generally required to choose a small sample from a larger population due to time restraints, financial limitations or lack of access to potential respondents. Therefore, the researcher can only collect data from a limited number of potential respondents. In this respect all researchers have potential biases that will either consciously or sub-consciously influence their selection of participants for a study. The study tried not to take advantage of easy-to-access groups of people (such as visitors at the door) simply because they are easy to access, as visitors of this type might have had limited time available for the interviews and too many variations in their occupations. Instead, subjects were chosen carefully and based on what would be most beneficial to the research by employing the reference sampling technique (see Sampling Selection Issue in section 6.3.1). If the researcher does not eliminate selection bias the results will be biased and potentially meaningless.

A bias problem in selection issues, whether it is qualitative research or quantitative research, cannot always be avoided. However, it is more critical for qualitative researchers to think about a spectrum of selection issues (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994). These include; '1) the core problem of selection bias that has been illuminated by advanced quantitative methods, that is, the specific

impact on causal inference of certain kinds of deliberate case selection; and 2) other issues already familiar to many qualitative researchers, including broader questions of case selection and their implications for various approaches to descriptive and causal analysis' (Collier, 1995: 465). In response, the data collection method (for instance, participants being recruited by researchers as they approach the museum) has been modified for this study, which employs a 'reference sampling' technique as a substitute for visitor group selection. The sampling method will now be discussed to examine how the method can minimize interviewer bias in the research.

4) *Member checks*. Creswell considers his technique 'to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility...' in that it involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 1998: 203). Likewise, after the interviews in this case study each participant was provided with an overview of the interview by e-mail and asked to judge and verify its accuracy.

5) *Rich and thick description*. Chapter 4 described the social system in the field of design to which the research participants belong. It is expected that this will allow readers to determine whether the theoretical findings can be applied to the empirical research data because of 'shared characteristics' between the participants and members of the design profession (Erlandson et al., 1993: 32).

6.4 Chapter Summary

This research began with a desire to investigate the meaning-making processes of the design profession in a design museum. This chapter has provided an overview of the Design Museum in London, chosen as the case study museum devoted to the investigation.

The chapter has also described the research design for the empirical study and the interpretive and naturalistic approach that has been employed. The influence of this approach on the research can be described in two ways. First, the analysis weaves the issue of the relationship between the museum and the visitor into the interpretive tapestry. Second, the position of the participants, as museum visitors as well as members of the design field, is acknowledged using the interpretive analysis approach. The actual investigation that took place using this approach will be described in the next chapter.