3 Dramatic Conflict

Stories are very particular forms. Although they contain descriptions of everyday life they are purposefully constructed by writers or playwrights and, in the case of narrative environments, by multidisciplinary teams of designers in collaboration with scriptwriters, interpretive planners and sometimes end users or inhabitants. Taking the three-node network explained in Chapter 1, it could be argued that all spaces tell a story; for example, the seashore tells a story of erosion, a busy high street tells a story of consumerism or a village fete tells the story of a rural community. If so, all environments would be narrative environments. However, this definition would be too broad to be useful in developing the practice and theory of the design of narrative environments (Austin 2012). Narrative environments would be the same as the everyday or the lifeworld. In contrast, narrative environments are taken to be places which have been *deliberately* designed to tell a story. As such they correspond to literary stories which are purposely crafted to convey a message (Aristotle 1996; Bal 1992; Chatman 1978; Porter Abbott 2002; Propp 1958). So, just as stories are not daily life, neither are narrative environments, although you might come across them in your daily life. Narrative environments are intentionally structured, content-rich spaces or situations that communicate particular stories to specific audiences and that seek to induce an emotional impact, particular behaviour, social or commercial exchange, an inquiring or critical frame of mind in the visitor or inhabitant, or a combination of some or all of these. Narrative environments are envisaged, debated, designed and funded by individuals or communities, companies and governments. They are produced by an alignment of multiple stakeholders in a complex set of steps that are negotiated in order to transform an environment, tell a story but also to produce socio-economic and cultural change.

This leads to the question, how do narrative environments arise? While individuals generate literary stories and plays, narrative environments are developed by creative teams usually in response to a client brief. However, in instigating the proposition for a narrative environment, creative teams, like literary authors, observe and reflect on frictions in the world at large. Frictions or tensions excite the imagination, so that we produce stories or dramas about the origin of the friction or what may happen as a result of the friction. Writers may respond to inner tensions, interpersonal tensions, societal or political tensions, and designers of narrative environments do much the same, although they are particularly rooted in tensions that exist in specific physical locations and will include physical and material stresses as well as social and political dynamics. Screenwriters call these frictions *dramatic conflicts*, tensions that cause people to act or something to happen. Some screenwriters suggest all storytelling is based on conflict: "Without conflict there's no drama. Drama is conflict" (Flattam 2013). Writers craft their narratives around a driving conflict and envisage their hero or protagonist

progressing through a series of conflicts, in a struggle for resolution. Indeed, creative writing instructor Robert McKee talks about 'the Law of Conflict'. McKee says, "nothing moves forward in a story except through conflict" (1999: 210–13). Literary theorist David Herman (2004: 83) also suggests conflict is constitutive of narrative, although its source, manifestations and relative pervasiveness will vary from story to story. Empathy with characters and their struggle to resolve conflicts is one reason audiences sustain emotional engagement in stories (Zillmann 1991).

The concept of dramatic conflict can be traced back to theories of agon in classical Greece where the word *agon* meant a purposeful gathering. However, its meaning evolved over time in a number of ways. For example, Aristotle (1996) writes about agonistic nature of Aeschylus' play the *Oresteia*, where the characters are engaged in struggles over justice and power, while in another of his plays, *The Eumenides*, agon is clearly related to athletic contest and legal proceedings. Debra Hawhee (2002: 186) writes that agon or struggle is central to the act of learning and self-development in ancient Greece. As such, struggle is evidence of virtue, skill and courage. It was considered insufficient just to be virtuous. Virtue had to be demonstrated or performed in public. Some years later historian Thucydides (Marincola 2007) describes agon as extreme anxiety and the notion of conflicting emotions producing agonising states of mind still persists. In the English language the word 'agonist' has, since the seventeenth century, been taken to mean someone involved in struggle and has given rise to the words protagonist and its opposite, antagonist, as core roles in narrative.

Twentieth-century philosopher Hannah Arendt (1958: 199–207) takes inspiration from ancient Greek politics and theatre in formulating her concept of action. As well as paying attention to narrative, she develops the notion of a 'space of appearance', which occurs whenever people gather together and through their speech and interaction reveal their political character. Arendt's understanding of agonism is important to the design of narrative environments because she suggests political agonism is not confined to parliaments or official buildings. It can arise in any public space. For Arendt, human plurality is the basic condition for action and speech. In distinguishing herself from Arendt, political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2013) argues that Arendt's concept of agonism, although based on human plurality, is without antagonism. Mouffe explores antagonism, agonism and hegemony. Hegemony is a process whereby those disadvantaged by hierarchical power relations nevertheless agree to live by such social orders, making a pact that is against their interests. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2014), Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe argue that political struggle is pervasive and ever present. Thus, antagonism can erupt at any time. Social and political order is not fixed but temporary, precarious and constantly subject to challenge. This approach resonates with Doreen Massey's description of space as being in a constant state of change, constituted by the interaction of multiple agents, each one moving along their own trajectory. Massey and Mouffe both envisage a pluralistic world, critiquing liberalism's and neoliberalism's assumption of the free individual. Instead, they see society and space as the outcome of practices, struggles and decisions made by multiple actors, a world that encourages some flows but constrains or obscures others. This pluralist, dynamic view can also be made to resonate with some of the insights from Actor Network Theory (ANT). Although initially seemingly apolitical, ANT is pluralistic. It envisages multiple situated actors engaged in constant negotiation and the constant formation and reformation of alliances. Drawing on these sources, the three-node narrative environments network understands agency, power and responsibility as distributed across people, narrative and space.

These ideas are important to design, particularly in its critical mode, because design is no longer, if it ever was, just a technical process. Design is increasingly being deployed in important strategic social and political processes. This may not be evident at first glance because there is a dominant view of design as the market-driven presentation of goods, services and experiences. Since its emergence in the industrial revolution, design has evolved in different directions. One direction, to produce the face and form of products, has become closely associated with market economies. In this model, designers develop products and services to sustain or expand mass production and consumption, for example, through eye-catching packaging, seductive advertising, spectacular lighting, fun interactive screens and awe-inspiring architecture. These designs help to attract an increased number of customers or, in the case of commercial narrative environments, an increased number of visitors to shops, restaurants, leisure attractions, museums, events and regenerated urban quarters. The designer in this realm is envisaged as a problem solver, at the service of the client, working on new products, services and experiences that address the client's needs. In the design of narrative environments, examples of this are commercial, experiential and place branding, where a strategic narrative is often circulated as a promotional video to appeal to customers, and events are curated to draw people to spaces that shape and enhance their emotional attachment to the location.

Market-driven problem-solving is the dominant view of design across the creative industries. The issue is that it positions the designer as a technical expert, albeit creative, but does not allow for the designer to express any political, environmental or social position. Nor does it necessarily question in much depth the suitability or benefits of the design solutions to the visitors or inhabitants (Peart 2017). It limits design, which has the capacity to deal with many more dimensions of human life than marketing. Dunne and Raby (2013) also point out that problems are conceived of within specific systems and working within the same system inadvertently reinforces those systems and therefore could be argued to perpetuate the problem in a different form.

In his book *Dark Matters & Trojan Horses: A Strategic Design Vocabulary*, designer and urbanist Dan Hill (2012) outlines some practical strategies that designers can use to work beyond the problem-solving paradigm. Dark matter is a phrase borrowed from physics to describe the vast majority of matter in the universe which is undetected. However, it is only when this dark matter is brought into the frame that systems can be more fully understood. Hill's analogy makes the case for the consideration of a wider context in the design process so that, as well as market forces, other factors, or actants as they would be called in the design of narrative environments, are taken into account. These include organisational culture, policy environments and governance structures, which are often overlooked in the development of artefacts and services. Hill advocates a more comprehensive and strategic design process. This matters as much in commercial design as in social or critical design.

Market-driven design obscures the important tradition that emerged from the Arts and Crafts movement in the nineteenth century, and whose legacy can be traced through the twentieth century, which advocates social and political reform and envisioned the designer contributing to a more egalitarian world. Social purpose, in an industrialised context, was a guiding principle at the Bauhaus in the 1920s and the 1930s. It was rearticulated in a different form in the 1970s by Victor Papanek (1971). Papanek connected product design, architecture and anthropology, arguing that design should meet people's needs within the finite physical resources available in the world. Recent developments in critical design and participatory design continue to position the designer as an active advocate in the democratic process.

Problems do exist but so do opportunities. By simply focusing on problems designers may overlook potential ways to innovate. However, the design of narrative environments argues that the point is to investigate what gives rise to those problems and opportunities, to look at the underlying tensions or dramatic conflicts. This leads to a wide variety of propositions in addition to those addressed to problem-solving. The kind of dramatic conflicts identified will depend on the perspective taken. For example, the current health crisis triggered by obesity could be viewed as a tension between the priorities of urban planning, based on the car, and the need for bodily exercise. If destinations are spread far apart, we drive and therefore exercise less, creating obesogenic environments. This conflict takes a spatial form, highlighting a conflict between urban design for cars and urban design for human bodies. Alternatively, obesity could be seen as an effect of poverty. People on low incomes tend to buy cheap, processed foods, high in sugar, salt and fat content. In this case, the conflict arises from the economic divide between rich and poor and the ways it is embodied in the food production, distribution and marketing systems. Part of this underpinning dramatic conflict is the recognition that it is a deliberate ploy on behalf of food producers to add sugar, salt and fat to many foods, exploiting our predilection for these ingredients despite their adverse effects on health. The conflict here is between corporate goals to achieve profit and customers' opportunity to buy healthy foodstuffs. These three different perspectives on obesity prompt three different visions of how practices might be changed in order to combat obesity. In the design of narrative environments, the decision to focus on any one of these dramatic conflicts would drive the form and content of the design. As these examples show, design teams need to develop a sophisticated perspective that incorporates political, technological, organisational, social and environmental dimensions of the world at large so that they are designing in an informed way.

Researching Dramatic Conflicts for the Design of Narrative Environments

In order to understand the multiple qualities and meanings of spaces and places, initial research into the dramatic conflicts they embody is essential for the design of narrative environments. A critical perspective can be developed by implementing what Michel Foucault (1972) called discourse analysis, a term he used to describe the way groups of statements structure, regulate and perpetuate institutions and their power, and produce objects, places and practices in those institutions. For example, the discourses of law give order to legal regulations, the legal profession, and courts and prisons as places of legal enactment. The discourse of medicine articulates relationships among doctors, patients, bodies, hospitals, treatments and medical research. The discourse of art practice interrelates art galleries, museums, artists, audiences, collectors, curators and reviewers. Sociologist Gillian Rose (2011), in advocating discourse analysis as a visual research methodology, describes two main approaches. The first is to look for the kinds of assumptions, values and knowledge expressed in and through paintings or visual objects. She gives the example of Lynda Nead's (1988) research on the depiction of prostitutes in European nineteenth-century engravings and paintings showing how prostitutes contravened contemporary bourgeois notions of femininity. Nead argues that prostitutes were portrayed as evil or as victims of an evil society. Engravings show prostitutes paying the price for their so-called deviance by gradually losing their looks, their glamorous clothes and frequently choosing suicide by drowning. While the images stem from prevailing views, their production and circulation serves to institutionalise and validate this view as truth.

Applying this kind of discourse analysis to site research means looking for repeating patterns visible *in* the environment that normalise a particular value system. An example might be noticing the city skyline is peppered with high-rise buildings and assuming that means the city is an active participant in the global economy and a vibrant place to live. On closer examination, however, many high-rise flats may belong to foreign investors who have no intention of living there. Consequently, sites of major urban development can be virtually uninhabited and can carve a void in the social and physical fabric of the city.

The second approach Rose takes is to look at the way paintings are produced, owned and exchanged to reveal the institutional apparatuses and powers at play. So, for example, she examines how museums legitimise the collection of certain objects and not others. The question of the power and purpose of museums has been explored in some depth in recent years. Elaine Heumann Gurian (2006) and Suzanne MacLeod (2017) discuss museum architectures as powerful tangible frames that inflect or directly influence the institutions they house and the way they are understood. The architecture of museums embodies assumptions that influence the collections, the interpretation strategies, the attitudes of staff and visitors and the museum's civic role. For example, the scale and solemnity of nineteenth-century European and American museum architecture asserts the role of Western museums as state-sponsored guardians of a singular 'civilisation'. Tony Bennett (1995) criticises such museums for speaking from a position of unquestioned authority.

Theorists in the twentieth century such as Mieke Bal (1992) and Eileen Hooper Greenhill (1992 and 1999) have disputed the single voice and the assumed neutrality of museums. Bal compared the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met) on the Upper East Side in New York, which it says on its website houses "a treasury of rare and beautiful objects" and the American Museum of Natural History, on the Upper West Side, which houses Asian, African, Oceanic and Native American art. Bal makes the point that an object in the Met is revered while a similar object in the American Museum of Natural History is perceived as "an instrumental cognitive tool, anonymous, necessary, natural" (Bal 1992: 559) and therefore of lower cultural value. Bal's analysis shows how the anthropological frame is intricately shaped by colonialist values. Although in one sense, the Met and the Natural History Museum frame their collections differently and seem to present contrasting views, in another sense, they can be seen to materialise a single overall, hierarchical, conceptual frame in which the former is taken to be the domain of humanity and high culture while the latter is assigned to the realm of the lesser human, the non-human and 'primitive' culture. To put it in its simplest terms, one key dispute around museums concerns whether in practice they reproduce cultural elites or whether, in challenging this elitism, they are working as agents of change to establish a more democratic society. The application of this approach in the research of public spaces means asking questions about what constitutes the contextual frame and how it is maintained, probing the management and governance of space. Debates such as these highlight the importance of the framing context for meaning production. In the space, what objects, lights, street furniture have been installed to sustain the meaning? This process also brings to the fore the positioning of the researcher in relation to these questions.

Apart from discourse analysis, dramatic conflicts of place can also be uncovered through information-gathering using visual research methods, such as observation, sketching, photography and video documentation. Visual research can be synthesised through map making, which re-presents all manners of characteristics for reflection. Maps may include the quantitative analysis of dimensions and materials at a particular location but this is just a baseline for a more comprehensive analysis. Sensory mapping

is another technique where special attention is paid to the moving body and its responses to the surrounding materiality, sound, scale, light and so on. This is a very demanding exercise because you are observing two experiential dimensions at once: sensing the physical world, and also your own bodily and emotional responses to that sensing. This kind of mapping, in producing multilayered diagrams of zones and transition spaces, can capture a sense of the atmosphere of a place. Behavioural mapping is another kind of mapping. It records the use of space by specific groups in particular places at particular times. In memory mapping, another valuable technique, members of the public are asked to draw a map of their journey to and through a location from memory. This reveals just how much people omit from maps. Whole buildings and roads disappear and only salient paths and landmarks are noted. Memory maps give form to cognitive models of space, as Kevin Lynch (1960) discusses.

The design of narrative environments, in being concerned with the movement of bodies through space, also adopts walking as a critical research method for exploring the urban environment. Variants of this method can found in the practices of the nineteenth-century flaneur, the Dadaist event, the déambulations of the Surrealists, the urban explorations of Walter Benjamin, the dérives of the Lettrists and Situationists, the wanderings of the land artists in the 1960s, experimental practices such as the Italian Stalkers in the 1990s right up to contemporary psychogeographical expeditions (Bassett 2004). This tradition emphasises following a route which is not predetermined, often through city streets, leaving yourself open to the guidance of the environment. It is the drift of the ambulating body through space in ways that break routine, overcome boundaries and provoke new situations. Author and philosopher Sadie Plant (1992: 95) writes, "to dérive was to notice the way in which certain areas, streets, or buildings resonate with states of mind, inclinations, and desires". Using this process to subvert the dominant orientations in the space enables researchers to discover places they otherwise might not have found. This exploratory, open-ended, playful approach to space is related to certain kinds of spatial narrative research where the researcher goes with an open mind and through immersing themselves in a place allows stories to develop in their imagination. These are action-based research methods that invite happenstance and interaction. They can be extended and amplified into temporary physical interventions that bring to awareness the 'dark matter', noted by Hill (2012), that regulates space.

Seeking to understand the dramatic conflicts of spaces and places also requires an understanding of the people who live in, work in or use that environment. Narrative environment researchers may install unexpected objects to gauge people's reactions. Minor disruptions to the everyday can reveal assumptions about the use and purpose of particular places. They may set up installations that help to engage passers-by in conversation or make temporary interactive games to attract their audiences. Slightly disruptive performance is another creative option that can reveal the conventions in a space. Other productive social research methods for engaging with everyday spatial practices include taking part in online chat rooms and blogs. Cultural probes, as developed in visual sociology, can be used, such as when researchers give people disposable cameras and ask them to photograph things they like or dislike at regular intervals during their day. More ethnographic-style inquiry may lead design researchers to seek to empathise with inhabitants by following local customs. This might involve role play which is useful to shift the researcher's mindset from detached observation to active engagement. Deeper immersion in the social dimensions of the environment might involve researchers living among the people they are researching, but this can work well only if the researchers establish the trust of the community they are studying. Much time is required for meeting

and talking to communities and explaining the intentions of the research. Participatory designers usually gain access to local groups through community leaders. They work strategically to avoid any sense of intrusion. In some areas, communities may suffer from consultation fatigue and feel disappointed if their expectations are raised but not met. Well managed, socially engaged research for the design of narrative environments has the potential to bring about long-term change but it needs time and careful planning to undertake research that is thorough and productive.

Narrative environment researchers will also use desk research to gather relevant case studies, histories and socio-political context to feed into an exploration of the dramatic conflicts of place. The analysis of data collected will call into account the world view of the design team and this requires self-reflection and agreement among the team. The practical process of identifying dramatic conflicts of place involves literally laying out the data collected and moving elements such as photographs, testimony and maps to identify frictions, gaps and clusters. The skill here is pattern recognition. It is a rational process but it relies on relational thinking across the three nodes of the tripartite network.

Dramatic Conflict as the Basis of Narrative Placemaking

Once dramatic conflicts have been identified they can then be employed at a number of scales to develop narrative environments. In recent years, there has been a surge in city regeneration placemaking activities across the world. Some of these are superficial and lack authenticity, partly because they lack an understanding of the drama of place. Numerous examples of flawed schemes, which seek to impose a positive marketing message on a space without engaging with its specific characteristics or frictions, can be found. Genuine city narratives stem from the dramatic conflicts of specific locations. You cannot impose any brand on a place indiscriminately. Brand identity grows from a place and the unique characteristics and dramas of that place. As urban strategist Thomas Sevcik says,

> Cities are not T-shirts or cars onto which you can simply paste a logo. Cities are living things, with their own particular dynamics and dramas.
>
> (Sevcik 2018)

Residents, whether temporary or permanent, are part of this dynamic and are key to any city's evolving identity. So, while marketing departments may issue polished images, residents will say whatever they want about their city and so will tourists. This communication process has never been so pervasive as it is at present, facilitated by social media. Although it is in the interest of policy makers, government communications departments and businesses to characterise cities in glowing terms, official media are now often ignored or suspected of producing fake news. Local communities, individuals and tourists have turned to more granular sources of information in search of authenticity or depth of information. The power of top-down communications is diminishing and peer-to-peer communications are on the rise.

So how can local governments elevate their cities in the eyes of the world? Many governments commission 'starchitecture', for example, gigantic museums in a 'culture-led' strategy for city regeneration that does not engage with tensions within the city. They focus on attracting the attention of global tourists, often overlooking the needs and desires of their own populations. As Graeme Evans (2003) writes, the success of Bilbao, for example, was infinitely more complex and layered than the building of the

Guggenheim Art Museum. Nevertheless, it has become a point of pride and indeed competition among cities across the world to have enormous, spectacular new art galleries and museums which serve as walk-in city logos and events in a city narrative. The dramatic conflicts at play are rooted in global city competition for status and its accompanying economic rewards. This is perversely at odds with the democratic mission of museums to nourish the creative lives of citizens (MacLeod 2017). These museums are the display themselves. They are often unfit for internal display with curved or sloping walls, for example, where exhibits cannot be hung. These structures have more to do with city governments competing with each other for status and media attention than nurturing and growing their own cultural producers.

Local government has to be clever to shine on the world stage for any length of time. Economically, cities are in competition, and do need to be distinctive, especially from neighbouring competitors. It is not enough for them to rely on starchitecture or architectural heritage, which are fast becoming stage sets for selfies. City governments need active local artists and designers, engaged with personal and place-based dramatic conflicts, at the heart of their initiatives. Antagonisms around, for example, immigration, housing, the interpretation of history and the numerous other concerns that preoccupy us should be seen as useful because they can prompt new thinking and act as narrative drivers that unfold into new strategies and designs that have significant potential to enrich cultural production and enhance everyone's lives. However, the managers of such places need to be wary of them becoming commercial spectacles, which hollows out their meaning. An example of how this can happen is the gallery district 798 Art Zone, or Dashanzi Art District, a complex of 50-year-old decommissioned military factory buildings, located in the Dashanzi, Chaoyang District of Beijing. It houses numerous galleries and artist studios. It was established in 1995, instigated by Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts who were responding to a growing number of artists exploring what modern Chinese art might look like, while reflecting and commenting on Chinese culture. The 798 Art Zone was also a response to an international demand for Chinese art and for some years it was an important driver in the Chinese art market for experimental art. It elevated the reputation of Beijing as a creative centre. However, 798 Art Zone has, in recent years, become quite gentrified with numerous restaurants and tourist visitors. Rents have risen. It has become a place of consumption rather than a place of production that responds to the dramatic conflicts of China's rapid development.

Dramatic Conflicts and Story Dynamics in Exhibition Making

We now turn from placemaking to look more closely at dramatic conflicts in spatial narratives in museum exhibitions. The notion of dramatic conflict as manifested in stories leads us to A. J. Greimas' (1983) studies of the dynamics of story and an exploration of how dynamic story tensions translate into spatial experience. In his narrative model, Greimas conceived of three pairs of contraries: sender vs. receiver; subject vs. object; and helper vs. opponent. He argued that these contraries generate three types of relations: knowledge, constituted by communication between sender and receiver; desire, which is experienced by the subject for the object; and power, exercised in the subject's agonistic struggle, eased by the helper and aggravated by the opponent, to acquire or achieve the object of desire.

A literary example is the medieval Arthurian legend *The Search for the Holy Grail*. The Grail itself was thought to be the cup from the Last Supper and Christ's blood was supposed to have run into it at the Crucifixion. It was deemed to have magical powers

that would bring happiness and eternal youth. Legend had it that the Holy Grail was hidden in a far-off castle somewhere in England. In the story, the sender is a mysterious force that creates an apparition which appears in front of King Arthur and his knights, the receivers. The apparition opens up the axis of knowledge by telling the knights about the existence of the Holy Grail. The knights then become the active subjects, setting out to find the Holy Grail. The axis of desire is activated. Galahad, one of the knights had a further vision that it was God's will that they should take the Grail to the Holy City of Sarras in the Middle East. The axis of power is populated by those helping the knights find their way to Sarras and opponents who obstruct the knights' pursuit of the object of desire. The opponents may be, for example, a mountain range, a desert or the Saracens. Neither helpers nor opponents are necessarily human characters.

Greimas' scheme is appealing as it captures the interweaving of significant dynamics of knowledge, desire and power at play in narrative and we can use these story dynamics to make more engaging narrative environments. This three-pair dynamic can also be used to analyse media narratives and narrative environments, as in the case studies below. It is not claimed that all stories can be reduced to these three axes. Nevertheless, this scheme enables us to consider story dynamics that capture emotion and the imaginative aspects of narratives. It complements structuralist approaches to narratology whose 'story grammar' focuses on story components such as the naming of roles (functions) and analysis of sequence and order (Genette 1980).

Louis Hébert (2011) discusses the work of Greimas on linguistics and semantics, particularly Greimas' development of an abstract diagram of meaning production called the semiotic square. Starting from the semiotic square, Allan Parsons (2017) suggests that Greimas' theory can be used to examine the spatial dynamics of different 'worlds'. Similarly to Philip E. Wegner (2010), Parsons has interpreted the semiotic square, in alliance with Jacques Lacan's theory of the human subject as divided, to develop a tool for analysis of the three-node model, people, narrative and environment. Parsons envisages 'the world' as constituted by active relations among four kinds of worlds: 'My world', 'Your world' 'Our world', and 'Their world'. 'My world' is both imaginary and symbolic, the way I imagine myself and the way that that imaginary identity is distributed spatially and symbolically, through my identifications with, and attachments to particular languages, specific material objects and particular locations. 'Your world' arises from the mutual perceptual divisions among the 'My worlds', brought into relationship through shared languages, objects and locations, recognising mutual claims on those material media of communication. Such material media are either held in common, as the ground of community in 'Our world', or in public, as the ground of society, in which 'Our world' related to but distinguished from 'Their world'. The emerging intersubjective and intercorporeal network is a continual negotiation of these boundaries which in narrative environments are rendered explicit so there can be a conscious renegotiation of conflicts and alliances. The second important aspect of this theorisation is the potential dominance, through hegemonic incorporation or otherwise, of one world, for example, 'Their world', over another, for example, 'My world', which the design of narrative environments also brings to the surface by showing how particular languages, objects and locations articulate potentially hierarchical relations among the different worlds.

This theory allows us to conceive, through negotiation and dramatic conflict, the spatialisation and materiality of thresholds and territories, constituted through identification with, or alienation from narrative content and material place. Parsons argues that 'the world' is neither undifferentiated nor singular. We sense when we are leaving the comfort of our own world venturing into a wider world, whether that be a shared world,

with its sense of belonging, where one can be 'self-possessed', or an alien world, with its discomfort, uneasiness and sense of dispossession. We need to feel safe, in 'Our world', but we also desire new knowledge and power, from 'Their world'. For exhibition design, the implication is that the exhibition will belong to 'my', 'your', 'our' or 'their' world depending on who the visitor is, but it is never a neutral representation of 'the world' or 'the history of the world'. The analysis of different psychodynamically experienced and materially realised worlds applied to literary stories, spatial narratives and lifeworlds can reveal the possible gaps and connections among individuals, groups, organisations and institutions.

To exemplify the use of this approach, the following section examines two case studies. The first is an exhibition, *Their Mortal Remains*, that took place in 2017 at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London. It was one in a series of hugely successful blockbusters that included exhibitions on Alexander McQueen in 2015 and David Bowie in 2016. The V&A was established as a Museum of Manufacturers in 1852. Its mission is to be recognised as the world's leading museum of art, design and performance and deepen the relevance of its collections to the UK creative and knowledge economies. It is an immensely influential and well-regarded institution, housed within an imposing Victorian building. It focuses on design and its application in the world at large, and, as such, exhibitions of popular culture are fitting, although since its founding the V&A has become a symbol of high culture, despite its initial aims to celebrate design as part of the emerging industrial society.

Their Mortal Remains, which showed the career development of the musicians Pink Floyd, from the 1960s until the year of the exhibition, 2017, was staged in the V&A's temporary exhibition space. The exhibition was conceived and designed by Stufish Entertainment Architects, founded by the late Mark Fisher. The studio is renowned for combining architecture, theatre and live music events. It designed every Rolling Stones show since 1989 and every U2 concert since 1992 and the opening and closing ceremonies at the Beijing Olympics in 2008. Stufish worked with Pink Floyd over many years. They designed the Wall Tour in 1980 and the Division Bell Tour in 1994. *Their Mortal Remains* was designed as a touring exhibition to be produced in other capital cities across the world.

The temporary exhibition space at the V&A is linear and therefore lends itself to chronological accounts. The space is U-shaped, so visitors encounter a distinctive half-way mark as they step through a lobby and turn almost 360 degrees into the second half of the space. This spatial shift needs to be incorporated into the storyline. In *Their Mortal Remains*, the first half of the exhibition was divided into several distinct spaces. At the threshold, the audience entered the exhibition through a psychedelic bus, evoking youth travel in the 1960s (Figure 3.1).

This was followed by several smallish spaces: the immersive psychedelia of the UFO nightclub; the Sid Barrett story; the move to more instrumental music; the release and impact of *Dark Side of the Moon*; the technology the band used to experiment with sound; and the graphics and stage sets the band developed. The second half of the exhibition was highly theatrical. A huge space housed 5-metre high simulations of Battersea Power Station with enormous replicas of floating inflatables, referencing one of their album covers. This was followed by scenographic settings of walls with missing brickwork evoking the Wall stage show. The exhibition culminated in a large immersive media wrap-around room where visitors could sit, surrounded by projections and music. Throughout the exhibition there were video projections, video screens with talking heads, objects and music graphics, photographs and graphic information panels and

Figure 3.1 Entrance to the exhibition *Their Mortal Remains*, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2017.

labels. Each visitor was given headphones which played Pink Floyd music. The music faded into the sound of talking when visitors approached the screens. Overall, the exhibition moved from the intimacy of the UFO club to the wide-open space of a stadium, increasing in scale as visitors moved through the space, mirroring the scale of the band's performances and fame (Figure 3.2).

The dramatic conflict of the story was Pink Floyd's struggle with the music industry to become famous, not for mainstream pop but rather for being independent and continuously innovative musicians. However, the key flaw in the exhibition is that it did not show or evoke the machinations of the music industry or the context of popular culture against which the band positioned themselves. Equally, the major rifts among the band members over the years and the reasons for them were minimised. The dramatic conflicts in the story barely surface. Instead, visitors encounter a series of successes, reinforcing an already circulating mass media and public relations story of Pink Floyd as superstars. As a consequence, for example, young musicians would be unable to learn a great deal from the exhibition about how the music industry works or how they could position themselves.

If we take Greimas' narrative model to examine the axes of knowledge, desire and power, we see the knowledge axis manifested through the band's increasing technical accomplishment in sound, light effects and graphics. The band triumph through their determination and skill, reaffirming the overarching brand narrative. The desire axis manifests as a drive to be renowned for their musicianship and creativity, and not simply for wealth or celebrity. Some photographs and text in the exhibition show Pink Floyd

Figure 3.2 Inside the exhibition *Their Mortal Remains*, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2017.

filming a performance at Pompeii to an audience of none, in the process locating themselves firmly in Western high culture, in contrast to their musical peers who were at the time performing at Woodstock to a mass audience. The aspirations of Pink Floyd to create high culture and not produce mass culture were not discussed explicitly enough in the exhibition, which reduced any critical engagement with the story. The power axis in Greimas' model is manifested in the relationship between the music corporations and music bands, the outcomes of which determined their career paths, and in the struggles among band members over creative direction. Neither was discussed in any detail. The net result was a flattening of the story.

The exhibition itself, being at the V&A, a centre for high culture, confirmed that Pink Floyd had reached their goal of being considered artists, while simultaneously demonstrating the standing of the V&A as a frame that validates aspirants' cultural credentials. So, ironically, although the V&A appears to be bringing popular culture into a place associated with high culture, thereby making it more democratic as a museum in creating a more inclusive 'Our world', the power of the V&A's reputation is so great that instead it actually shifts Pink Floyd into the realm of high culture. Famous national museums, unless they somehow deconstruct themselves, cannot help but produce and sustain the framing spatial narrative of high culture which is bestowed by the government and embodied in the grand and imposing architecture and operational practices of those museums. The environment here speaks loudly and with propriety.

Moving from an analysis of the content of the exhibition to an analysis of the spatial aspects of the narrative environment from the visitor's perspective, we can apply Greimas' pairs of contraries: the subject and object, the sender and receiver, the helper and opponent. From a content perspective, the band members were couched as subjects whose acts and works visitors followed through their hand-written letters, video interviews, music, films and pictures of performances but from a visitor perspective, the visitor is the subject seeking the object. A crucial point is reinforced here. In narrative environments, there is a shift in the role of the visitors. You, *the visitor*, are not only the recipient of the messages you also become the subject seeking the object. In this case, you literally set out on a path to find out what 'Pink Floyd' means.

The headphones were helpers providing music to immerse visitors in narrative space but also to punctuate the visitor's journey by broadcasting the spoken words from film and video as they walked close to the screens. The physical divisions of the space acted as physical opponents pacing the journey, preventing visitors from seeing the next section, acting as concealing, revealing and spatial modulation devices.

From the perspective of Parsons' analysis of relationships among worlds, the audience stayed in their own world partly because they were insulated by their headphones, except perhaps at the end, when visitors sat together on the floor in the wrap-around media room where some people may have felt a sense of 'us' literally as an audience. In the hermetically sealed world, the sound, images and staging took people on a nostalgic journey drawing up associated emotions from their memories. From the perspective of embodied experience the rhythm and flow of the space was articulated through the gradual increase in scale, corresponding to the success of the band but also offering more and more physical drama for visitors to discover as they progressed through the show.

The collection of historical objects, letters, posters, photographs, albums, CDs, items of clothing, musical instruments and so on did not build a wider network of relations to invite you to participate in the world of Pink Floyd. This was perhaps because they were displayed behind glass which minimised their physicality and as a consequence they lacked presence.

They were also arranged in rows with labels using conventional museum display techniques which jarred with the sound, light projections and scenography which were immersive and experiential.

Overall, *Their Mortal Remains* relied on sensory stimulation to engage visitors and drive them through the space. The experience was largely market-driven nostalgia and consequently rather questionable in terms of the museum's mission to educate and inform its visitors. The exhibition demonstrates how dramatic conflicts underlie the transformational capacity of both the story and the spatial narrative and that minimising struggle in the story weakens the narrative, reducing it to a slick brand narrative. In this case, the irony is that the band wish to be known for their musicianship and innovation but the polished brand narrative reduces them to a commodity.

Dramatic Conflicts and Story Dynamics in Critical Narrative Environments

By contrast, the narrative environment, *Citizenshop – Buy Your Way into the Country*, created in 2016 by designer Nele Vos, is a critical commentary on immigration and nationality which she installed in a small empty shop that sometimes functions as a gallery on the busy Bethnal Green Road, London. Vos, who was a student of MA Narrative Environments at the time, was exploring themes of national identity, international

mobility and their relation to the refugee crisis in Europe caused by conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan and African countries such as Somalia. Vos devised a two-part story contrasting the privilege afforded to those wealthy enough to purchase nationality with those who have become stateless. Her research revealed that different countries sell their nationality for different prices. At the time, an Argentinian passport cost $26,000, an Australian passport cost $3,557,000 and an American passport cost $500,000. The opportunity for those who can choose whichever tax and financial regimes best suit their circumstances stands in stark contrast to the plight of refugees who, through no choice of their own, belong to no state. Vos's project is a critique of the inequities of a neoliberal, international economy, the capture of the nation state by private interests and the technocratic protocols that sustain the system. The project exposes double standards between the post-Second World War human rights-based regime and the international economy organised around nation states-based rights regimes. The project questions what having 'rights' means.

Applying Greimas's model, the sender of the message, that you can change your nationality, is financial rationality, channelled through official governmental communications, financial media publications or personal financial advisors. The receiver is anyone who has the capacity to act on that information and advice. The message transforms them into a rational economic subject seeking to move to a location where their financial interests are seemingly better served. Rational subjects seeking optimal conditions are assisted by legal and financial systems which act as helpers by defining and defending their property rights. Opponents are two-fold. Firstly, they are countries who are seeking to defend themselves against international flows of capital, and, secondly, those seeking to uphold the global human rights regime and, in consequence, to undo the identification of human rights with financial rights, a process that is coordinated by and across nation states.

According to the human rights narrative, all subjects have rights. The sender is the UN convention of human rights; the receivers should be everyone. However, if the subjects are displaced people, who therefore become stateless, the universal story is rendered impotent as the displaced discover that, without wealth or state, they have no rights and effectively disappear. They seek therefore to become citizens of another state. Helpers might be humanitarian organisations who assist them in gaining refugee status, on-line campaign websites and family who provide money for travel. They then become visible as claimants. Opponents might be human traffickers, legal systems, anti-immigrant governments, the sheer distance needed to travel to reach safety and the dangerous nature of the terrain.

There are two levels of dramatic conflict: the political-economic conflict between neoliberalism and other forms of organising society; and the conflict between the universal idea of each human being as endowed with rights and the actuality of rights being attached to states. The two conflicts are tied together by the capture of the state by financial capital.

Vos brings these two conflicts to the surface by designing a two-part spatial narrative which is informative, critical and humorous. She describes the work as an interactive travelling installation. The first iteration took place in Bethnal Green Road at the heart of a bustling multicultural area in London's East End. She installed a freestanding sign on the pavement outside the shop offering passports for sale. The showcase window of the *Citizenshop* was also designed to attract pedestrians. It displayed what appeared to be passports. On closer inspection, passers-by would notice the crest on the cover of the passport had been exchanged for an ISBN code and that images inside the

passport illustrated the dramatic benefits of having a passport. Here were the clues that this was a critical commentary rather than a shop. Signage in the window which said CITIZENSHOP and 'WHAT DOES CITIZENSHIP MEAN TO YOU?' also indicated this was not a typical shop. Nevertheless, the typography looked commercial, so the graphic design acted as satire, simultaneously sending two different messages. It was anticipated that people would suspect the shop to be a performance or installation of some kind, that this might pique their interest and encourage them to enter but also mentally prepare them for an unusual experience. Passers-by could look in and see there were computers, colourful signage and other people browsing the installation. A friendly sales person appeared at the door to invite visitors in. In Greimas' model, the sender was the freestanding street sign and the window display and the receivers were the passers-by, who become subject to the desire to know what 'Citizenshop' means (Figure 3.3).

Working with the principle of a two-part story, Vos divided the internal space into two, the front and back of the shop. When you ventured into the front of the shop, the sales people welcomed you into the international zone of the Republic of Nowhere. You were given a passport which served as a physical token to engage you and commit to staying in the premises by playing a role. The passport functioned as an invitation to start the journey. On the passport for the Republic of Nowhere, visitors found an individual username and password so they could go over to the computers and sign into the online portal of the *Citizenshop*.

The shop was designed like a smart travel agency to give the impression that commercial transactions would occur. The decor functioned as a narrative schema, preparing visitors for the familiar unfolding of a purchasing experience. In Greimas's model, the visitors become the subject, seeking a passport at a fictional level but also seeking the meaning of the installation. The sales people were helpers and the obstacles were

Figure 3.3 Citizenshop installation, London, Nele Vos, 2016.

the tasks visitors had to perform to progress through the space and the physical division of the space. The role play was engaging and people stayed to find out what the point of the shop was. In their role as customers, visitors were shown how to browse through the on-line international collection of investment programs in the *Citizenshop* catalogue. There was a provocative question on the wall behind the computers saying 'What can you afford to buy in Citizenshop?' On the website, visitors were confronted with current citizenship by investment programmes, which they could not afford, and alerted them to the way citizenship has become a commodity which opens up a different world only available to the wealthy. The costs, duties and bonuses governments apply to their offers were revealed and the variations among countries were also surprising to many (Figure 3.4).

Visitors were then ushered into the back of the shop past a large graphic banner that divided the space and concealed the parallel world. Visitors now entered the second part of the two-part story structure. They saw a series of demonstration boards holding individual opinions about the meaning of citizenship. As opposed to a commercial sales pitch, they started to encounter individual stories. The tone of voice changed from one of marketing to one of personal testimony. The light changed from warm to cold and the colour scheme was reduced to greyscales. Banners were hung on the wall with data on migration, displaced persons and statelessness. The banners also showed research from sociologists and policy makers discussing how the world might move beyond the neoliberal organisation of nation states. At this point, visitors were left to digest the information. Here the obstacle became the struggle to understand the multiple ethical, financial and human dimensions of the situation and relate these back to their own experience. Having read the banners, visitors noticed an invitation to contribute to the data

Figure 3.4 Citizenshop – a visitor is confronted with citizenship investment programs, London, Nele Vos, 2016.

Figure 3.5 Citizenshop – a visitor is exploring the meanings of citizenship, London, Nele Vos, 2016.

collection around citizenship by writing a note in response to the question: What does citizenship mean to you? (Figure 3.5).

In Parsons' scheme, the passers-by move by invitation from the 'My world' of Bethnal Green High Street into the 'Their world' of the *Citizenshop*, becoming a visitor. Entering and being given a passport for the Republic of Nowhere is, on the one hand, a displacement to the Nowhere world. On the other hand, the personalised passport prompts a reflection between being in 'My world' and being 'Nowhere'. While, on the computer, the world of neoliberal transactions is laid bare as another 'Their world'. As the world of those who can afford to buy citizenship becomes apparent, visitors realise their assumptions about citizenship being a right are being challenged by the information about citizenship being a commodity. Moving on to the second section of the installation, the facts and commentaries bring the visitors to a realisation that this is a shared issue. They are invited to consider the possible constitution of 'Our world'. Writing their personal response prompts them to reflect on the relationships among 'My world', 'Our world' and 'Their world'. The several shifts across different thresholds from 'My world' to 'Their world' to 'Our world' are an important aspect of the spatialised engagement. The sequencing of the movement through different worlds is transformative and provocative. This example highlights the importance for the design of narrative environments of the ongoing tensions between the nation state as a concrete territorial entity and globalisation as an abstract, universalising space.

While the V&A exhibition offered an immersive sensory experience that apparently gripped visitors through physical delight, triggering memories and heightening

emotions, in the end it was a brand story that avoided confronting dramatic conflicts and, ironically, in itself lacked the innovation that the band claim for themselves. It was an extraordinary technical and aesthetic production and a secure business opportunity for the museum but it did not provoke or inform or indeed encourage people to share ideas or reflect on the world of Pink Floyd in relation to their own worlds. By contrast, *Citizenshop* highlighted an important issue and used an artful combination of playfulness and confrontation to reveal vital issues and prompt people to discuss them further, and possibly even act on them.

Irrespective of whether a narrative environment is commercial, cultural, social or critical, it needs a dramatic conflict to establish its relevance, authenticity and power. Through the dramatic conflict, people are engaged in thinking about how worlds are sustained or rendered invisible and how worlds include or exclude. Narrative environments prompt people to consider in which world or worlds they stand and how they are acting in relation to the way those worlds are produced and sustained. The design of narrative environments heightens people's awareness of their situatedness and how their actions are capable of changing that situation. They gain a greater awareness of the dramatic conflicts that structure their worlds and their lives. In this way, the design of narrative environments can provide insights into the situated, grounded and contested character of lifeworlds. It is not enough simply to present a set of related artefacts in chronological order or thematic clusters, or related architectural or urban design schemes, and imagine they will have significant impact. The three-node network model, aligned with the Greimasian model of narrative dynamics and the Parsonian model of the constitution of interrelated but differentiated worlds, provides a way of discovering and articulating dramatic conflict, such that inhabitant, visitor or participant engagement is enhanced through the design of narrative environments.

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