Spacing: Following Negotiations in the Process of Exhibition Dismantling

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Abstract

This paper explores an Actor-Network theory approach to museum space. It builds upon qualitative research conducted at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, a museum and educational building located in Norwich, United Kingdom. By following the activities of the people who work at the museum and those involved in the process of dismantling an exhibition, I examine the negotiations that emerge when issues relating to the handling of a specific artwork arise. Drawing on Bruno Latour's concept of 'spacing', this article emphasizes the multiplicity and complexity inherent in this form of museum practice. I focus on space as relationally produced by actors, including nonhumans such as the building design and material features, exhibition objects, handling instructions, and surfaces, alongside people. Through the analysis of this process of 'spacing', the work *towards,* and the negotiation *of,* stability and flux, of homogeneity and heterogeneity inherent to museum spaces, becomes visible. This approach allows for a rich and nuanced understanding of the multifaceted relationships between these various factors.

Keywords: Museum practice, space, actor-network theory, spatial turn, architecture

Introduction

There exists a widespread perception of buildings as static objects, rendered stable through classifications and interpretation, and, ultimately through the conservation of a certain version of the past (Latour and Yaneva 2008; Guggenheim 2009). Following this idea, buildings are considered complete upon their construction, with an interior space enclosed by walls – static and singular (Hilger 2011). When discussing museum buildings and museum spaces, we encounter a unique situation. With the modern museum and gallery, we enter a framework that aligns practices towards stabilized environments that focus on preservation, security, objectivity and often a form of knowledge production that is typically perceived as authoritative. Kevin Hetherington refers to museums as "heterogeneous classifying machines that aim to perform homogeneity" (Hetherington 1997: 215). Nevertheless, museums are in a state of change. Within the extensive field of social and cultural research on museums, there is an increasing awareness of multiplicity and complexity, and more recently, diversity (Macdonald 2006; Macdonald 2023). This tension between control and stasis, as well as fluidity and uncertainty, also accompanies contemporary developments such as digital and participatory museum spaces in particular (MacLeod et al. 2018).[1] And yet, as Hetherington (1997) suggests, this tension between stasis and fluidity, and between homogeneity and heterogeneity within museum spaces, cannot be registered if they are considered Euclidean spaces. If we abandon the disembodied view that sees spaces as abstract, and adopt various standpoints to perceive "partial truths and incomplete perspectives", these tensions can be grasped (Hetherington 1997: 215; Hetherington 1999). In this sense, the following account of museum spaces attempts to alter perspectives in order to gain a different access to reality. As Annemarie Mol observes, the goal is not to "catch reality as it really is. Instead, it is to make specific, surprising, so far unspoken events and situations visible, audible, sensible" (2010: 255). Following the call for

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a biographical approach to understanding museum buildings (MacLeod 2013), I examine the negotiations that involve multiple actors within a specific museum building that is protected as a heritage site. Similar to Arjun Appadurai, who argues that, like humans, things also have a 'social life' and a biography (Appadurai 1986), and Albena Yaneva, who explored the "social life of the Whitney Museum as design object" (Yaneva 2009: 8), I explore a physical engagement with the material world – focusing upon museum objects in particular (MacLeod 2013; Macdonald 2002) – using Actor-Network theory (ANT) (Yaneva 2003; Yaneva 2009).

When entering museum spaces as a researcher, one can easily observe that a lot of work is necessary to perform homogeneity and that it does not necessarily remain in place (Hansmann 2021). It is negotiated anew again and again; it is shaken by every new museum object that enters a building, challenged by things that become decrepit or break, by new insurance standards or changing leadership positions in institutions, but also through diverse, creative and unpredictable visitors. Again and again, the mechanisms of control and order are questioned and readjusted; so too is the negotiation of order that we find when turning to the everyday life of museum buildings.

In his studies of the relationship between architecture and time, Michael Guggenheim has pointed out that buildings do not possess clearly defined interfaces for use, and that they instead present manifold possibilities for action (Guggenheim 2009). In engagements with buildings, possibilities are negotiated, and I argue that such negotiations are particularly interesting when approaching museum spaces. As outlined above, such museum spaces are highly regulated. This is even more the case for particular types of buildings, and especially for buildings under preservation, for which the centralization and maintenance of a linearity or continuity in space and time is of utmost concern. This article will address such work *towards* stability through a museum building that is under heritage protection, where the problem of stabilizing can be explored in three ways: firstly, there is a dominant form of architectural discourse that isolates buildings from courses of action and limits understandings of three-dimensional objects in architectural space. Secondly, dealing with a building under preservation, this three-dimensional object becomes even more fetishized as it enters a network that tries to keep it particularly stable, or authentic. Thirdly, since it is a museum building, the work of stabilization and control also extends to the objects that circulate within the building.

As an architectural researcher, I have argued lengthily elsewhere about the need to take note of the call for a spatial turn in the field of architecture (Geipel and Hansmann 2021; Hansmann 2021). With reference to this issue, I have previously spoken about the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, and I return again to this museum in this paper. While in my previous work emphasis is placed on a new dynamism in architecture, making the claim that a building is what it does, a different focus will be adopted here. Using ethnographic material that I have not yet placed at the centre of scholarly discussion, I address museum spaces as complex processes of sustained negotiation. The focus here is less upon the building and its agency than the everyday work of the museum team. More specifically, this paper looks at a particular moment in the dismantling of the exhibition *Space Light Colour* by the artist Rana Begum, which was exhibited between 12 May – 15 October 2017 at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts. Using participant observation during the dismantling process, as well as interviews with employees, this account enters the modern world of a museum under heritage protection, applying the rather non-modern methodology of ANT to argue for a complex and rich understanding of museum space in negotiation.

Space and spacing – methodological considerations

New understandings of the significance of space that have emerged from the spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences during the late 1980s have allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship and interactions between people and physical things (Soja 1989; Löw 2001; Löw 2016; Döring and Thielmann 2008). Space is no longer understood as an abstract concept –instead, it is conceptualized as social and complex – and the spatial turn has led to the development of various new methods of investigation (Baur et al. 2014; Heinrich et al. 2021). While an explicit interest in architecture emerged in the course of the spatial turn (Delitz 2009, 2010; Yaneva 2009), the discipline of architecture has remained largely

unaffected by these developments. During the twentieth-century architects and architectural researchers have widely embraced space as a design concern (Scott 1914; Giedion 1954; Zevi 1957), in which space is understood as something that can predominantly be manipulated with "objectlike qualities" (Till 2013: 119). Although in the field of museum studies, space is often still conceptualized as a 'container', there is a growing body of research that explores museum space as a social process (Bose et al. 2012; MacLeod 2005, 2013).

While Actor-Network Theory, which interests me here with regard to museum space, has not been explicitly influenced by the spatial turn (see Farías and Paulos 2021), it nevertheless offers a useful conceptual toolkit for grasping space as a socio-spatial process. It is particularly helpful when turning to the architectural realm and human-nonhuman interactions. ANT evolved from the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) in the late 1970s, driven by sociologists such as Michel Callon, Bruno Latour and Madeleine Akrich amongst many others (Callon 1987; Akrich and Latour 1992; Latour 2005). As a research method originating in laboratory studies, ANT focuses on the material and social dimensions of knowledge production in object-rich environments (Latour and Woolgar 1979; Cetina 1999). The indeterminacy of the actors – i.e. what counts as an actor? – and the hybridity of the networks, allow researchers to maintain a focus on the materially rich world and at the same time to open up to the social, which is understood here in the terms of Latour as a "type of connection between things that are not themselves social" (Latour 2005: 5). Circumventing the subject-object distinction, ANT differs from other practice-oriented accounts of space, which still more or less give preference to a human – intentional, sensorial, reflexive – actor.[2] Furthermore, the indeterminacy of context is crucial for an ANT account. ANT scholars do not predefine a context (structurally, institutionally, spatially) in which a certain course of action takes place. Instead, by following the actors and tracing the continuity between, for example, global and local categories, but also the present and the past, a specific actor network becomes visible and creates its own types of space and time. This makes ANT valuable for exploring museum activities because it does not separate the technical and the material from the social aspects of the museum. ANT-based research in the field of museum studies highlights this perspective with a focus on various areas, including art installation (Yaneva 2003), museum collections (Byrne et al. 2011; Jones 2018), archival practices (Yaneva 2020), digital display, and data management (Herman 2018; Park 2021). The unique insights that ANT offers when approaching museum space has been emphasized by Hetherington, who examines the evolving subject-object relation by studying the history of material heterogeneity in museum space (Hetherington 1999), and how artefacts create folds in the modern museum (Hetherington 1997). While Hetherington defines the museum space as an abstract topological space – a topology that "alter[s] within specific temporal, epistemological, cultural and material contexts" (Hetherington 1999: 53) – my approach is to illustrate how the museum constitutes a distinctive social space. In my work I refer to Latour's concept of 'spacing' (1997), in which he emphasizes the work necessary to create space, and suggests observing the emergence of space through activities or courses of action, that is to say, that spaces do not pre-exist particular activities, but rather that particular activities constitute spaces through processes of spacing. To grasp this concept, it is important to clarify the terms of agency, actor and network.[3] Put succinctly, actors enter into, maintain, and transform relationships with other actors, forming networks in this process. Agency is distributed throughout these networks. In this sense, actors never act alone but rather through and with other actors. As mentioned above, actors are not only humans; they do not need to have intentionality or free will, but can take the form of material objects, rules, and texts for example. Actors act by making a difference or by altering a certain course of action. Therefore, an ANT approach to the concept of space involves an observation and analysis of how actors establish hybrid networks, through which they in turn exist as actors. The network generates space, both as a spatial object and as a spatial process.

This becomes clearer with a concrete example: museum spaces that house light-sensitive exhibitions must meet specific requirements (Hansmann 2021: 167-202). When we follow the role of light in such a building, its agency becomes visible. The light allows visitors to enjoy the art, it connects and guides them, and makes a significant contribution to the pleasure of visiting and the information shared within a museum. Since the light makes a difference, it is an actor, and yet it never acts in isolation: light is designed and installed; bulbs are replaced;

light intensities are adjusted; regulations and electricity prices change over time. The network of light is a hybrid of human and nonhuman actors. It is never static, but rather fluid and changing over time. To maintain stability, and as a result, homogeneity, the system requires meticulous maintenance and a network of actors to align various heterogeneous elements. Exploring the matter of light, we can trace the multiplicity of actors working towards a well-lit museum space. The work that is necessary to sustain a well-lit museum does not take place *in* space but is the space producing a process of spacing. Arguing for a complex and processual understanding of 'doing museum space' by looking at the dismantling of a particular exhibition, I seek to show how an ANT approach towards space in the field of museum research can provide for a rich understanding of the reciprocal relationships between practices, objects, materials, and humans. But before I give an account of my observations, let us first take a look at the building, its specific entanglement with its patrons, Lisa and Robert Sainsbury, the architect Norman Foster, and the relationships that exist across different institutions and groups of users today.

Stability – the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts

Figure 1: View of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts. Photo: The Author, October 2017.

The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts building resembles an elongated cream-white box that opens from both ends through windows onto the surrounding greenery (Figure 1). Located on the campus of the University of East Anglia (UEA) in Norwich, the building was originally conceived to house the collection of Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.[4] Financed through an endowment from their son, David Sainsbury, and designed by Foster Associates, the Sainsbury Centre opened its doors to the public in 1978.[5] While still in the design process, the centre was given further functions, including an academic and social hub for UEA, combining exhibition and education facilities with spaces for social gathering. Foster Associates created a building with a continuous open space to house these diverse functions. This is supported by an underground structure and a double-layered 'skin' that accommodates service rooms and secondary functions (Foster and Powell 2010). The prominent steel framework creates an extensive continuous interior without separating walls in the conventional sense. This space predominantly houses the permanent collection in what is referred to as the 'Living Area' (Figure 2). The building has been widely praised: Reyner Banham described it as the "dream of the infinitely flexible and perfectly conditioned art gallery" (Banham 2000: 85).

Indeed, Historic England announced in 2012 that the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts would become a Grade II listed building, given the "in-built flexibility of its open space responds to the changing needs of its use as a museum gallery and education centre".[6] However, while the material object indeed offers flexibility and can be adapted to meet changing demands, it is only through a closer look from the inside-out that one can understand the actual processes of ordering and control that characterize the everyday life of the Sainsbury Centre today. It is here that we come across another set of actors that have their own specific interests and needs: the Sainsbury Institute for Art; the School of Art History and World Art Studies at UEA; and the Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Oceania, Africa and the Americas.[7] Museum and exhibition makers work alongside students, researchers and educators; in addition to this exists the rhythm of visitors in the museum, café and restaurant. However, it is not only the actors on-site that determine daily events. Numerous actors control the possibilities of the building that are not present or only rarely present. For example, when Norman Foster was commissioned to design the building together with his wife Wendy Foster in 1974, he was a relatively young and unknown architect who only became a so-called 'starchitect' through the support and backing of patrons Lisa and Robert Sainsbury (Jodidio 1997; Sudjic 2010).

Figure 2: Interior view from a pedestrian bridge towards the first mezzanine. In the foreground is the main exhibition area, the Living Area gallery; in the background the second mezzanine. Photo: The Author, April 2016.

Calvin Winner, who was head of the curatorial team in 2016, explains that since the Sainsbury Centre was Foster's first public building, the architect is still very much involved in decisions concerning the building.[8] The prominence of Foster as a world-renowned architect has also contributed to Historic England's assessment of the building: indeed, a key reason given for granting the building Grade II status makes explicit reference to the architects – limited here to Norman Foster. The assessment of Historic England claims that the building, created by "one of Britain's most significant modern architects", exemplifies the architect's "signature use of technological and engineering innovation and the industrialized, prefabricated, style".[9] The Sainsbury Centre has indeed become known for its iconic appearance. It is typically understood as a late-modernist building, a rare example of British high-tech architecture (Pavitt and Thomas 2018; Dormer and Muthesius 2001). However, I would like to point out that the justification given by Historic England reproduces a common understanding of buildings as static objects, and represents the desire to preserve a particular version of the building that

is as close as possible to the *original*. A preoccupation with iconic buildings as products of individual architectural designers rather than architectural processes is common in the field of architecture (Hilger 2011; Latour and Yaneva 2008). This is particularly present in discourse on museum buildings (MacLeod 2013). Such a focus leads to:

> …the dominance of aesthetics, style, form and technique in the usual discussion of architecture, and with this the suppression of the more volatile aspects of buildings: the processes of their production, their occupation, their temporality, and their relations to society and nature. (Awan et al. 2011: 27)

In the case of the Sainsbury Centre, the idea of holding on to a certain static order does not only apply to the building's envelope but also extends to the building's interior. The permanent exhibition on display in the Living Area gallery has "more or less stayed the same since 1978", as Nell Croose Myhill observes. In this way the display is considered 'historic'. "There are objects that get loaned out or need rest, often the works on paper change", Myhill stresses, "but the majority, the more robust sculptural works, stay pretty much in the same place".[10] During research carried out in 2016 and 2017 I was surprised by the inflexibility of this 'flexible' building and I understood that there is a consensus on the importance of the legacy of the Sainsburys for the institution today. This is represented in the permanent Living Area gallery (Hansmann 2021: 125). Financially too, the family still plays an important role, since David Sainsbury's Gatsby Charity Foundation remains one of its main donors.[11] I can trace a lot of work done to keep the Living Area gallery 'original', as well as the building – the "best object in his [Robert Sainsbury's] collection" – as stable and as authentic as possible (Sainsbury 2018). That said, the building was re-clad in 1988 due to corrosion inside the external panels. Moreover, there have also been major changes to the underground organization of the building, as well some additions: the underground 'Crescent Wing' was added in 1991 and only connected to the upper part of the building in 2006; cantilevered canopies and automatic glass doors were installed during refurbishments that took place between 2004 and 2006; and a major re-organization of the temporary exhibition areas in the newly installed 'Exhibition Suite' took place between 2013 and 2014. However, the appearance and use of the main upper body of the Sainsbury Centre has essentially stayed the same ever since. The temporary exhibition areas change frequently of course, but apart from that, only the more marginal areas of the building have undergone significant changes and these are more or less invisible to the public. This includes the second mezzanine, which is located between the school area and the restaurant at the west end of the building, away from the large central Living Area gallery for which the building is most well-known. The second mezzanine has taken on several functions during its career. When the building was first opened it was used as a senior common room, and was then later turned into a postgraduate desk area and office space. Today it is used as a temporary exhibition space. These functional changes pose challenges to a building under preservation, and a building in which the architect of the original design is still closely involved in all alterations. However, the mezzanine also poses challenges. Due to the strong penetration of light in this area of the building, the mezzanine is not particularly well suited for the display of light-sensitive objects. Additionally, direct proximity of the mezzanine to the restaurant, which produces considerable background noise when it is in full operation, makes the mezzanine rather unsuitable for intimate exhibition display. The circulation of the art object is sometimes difficult here, as the mezzanine is only served by two narrow spiral staircases – one public, one private – and a small passenger lift. While no permanent structural interventions were made in the course of its repurposing as a temporary exhibition space, some experiments have taken place here. For example, a light fabric used in theatres was temporarily installed to reduce direct sunlight reaching photographs in the *Henri Cartier-Bresson* exhibition in 2016 (Figure 3). Despite discourse in heritage and preservation that seeks to cast buildings as stable objects, they are rarely so. Stability and homogeneity require constant work, and this becomes especially clear in areas of a museum that present difficulties, such as the second mezzanine at the Sainsbury Centre.

Figure 3: A light fabric is temporarily installed in 2016 at the second mezzanine, located between the school area and the restaurant. Photo: The Author, April 2016.

Figure 4: View of the exhibition installation by Rana Begum on the second mezzanine. Photo: The Author, May 2017.

Figure 5: View from the second mezzanine to the restaurant on the left and into the Rana Begum exhibition on the right. Photo: The Author, May 2017.

The exhibition *Space Light Colour* by Rana Begum took place on the second mezzanine (Figures 4, 5). Begum is a contemporary visual artist based in London whose work "blurs the boundaries between sculpture, painting and architecture",[12] as she puts it. When approached by the Sainsbury Centre to stage a solo show in 2015, Begum observed that she was glad to be able to use the mezzanine level rather than the basement space, even though the underground Exhibition Suite offers ample and well-conditioned exhibition space. In the process of developing her exhibition with the curators, Begum says she was interested in the "experience of not only the artwork but also the architecture, and how the architecture manipulates light". The artist commented that it was important for her that the viewer was able to "move through the space and view the work from various angles".[13] However, while the mezzanine allows for extensive sight lines and for Begum's artworks to play with daylight – "manipulating" the light to "unlock a range of colour sensations" (Sainsbury Centre 2017) – the space poses challenges in terms of the circulation of her artworks. In what follows, I take you (as readers) with me to visit a particular moment in the process of dismantling this exhibition, focusing on the trajectory of one particular artwork, *No. 161* (2008).

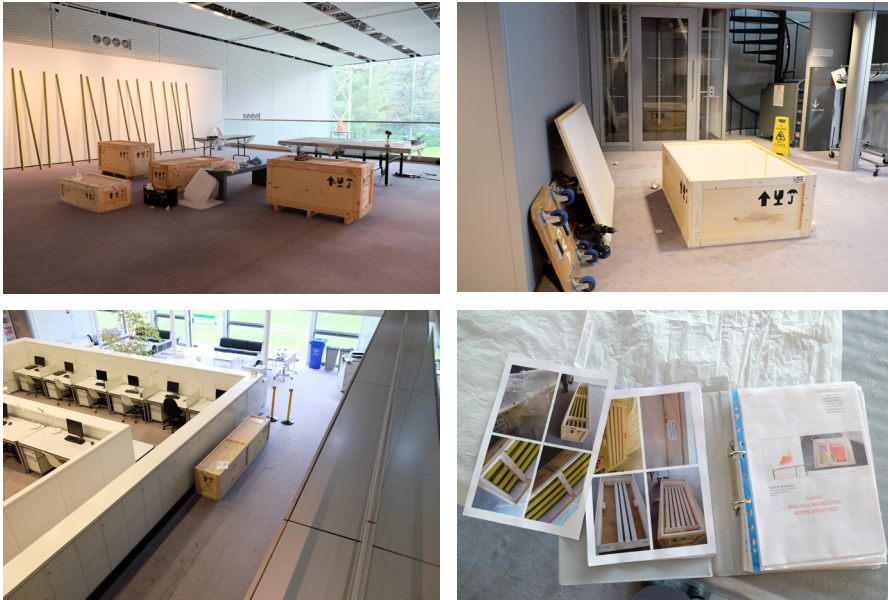**Dismantling the exhibition – an observation**

Figure 6: From top left to bottom right: 1. Artwork No.161 (2008), grey and yellow repeated metal bars, still leaning against the wall on the mezzanine during the dismantling process. 2. Lift and spiral staircase form the access points to the mezzanine level. 3. Protrusion behind the glass railing. 4. Folder with the artist's instructions on how to handle each work. Photos: The Author, October 2017.

In the autumn of 2017 I returned to the Sainsbury Centre to observe the process of dismantling Rana Begum's exhibition. On the second day there is an issue with the artwork *No.161*, the 'leaning piece' (Figure 6.1). The bar pieces and their packaging for transportation are too long to be carried up and down the spiral staircase (Figure 6.2). The team dismantling the exhibition suggests to the conservator that they either hand each piece individually over the railing of the mezzanine or take the elevator, transporting one bar at a time. The conservator hesitates. There is a protrusion behind the glass railing that the bar pieces must not touch (Figure 6.3). She considers wrapping the metal bars individually and bringing them down via the elevator. However, the artist's notes on how to handle the pieces state that wrapping is not an option (Figure 6.4), as paint could stick to the wrapping material. The conservator postpones the decision to consult the senior registrar and the head of collections. After a coffee break the registrar joins the setting and says that in terms of the objects, handing them down seems the better solution, but in terms of the humans, she does not want any risk. The following day when I arrive in the morning, two staff members have set up the long boxes in the school court next to the mezzanine. Upstairs I find a group, including the registrar and the head of technical service, again discussing how to bring down the long bar pieces. A scaffold is considered but then dismissed because there are too many parts that could hit the bars. After a joint coffee break, one staff member insists that they have to start now so they do not have to stop in the middle. Staff put up barriers in the school court in order to hinder people from walking past. They then open the wooden transport boxes and then start handing down the bar pieces (Figure 7.1 and 7.2). No ladder is needed.
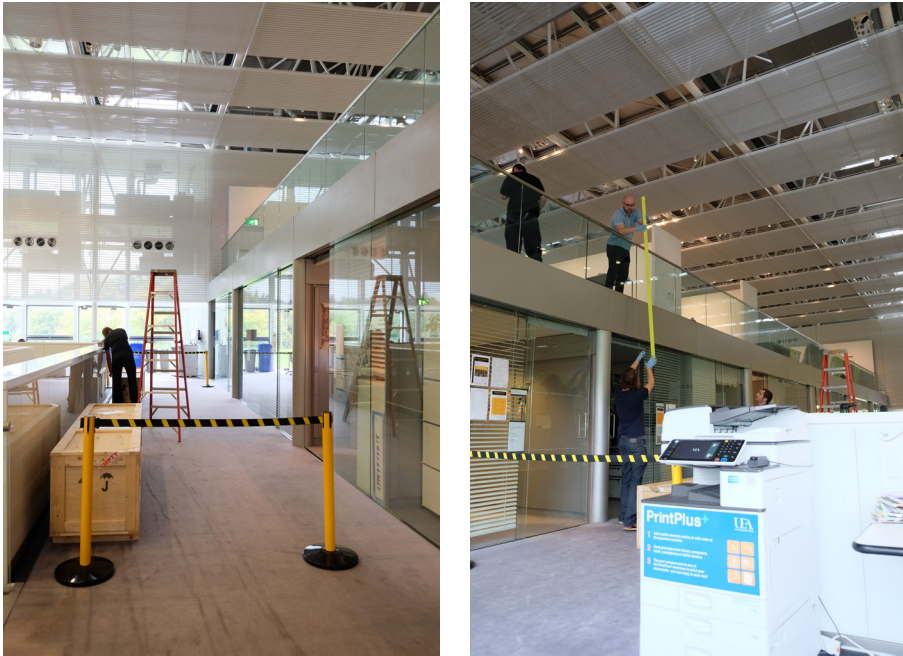
Figure 7: From left to right: 1. Barriers, transport boxes and a ladder are set up in the school area. 2. The bar pieces of artwork No.161 are handed down over the glass railing. Photos: The Author, October 2017.

In this short ethnographic account, we witness the negotiation of bringing artwork *No. 161* down from the mezzanine without putting either people or the artwork at risk, while at the same time the necessity of dealing with the building layout and material features of the Sainsbury Centre. Facing the physical restrictions of the mezzanine – which was not designed for major artworks to travel in and out of – staff consider various options; or rather, they enter into negotiations with different actors: the elevator seems to be large enough for the bar pieces – each are 250cm in length – to be transported individually, and yet artist's instructions stipulate that wrapping them is not allowed, as the paint on the powder-coated aluminium of *No.161* is sensitive to wrapping material. As a result, forms of transportation that require extra packaging protection are not possible. The edge of the mezzanine behind the glass railing would appear to present a danger if people to reach down directly. A scaffold used to overcome the height difference between the mezzanine and the ground floor in turn fails to offer a safe journey for the bar pieces. Finally, under time pressure, the decision is made that passing the bar pieces directly is the best option. Barriers block off the regular flow of movement in the school court to exclude other possible collisions, and the procedure succeeds without further incident. What we witness here is a problem of museum practice: the protection and transport of an artwork comes to a halt for a moment, forcing a rethink of a network of movement with relation to an artefact, taking into account the possibilities suggested by the staircase and the elevator, in combination with the use of wrapping material and the potential for damaging the artwork. A set of new actors and a different strategy to guarantee safe transportation are chosen. As a result, a different network of action has been assembled.

What can we learn from this seemingly mundane event? With reference to the concept of 'spacing', we do not follow it taking place *in* space, in the huge 'box' of the Sainsbury Centre, but we might analyse the "event connecting interactions" and the "large spread of space-time-actants" (Latour 1997: 180-1). Understood as a form of spacing, we enter the many dimensions of a process which, then illuminated by the perspectives offered by ANT, we do not distinguish

between a passive material world and an active human world; rather, we examine how they are mutually dependent and change each another, shifting certain courses of action. In the process of bringing down the bar pieces, the new network *breaks* with the historical 'script' of the building – or it is at least enacted differently. The terms 'script' and 'de-scription' used by the sociologist of technology Madeleine Akrich are helpful when turning to the temporal layers weaved together in this little event (Akrich 1992). Understood according to Akrich, a script is a "vision of (or prediction about) the world" that becomes "inscribed" into a technical object. This 'script' carries the "innovator's beliefs about the relationships between an object and its surrounding actors" and, as Akrich explains, presents an "attempt to predetermine" a certain course of action (Akrich 1992: 208). However, in the process of 'de-scription', this relationship is an object of negotiation.

It was during the mid-1970s when patrons Lisa and Robert Sainsbury, the representatives of UAE, and the architects Wendy and Norman Foster, amongst others, had 'inscribed' their vision of the building-user relationship into the material settings of the building design. The mezzanine had been designed and installed with a particular understanding about how it would be used as a senior common room. However, time passed and the requirements of the building changed. In this sense, we can see that buildings "develop very complex relationships to times" (Guggenheim 2009: 39). In the case of the Sainsbury Centre, the building has not been re-designed. Functional features such as the stairs and the glass lift for the movement of objects and people have remained, while new courses of action have emerged in the meantime. The building design, the building's materiality, the objects it contains, the conservation policies of Historic England, the will to memorialize both the legacy of the Sainsburys and the signature of Foster the architect – these all work together towards keeping the building stable. However, within the process of bringing down the bar pieces, the 'script' is negotiated and many actors are present from different periods of time and different spaces. For example, the will of the London-based artist transferred to a series of instructions on a sheet of paper has a clear influence on this process of negotiation, as a barrier but also as a gateway of possibilities for action. Such a dynamic is typically overlooked and considered insignificant, because it is clear to museums scholars and architectural researchers alike that this kind of improvisation – the workarounds *with* buildings and objects – constantly emerges, especially in more marginal areas of buildings. However, by identifying and paying attention to such everyday events, we can also understand the many dimensions of museum practice, and witness the temporally and spatially complex weaving together of heterogeneous actors, through which the continuing trajectory of the building's space takes place.

Conclusion

I have argued that it is fruitful to delve into the multiple interactions that exist between people and material things that influence the evolving character of a museum space. Looking to the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts as a specific example of a negotiation of stability and flux – a constant aspect of museum buildings – we encounter the paradox of a structure praised for its in-built flexibility that is nonetheless stabilized through various other factors. However, the process of stabilizing only becomes evident when looking empirically at everyday events that take place in the building. Here the work *towards,* and the negotiation *of,* stability and flux, homogeneity and heterogeneity, becomes visible.

Examining the dismantling of the exhibition *Space Light Colour* by Rana Begum, and the re-assembling of the circulation network of artwork *No. 161*, reveals the complexity and 'messy' reality of such a process. During the disassembly of the exhibition, a hybrid network emerges, involving the design and material features of the building, artefacts, handling instructions, and the various people – amongst them the artist, the architects and the patrons. I argue that this space is not something that exists independently of such interactions but is instead produced through them. By focusing on everyday processes, we can understand what sort of difference a building, a museum setting, and the people interacting with them, can make. 'Spacing' is the result of a set of complex relationships and negotiations between different actors engaged in various actions – material as much as immaterial, human as much as nonhuman. The building, its layout, and its components, become visible as actors that are

capable of shifting decision-making processes. Instead of focusing on the fixed product, an analysis of the process of spacing also acknowledges that material configurations can never determine specific courses of action, as there is always the possibility to act otherwise. Complex dynamics come into play, enabling changes and alternative uses of what is conventionally regarded as a well-tempered and ordered museum space within a heritage building. Scripts can be de-scripted. Indeed, despite all of the regulations and instructions, what we witness is that the building is never fully under control.

The act of 'doing space', or more precisely, 'spacing', is a hybrid act of doing influence by both humans and nonhumans. It is a constant process, characterized by the negotiation *of* stability and flux, between homogeneity and heterogeneity. By following the complex interactions within everyday spaces at a specific museum, and by shedding light on the processes in which objects are involved, it is possible to gain access to the complexity of different realities of museum buildings. This in turn can allow for more nuanced and detailed understandings of museum spaces, serving as the basis for future architectural developments.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1]   On the idea of fluidity see the work of John Law and Annemarie Mol (Mol and Law 1994; Mol 2002).

[2]   For example, Theodore Schatzki classifies two types of action, one of which is intentional (Schatzki 2002). Martina Löw likewise distinguishes two space-constituting interactions: 'spacing' and 'synthesis' – the latter of it is bound to the human imagination (Löw 2016). Löw's use of the term spacing does not refer to Latour.

[3]   For a more detailed explanation see Annemarie Mol (2010) and Bruno Latour (1996). For an introduction to Actor-Network theory vocabulary, see also Akrich and Latour (1992) and Yaneva (2017: 167-70).

[4]   See Witold Rybczynski's biography of the building for the history of the collection and project development (2011).

[5]   Foster Associate became Foster + Partners in the 1990s.

[6]   Historic England, 'Sainsbury Centre', Historic England. https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1409810?section=official-list-entry, accessed 26 February 2023.

[7]   Sainsbury Centre, 'About us', Sainsbury Centre. https://www.sainsburycentre.ac.uk/about-us, accessed 23 February 2023.

[8]   Calvin Winner, interview by author and Maria Lisenko, digital recording, 2 November 2016, Norwich.

9   Historic England, 'Sainsbury Centre', Historic England. https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1409810?section=official-list-entry, accessed 26 February 2023.

10   Nell Croose Myhill, interview by author, digital recording, 3 November 2016, Norwich.

11   The financial statement figures the funding share of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation at 27% for the year 2021-22. Sainsbury Centre, 'Annual Review 2022'. https://www.sainsburycentre.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Annual-Review-2022.pdf, accessed 31 October 2023.

12   Rana Begum, 'Bio', Rana Begum. https://www.ranabegum.com/bio, accessed 6 March 2023

13   Rana Begum, interview by author, digital recording, 9 August 2017, London.

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