

Rethinking museum shops in the context of the climate crisis

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Abstract: *This paper critically evaluates the role of the museum shop in the context of the climate crisis. Specifically, it considers how museum shops might be reconceptualized as an important facet of visitor communication within the emerging category of climate museums. Theoretically, the paper references the conceptual linkages of material and commodity culture in relation to climate issues, while practically, it frames the shop as a space that can both support exhibition messaging and prompt behavioral changes among visitors that might help reduce their planetary impact. These claims are explored with reference to the concepts of “gestalt” and “nudge” theory. The paper presents three approaches for effecting such changes: 1. Extended exhibition messaging through shop products; 2. Consistency of tone between exhibition and shop spaces; 3. Imposing limits on the shop space to convey environmental messages. Ultimately, the paper argues for the shop as a more integral cultural component of the museum complex.*

Keywords: climate museums, museum shops, museum activism, climate crisis, consumption.

In this paper I discuss the museum shop in the context of museum responses to the climate crisis. My remarks are directed towards museums and exhibitions dealing with the changing climate, but particularly the nascent concept of the climate museum. Few climate museums currently exist, but this is likely to change with increased focus on strategies to mitigate the climate crisis and to rethink the role of the museum in contemporary society.¹ For those that do exist, their emergence can be viewed in the context of recent trends of museum activism that seek to address societal

issues, such as homelessness, migration and changing norms of gender and sexuality (e.g. Janes & Sandell 2019). These museums aim to effect change and, in many ways, to enact new, discursive forms of museum practice, departing from the passivity bound up in traditional notions of museum neutrality. In the context of the activist museum, it is vitally important that the core values for which the organization advocates are inherent across every facet of its operations, presenting opportunities to reconceptualize visitor communication in different forms throughout

30 the museum complex. As such, this paper contributes to a broader discussion about how we might radically rethink the museum in the context of the climate crisis, specifically the role the museum shop might play.

The precise notion of what a climate museum should be, or the practices it should deploy, has yet to be fully developed, although innovative methods of communicating the climate crisis have emerged within the museum sector and the academy. These range from exhibitions that convey lessons from climate science and attempt to inspire action (e.g. Newell *et al.* 2017a), to radical proposals of disrupting established intellectual frameworks by “ecologizing” the museum through highlighting the interconnected nature of human and non-human relationships (Cameron 2015). A common characteristic of such approaches is holistic thinking, moving beyond scientific explanations and solutions and recognizing the social and political inequities – both local and global – that need to be addressed as part of a comprehensive approach to climate action. For climate museums to be embedded within their communities means they will respond dynamically to these needs and act in myriad different ways. Thus, while some climate museums will develop commercial infrastructure to which this paper directly speaks, emerging museums, particularly in the Global South, may develop alternative models of museum practice. Hopefully, the core tenet of this paper – ensuring consistency of curatorial messaging across all aspects of the museum complex – will have some relevance in both contexts.

While engagement surrounding museums and the climate crisis is producing innovative research, attention tends to be focused in two areas: effectively communicating with audiences through exhibitions and reducing

the carbon footprint of museum operations (particularly related to curatorial activities). Much less attention is paid to rethinking the broader visitor infrastructure to support both climate messaging and forms of carbon reduction. While museum amenities have assumed an increasingly important part of museum operations in recent years, their value is primarily tied to the visitor experience, rather than their capacity to contribute to curatorial messaging. While there are exceptions (for example, see Macleod 2005 on museum architecture), amenities like the admissions desk, the information kiosk, the museum shop, the cafeteria, restrooms, or parking and transport accessibility have received little attention regarding their capacity to communicate curatorial messages. The latent potential of these areas has been emphasized in recent work on the museum lobby by Laursen *et al.* (2016), which argues for its role as a transformational visitor space. Consequently, there is little discussion on the relevance and appropriateness of these amenities, or whether we should attempt to radically reimagine them in relation to emerging themes of museum practice.²

As such, this paper responds to Cameron’s (2015: 16) call “to produce knowledge and cognitive frames that will give rise to new ways of thinking and acting” to empower museum responses to the climate crisis. I contend that the shop can play a crucial role in climate museums’ visitor communication largely due to the museum’s subject matter. Given that modern society is entwined with the carbon economy which has precipitated the climate crisis, visitors to climate museums are arguably more fundamentally implicated in the subject at hand than other museums. Such museums describe climate processes – historical, contemporaneous, and crucially, future-oriented

– that create a binding conceptual framework that explicitly links material culture in the exhibition space and commodities in the museum shop as being produced by and being part of the same system. For example, an exhibit of coal in the gallery and a plastic bottle in the shop can be conceptually linked in a way that other museum exhibitions may struggle to do.

To realize such new perspectives, I argue we need to deconstruct barriers between “cultural” and “commercial” museum space and think more seriously about the shop as a site of representation, where products may reinforce exhibition messages, but also as a space of action, wherein visitors can be prompted to make lifestyle changes to reduce their planetary impact. I explore these issues through the concepts of “gestalt” and “nudge” theory. “Gestalt”, developed by Falk & Dierking (2013), posits that the museum experience is made up of an interplay of contexts, and therefore the quality of visitor amenities is as important as exhibition galleries in ensuring visitor satisfaction. Here, I consider whether reframing “gestalt” through an overtly curatorial lens can apply an intellectual framework across the museum complex which would expand legitimate areas of curatorial communication, resulting in shops becoming a more holistic part of the museum’s messaging. “Nudge” theory (Thaler & Sustein, 2009), drawn from behavioural economics, is premised on designing free choice environments to encourage users to make specific decisions, often based on what is perceived to be in their best interests. I consider whether specific “nudges” can be utilized within the museum shop to direct visitors to products that support messages they’ve encountered in the exhibition galleries.

Ultimately, this paper asks whether the

museum shop can be reconceived as a dynamic environment for visitors to connect their experience in exhibition galleries to decisions they make as consumers, thereby more fruitfully connecting museum narratives to their everyday lives and behaviours. More ambitiously, this entails reconceptualizing the museum by reframing it as a relational space, in which the whole complex is subject to curatorial practices that constitute “networks of related things and their significance, rather than delivering knowledge from a single vantage point” (Newell *et al.*, 2017b: 2), democratizing different types of knowledge transfer throughout the museum complex.

MUSEUM SHOPS AND THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

The museum shop has become integral to museum operations in the Global North, as both part of the visitor experience and as an important economic asset. This is evident in the ubiquitous presence of museum shops, particularly in the UK and USA, and positive visitor attitudes towards them (Larkin 2016b: 308-311). It is also seen in the significance of commercial revenues to museums: a professionally run museum shop can generate around 10% of a museum’s income (Jill Fenwick, personal communication, 24 November 2020), while museum retailing in the UK produces in excess of £100m per annum for the sector (Neville 2013). Moreover, there is a growing realization of the importance of museum shops as a visitor amenity, and one in which curators, artists, and artisans have begun to take an interest (Fitch Little 2019), creating new possibilities for how the shop can influence visitors. This ties into the growing sophistication of museum retailing which moves it beyond the traditional space of

commodified memory and into a more creative forum that can foster visitor identity-work in a similar manner as the exhibition galleries (cf. Macdonald 2012).

Visitor desires to acquire material from sites has been evident as long as forms of tourism have existed, from the sale of pilgrim badges in the Middle Ages to early visitors to George Washington's Mount Vernon, who collected sticks from the estate to fashion their own souvenirs (Bird, Jr 2013). Acquiring cultural or natural tokens in this way is an intensely anthropological means of understanding the world by placing oneself in relation to it, connoting both proof of experience and acting as aide memoire. These desires were formalized in museums earlier than is typically understood (Larkin 2016a), and by 1900 civic museums in the UK commonly sold some combination of postcards, catalogues, books and prints to visitors. Modern museum shop infrastructure emerged in the 1960s, reflecting norms of consumer culture. Retailing intensified as museums were drawn into the burgeoning tourist economy of the 1970s and 80s, and it was during this period that the museum shop gained a reputation for selling poor quality mass-produced souvenirs (often colloquially referred to as "tat"). Since the late 1990s, shops have become a more prominent feature of the museum experience in terms of their size, sophistication and ubiquity. Shop lines expanded to include items "inspired" by museum collections and products designed by contemporary artists, blurring the boundaries between museum piece and commodity.³ Similarly, the scope of products has increased with a focus on consumables such as food and drink. It is important to note that retailing varies across respective museum sectors according to size and resources. For larger museums, retailing is generally a combination of mass-

produced, souvenir items and bespoke products developed exclusively for the institution.

Crucially, the development of designated retailing areas within the museum complex produced spaces with the capacity to influence visitors' experience, not only in terms of general satisfaction but also their understanding of messages emanating from exhibitions. The significance of this can be understood in relation to the rich literature discussing shopping as a means of identity construction (e.g. Miller 1998). With specific reference to the museum, Macdonald (2012) has noted that the shop parallels the exhibition space, with both displaying objects with a common cultural referent⁴ using a similar infrastructure of display, meaning the shop provides an auxiliary space of representation in which "culture" is translated into popular form. Meanwhile, the differences between the spaces may expand the ways that visitors can relate to what they have seen in the galleries. The shop is a tactile space⁵ where visitors can touch, purchase, and take away items, thus extending engagement beyond the site. Shops offer other modes of engagement, including sensory (taste, olfactory); the sale of local products (e.g. handicrafts) that expose visitors to regional cultural discourses; and offer additional forms of cultural consumption (i.e. sale of an author's books at a literary museum). Thus, the museum shop can work as an "orienting space" (McIntyre 2010: 189) which helps visitors shape the memory of their experience, but it is also a space where objects and themes are translated into contemporary form, providing ways for visitors to incorporate them into their everyday lives. Museum shops have a particular potency as they are often the final part of the visitor experience, and thus act as a liminal space between the museum and the everyday world.

Yet there persists a separation between the museum shop and the traditional “curatorial” operations of the museum that occur in the exhibition galleries. While curators have become more receptive to involvement in shop consultation in recent years, there still exists a conceptual divide whereby the shop is framed primarily as a part of the overall visitor experience, and as an economic agent in museum management handbooks. When considering the climate museum, we have the opportunity to bridge these divides by imagining how the shop can constitute part of a holistic experience in which it is strategically framed to engage visitors in the climate crisis and act as a forum to prompt action.

HOLISTIC MUSEUM MESSAGING: “GESTALT” AND “NUDGE”

In terms of reconceptualizing the role of the museum shop to more effectively support exhibition messaging, there are two key concepts that I want to explore: “Gestalt” – a concept familiar within the museum studies literature – and “nudge” theory, drawn from behavioural economics. I want to consider how we might deploy these concepts differently within the museum complex (“gestalt”) and the shop itself (“nudge”) to create a holistic form of “cultural” messaging in which the shop is an important aspect of the museum’s climate communication.

The concept of “gestalt” was developed by Falk and Dierking (2013 [1992]), who proposed that visitors experience the museum as the sum of its parts, or “gestalt” – an organized whole – and therefore encounters with any facet of the museum, from the website, to the restrooms, to the galleries, should be of the same quality of experience. They suggest that “in rating the museum experience, the average visitor deems

the quality of the gift shop and food service to be as important, if not more important, than the quality of the artifacts or exhibition design” (2013: 90). Falk and Dierking’s work elevated the wider museum complex within the field of museum management and prompted reflections on the broader understanding of the experience. Their specific comments on the museum shop emphasize its role in terms of visitor satisfaction, and when referring explicitly to the issue of environmental sustainability, allude to the importance of consistent messaging across the complex: “this commitment must exist not just in the ‘talk’ of exhibitions but equally in the practices of shops and food services.” (2013: 187).

However, Falk and Dierking’s notion of “gestalt” is premised in ensuring each context the visitor experiences are as attuned as possible to maximize their *satisfaction*. Thus, whilst contributing to the overall experience, these contexts (e.g. curatorial, visitor services), still functioned autonomously in terms of their respective aims (i.e. the shop tasked primarily with generating revenue).⁶ Instead, I contend that we should adapt the notion of “gestalt” so that it is inflected with a commitment to upholding rigorous curatorial messaging across the entire museum complex. This is with a view to creating a truly holistic form of visitor communication that permeates the museum complex, so that the museum shop has *as much* of a responsibility for communicating curatorial messages to visitors as the exhibition galleries.

Such an approach calls for closer connections between the cultural and the commercial, presenting opportunities for museums to reconsider the relationship of different types of material culture. Such relationships are not novel; connections span the history of the modern museum project, from the

links between the Great Exhibition and the emergence of the Department Store (Cummings & Lewandowska 2000) to contemporary art projects that place commercial spaces within exhibition areas (e.g. Meschac Gaba's "Museum of Contemporary African Art"). Prompting this notion of a curatorially inflected "gestalt" may allow us to think more closely about these relationships, which might help realize Merritt's (2014) observation that, "the museum store is a natural extension of our relationship to the objects we preserve in museums." To understand objects in this way is to democratize the relations between things and to open up a broader scope of communicative possibilities within the museum.

The second concept I want to consider is "nudge" theory, drawing from behavioural economics. In their book, *Nudge*, Thaler and Sustein (2009) make the case that any environment in which people make choices cannot be "neutral" or value-free. Such environments have been purposefully constructed so there is some degree of inherent (albeit perhaps passive) bias in how choices are presented to consumers which can influence how they act. The authors provide a number of examples to support their argument, such as how the display of food options in a cafeteria influences the choices diners make. Thus, Thaler and Sustein suggest that in contexts where there might be a public benefit (i.e. preventing childhood obesity), environments can be constructed that provide consumers with a range of options, but which encourage them to make choices that are more beneficial to their health, finances, or general wellbeing.

There has been limited application of "nudge" theory in the museum literature, but the museum shop itself is a prime example of a choice environment. Within retail, nudging is

a commonly employed practice: customers are encouraged to increase their spending through framing strategies such as product placement, spotlighted products, and multi-buy deals. In this context, the shop manager is the "choice architect" who arranges the environment to achieve specific aims. Generally, the primary aim of the shop is to maximize profit to support the museum's financial health (see Komarac et al. 2019), although this is within broad parameters of the "appropriateness" of retailing. Thus, we encounter a context in which shop managers may be incentivized to promote products with a larger profit margin and less relevance to the "curatorial" aspects of the museum, than one which is more relevant but generates less revenue. As with "gestalt", we may ask whether "nudging", as currently employed works within the best interests of the museum.

Here, I am interested in exploring how the concepts of "gestalt" and "nudge" can be deployed together in the context of museum retailing. Conceived simply, we might ask whether adopting a curatorially-inflected "gestalt" across the museum complex could result in shops becoming a more effective tool for consolidating key exhibition themes. And could "nudging" be repurposed to direct visitors to products that support messages encountered in the exhibition space?

This approach is based on deconstructing different types of museum space and forms of museum messaging, arguing for greater curatorial synergy between them. It draws on the work of McIntyre (2010), who discusses the importance of designing museum retail environments as "integral" to the experience. McIntyre employs the idea of "gestalt", but more purposefully thinks about the linkages between spaces to ensure a sense of congruity for the visitor. He does this by considering

how cultural and commercial spaces can be designed so that they can work together to produce an appropriate “flow” and form a “synergistic” balance of experiences (2010: 181). My approach similarly advocates for more integral thinking but differs from McIntyre in that it argues for greater permeability *between* exhibition and shop spaces, and that the shop should be more explicitly curated to shape the onsite and post-visit experience. This approach still provides the visitor with choices and the ability to engage in subjective meaning-making in the shop, but through more purposefully selected products and joined-up curatorial thinking, it presents visitors with opportunities to make purchases that may potentially increase the impact of their visit.

In the context of the climate museum, this approach has the capacity to influence visitors’ cognitive and behavioral approaches to the climate crisis. This type of engagement might be fruitful in the context of climate education, where there is concern regarding the difficulty of communicating the climate crisis which many experience as an abstract threat (Morton 2019: 14-16). By attempting to create more joined-up messaging across the museum complex, the museum shop presents a forum to link abstract concepts to commodities; a way to combine museum practice with everyday life.

REFRAMING THE MUSEUM SHOP

In attempting to reframe the museum shop, there are a number of approaches that could be employed to draw closer connections between spaces and produce more holistic messaging. Here, I outline three examples of adapting shop practices and consider the efficacy each might have in practice. These examples have been developed through ethnographic

work during my Ph.D. research and refined with subsequent visits to museum shops and informal interviews with a number of retail managers throughout the UK.

APPROACH 1: EXTENDING EXHIBITION MESSAGING THROUGH SHOP PRODUCTS

Shop products should support and extend exhibition messaging as effectively as possible. Products should be selected with a clear understanding as to how visitors might use and interpret them, and how they contribute to the wider museum experience. While there are instances of informed retailing in the sector, this approach calls for a more circumspect, curatorial involvement in retailing. This can be realized in a number of ways, spanning passive and active curatorial agency.

On a basic level this means considering the aesthetic, educational, utilitarian and mnemonic qualities of objects. Moreover, it means thinking through how shop objects help visitors develop connections to exhibition narratives and themes. This would necessitate curators actively collaborating with shop managers to develop specific exhibition messages in ways that go beyond a passive “check-box” exercise of appropriateness.⁷ For example, an exhibition might highlight individual climate stories, while the shop products prompt visitors to directly connect and engage with this aspect of the exhibition. These connections could be raised in the exhibition galleries, while the experience might be extended by continuing interpretive content into the shop space, linking product(s) back to themes explored in the exhibition. This could be achieved in colour coordinated areas of the shop, or linked visually, with product display areas using the same typography as exhibition interpretation.⁸ More expansively,

an exhibition on the ecological importance of bees, for example, could be explicitly tied to shop products - artificial bee nests and seeds of bee friendly flowers - that “nudge” visitors to put principles learned in the exhibition galleries into practice. This would establish a more joined-up visitor experience and a context to frame products as a legitimate part of the curatorial process, prompting visitor participation to “complete” the museum experience.

Elements of this approach were evident at the Klimalab exhibition at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo (5 April – 21 November, 2019). The exhibition consisted of a series of installations and interactive exhibits, prompting the visitor to consider their relationship to climate and drawing them into a range of artistic, scientific and social dialogues (fig. 1). The Center’s shop supported the exhibition through the sale of carefully selected commodities. Few commodities had an explicit souvenir focus; they were primarily products that visitors could use to make lifestyle changes. Items for sale included reusable crockery and cutlery, laundry bags to prevent microplastics leaching into water systems, products made from recycled ocean plastics, and books that explored notions of environmental and social justice. Some products were presented in a way that introduced curatorial interpretation into the shop, extending exhibition messaging by creating opportunities to “nudge” visitors into purchases that could prompt positive behavioural changes (fig. 2). Despite this, the shop was still physically separate from the exhibition space without cues that drew the visitor into the shop as part of the experience; more could have been done in this context to conceptually link the two spaces.

The importance of the congruence of exhibition messaging and shop products

is evident when the relationship between curatorial and shop space breaks down. For example, in 2018, The Deep, an aquarium in Hull, UK, had a small exhibition highlighting to visitors the dangers of plastic to sea life. However, upon leaving through the shop it was clear that many products for sale were made of plastic and would ultimately exacerbate the problems identified in the exhibition. In this instance, the disconnect between exhibition galleries and shop space produced a dissonance in terms of the messages both conveyed. This discrepancy was evident to staff and the aquarium has subsequently made strides in stocking shop products that support key exhibition messaging.⁹

APPROACH 2. ENSURING CONGRUENT TONE BETWEEN EXHIBITION AND SHOP SPACES

The second approach is establishing an appropriate tone within the shop. A core tenet of retailing is to provide consumers with positive experiences and in the museum shop context this typically means helping visitors codify their museum visit as an enjoyable experience. As such, shop products often have a degree of levity, such as English Heritage’s cartoon depiction of English history, and in some instances this strategy runs counter to the cultural expression in the exhibition galleries, prompting a disjunction. For example, in 2014 the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth, UK, opened its “HMS: Hear My Story” exhibition, which painted a complex understanding of naval life involving heroism, tragedy and sacrifice. By contrast, the shop stocked products depicting a populist, jolly and flippant view of the navy. The shop tone was in stark contrast to the exhibition galleries and signified the end of



Fig. 1. Klimalab exhibition (April 2019 - November 2019), Nobel Peace Center, Oslo. Photo: Ursula Münster.

the museum experience, placing the visitor firmly within a commodified tourist context, highlighting divisions between curatorial and commercial parts of the site. Similar issues were evident during the opening of the 9/11 Memorial Museum in New York (Chung 2014). With such an abrupt transition, visitor mental modes may more readily shift registers, from an intangible, value-based perspective in the exhibition to an economic one in the shop. McIntyre's work highlights similar problems of congruity by stressing differences between areas of high and low engagement, which he designates "hot" and "cold" environments, and

which have the capacity to disrupt the "flow" of visitor experience (see also Thaler & Sustein below: p. 30). In both instances, this disjuncture is the point at which there is a breakdown in "curatorial" gestalt, and the consequence is that it produces different types of space.

Regarding the climate museum, it is vital to consider ways of constructing a shop tone that is appropriately matched to the exhibition. A consistent tone has the capacity to support contexts for interchange between curatorial and commercial spaces that connects the two as a part of the same holistic experience. On the one hand, an exhibition may frame the climate



Fig. 2. Product for sale in Klimalab exhibition shop framed with curatorial messaging. Photo: Jamie Larkin.

crisis as a form of negative heritage and convey a somber mood with the hope of prompting visitor action. In such cases, this should not be undercut in the shop by an overtly commercial refraction of the climate crisis. By contrast, with the emergence of “climate grief”, and its impact on mental wellbeing, the shop may be framed as a respite and be purposefully crafted to support messages of optimism and become a site for action (in response to the call of the exhibition). Here, a curatorially-inflected “gestalt” can ensure a carefully calibrated tone acts as a “nudging” mechanism, by creating a space which prompts visitors to adopt a particular attitude at the end of the visit wherein key exhibition messages can be reinforced. The crucial point here is to develop a clear understanding of how the tone within exhibition and commercial spaces interacts to support a consistent message.

An congruent example of the joined-up experience this consistency of tone can create was evident at the Olafur Eliasson retrospective “In real life” at Tate Modern, London (July 2019- January 2020). A collaboration between the artist’s studio and the museum catering manager resulted in a three-course vegetarian menu available in the museum’s restaurants throughout the exhibition. The menu, “made from sustainable, seasonal, mostly organic ingredients”¹⁰ noting the carbon footprint of each item, reflected the climate focused nature of Eliasson’s work and produced a resonance of messaging between exhibition and amenity space.

3. CONSTRAINTS: IMPOSING LIMITS ON RETAILING

The final approach relates to a more activist rendering of the museum shop, which involves creating retail environments that adhere to



Fig. 3. Product for sale at New Forest Heritage Center displaying The New Forest Marque. Photo: courtesy of Mel Glossop.

particular constraints, to highlight climate issues and attempt to affect the visitor in specific ways. Some retail constraints are emerging as museums adopt ethical policies, often following trading guidelines promulgated by professional bodies. But under this proposal the effect would be more visceral and would render a palpably different shop experience.

For climate museums, an effective constraint may relate to contemporary

consumption. In the Global North the rate of consumption is that individual needs contribute disproportionately to global carbon emissions (Berners Lee, 2010: 7). Within the museum sector consumption is exacerbated through the museum shop with cycles of commodities generating a carbon footprint consisting of production and shipping (often from areas of manufacture in the Global South). Moreover, there are often multiple ways of consuming single exhibition objects through shop commodities. Thus, the ability of the visitor to leave an exhibition space having experienced objects framed by a discourse of preservation and longevity, to be presented with a cornucopia of products to consume, potentially undercuts key messages concerning the need to significantly alter consumption habits. Moreover, when discussing decision-making, Thaler and Sustain (2009) refer to consumers existing in a hot and cold state (in which they are agitated - with many choices, or passive - with fewer choices). In this context, museum visitors move from a "cold" environment of the exhibition space to a "hot" environment of the shop, in which many options are typically presented to them. Such transitions, Thaler and Sustain contend, encourage visitors to act with "temptation and mindlessness" (2009: 43–56).

In this context, could a climate museum impose constraints on its retailing and convey this to visitors? For example, could the shop be stocked with a limited range of products that adhere to rigorous sustainability criteria, or that are circular by design, or only stock products which fall below a particular carbon footprint (cf. Berners Lee, 2010)? To link to existing movements, could the shop be set up to indicate what living a one tonne life might look like?¹¹ Such a move is particularly important given that "museums perform the knowledge

they create" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998), and in some sense this proposal performs museum knowledge by actively disciplining commercial activity. To frame the shop in this way would explicitly bring this area into focus of a curatorially-inflected "gestalt" in terms of applying a rubric of care and preservation to both exhibition galleries and commercial areas, and "nudge" visitors towards the kind of consumption society will need to adopt to meaningfully address the climate crisis. Examples of the rudiments of this idea can be seen in various eco-labelling schemes. For example, the New Forest Heritage Centre, in Lyndhurst, sells products with a New Forest Marque, an accreditation scheme meaning they have been produced in the local area, sustaining the local environment and community (fig. 3).

Considering these three approaches, which are by no means exhaustive and overlap significantly, we might argue for the museum shop to become a dynamic site of action. To truly achieve this aim would necessitate a conceptual re-orientation of the shop in which its rationale is flipped from that of primarily generating revenue to one that principally supports museum communication. Thus, we may conceive of it as a space with a greater concern for visitors to effectively extend their experience through products which *may* generate revenue, rather than be encouraged to consume an abundance of products driven primarily by the profit motive.

PROBLEMS OF IMPLEMENTATION

In a practical sense, changes that fundamentally alter the role and function of museum infrastructure would necessitate a philosophical change at an organizational level. It would potentially mean deconstructing traditional

hierarchies (in terms of museum roles) and broadening the understanding of how the museum communicates with its audience. Such changes would mean facilitating closer and more dynamic working relationships between curators, museum educators, and retail managers, to promote joined up thinking and implement new intellectual frameworks across the organization. To some extent, it challenges the authority of certain types of material culture as the primary instrument of knowledge within the museum.

While some museums are beginning to make such moves, conceptual divisions between cultural and commercial functions within the museum remain normalized. The emergence of climate museums in the mode of the activist museum has the possibility to disrupt established notions of museum practice, particularly the way the museum communicates with visitors. Such activist museums operate in ways that break boundaries in terms of what museums can say, how they can say it, and whose voices are heard when it comes to cultural preservation and storytelling. A greater fluidity of intellectual messaging across the museum complex, as presented here, may prompt a breaking out of embedded “mental models” (Emerson 2019). Such a departure from established museum models may even be essential to confront problems of communicating the existential threat of the climate crisis which challenges traditional ways of thinking and acting (cf. Morton 2019).

A significant problem here concerns revenue generated through this modified retailing paradigm. In the UK, museums are increasingly reliant on earned income as a component of their financial resilience (National Campaign for the Arts 2020). Such new models might not necessarily translate to reduced revenue

– indeed, a more holistic connection between exhibition and shop may stimulate increased spend as visitors feel part of an “authentic” climate discourse – but existing models do provide an established template for profitability. Similarly, while industry suppliers are working towards increasing sustainable products, at present these tend to have a higher price point making moves to greener retailing an economic trade off. So reconceptualizing the museum shop in this way means pragmatically evaluating its role within the organization’s income generating strategy.

Reflecting on these issues in the context of COVID-19, the crisis has exposed vulnerabilities of current museum funding models. Museums with extensive on-site monetization operations that incentivize mass consumption, including blockbuster exhibitions, memberships, museum shops, cafes, etc., have had their income severely curtailed during lockdown. Museums that have adapted most successfully to these new conditions are those that have been able to monetize forms of digital engagement. This digital shift means that museum funding models emerging from this global pandemic may be diversified, incorporating non-site dependent revenues, making the museum shop less financially imperative and a more malleable tool to support exhibition messaging.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have considered how climate museums and climate exhibitions might reconceptualize their retailing operations to more effectively communicate messages and prompt action among visitors. My aim was to think critically about repurposing the concepts of “gestalt” and “nudge” theory, and ways that climate museums can produce discourses that

42 run throughout the organization in a more holistic way. The ideas presented here are a provocation – to try to prompt a different way of thinking – but it could be argued that they still fit firmly within an established paradigm of mass consumption that we need to address as a society, to the point at which we can begin to question whether retailing in museums is appropriate at all.

Therefore, we may need an even more radical approach to reimagine what the museum shop is, and question what an evolution of the shop concept might look like. Could alternatives be “maker spaces” or skills workshops, in which museum mementos are supplied by crafts workshops taught by local artisans and principles of the circular economy are practiced? The rudiments of such an approach might lie in initiatives linking nature, commerce and the museum, like Ceredigion Museum’s “Hadau” project, which created educational programs to produce greenwood crafts that would be sold in the museum shop and promote sustainability and social enterprise.¹²

The nascent climate museum has the capacity to make significant strides in this area, in part, because of the emergence of the concept and the lack of established practices surrounding this type of museum. In their emergence, alongside radical opportunities to think about engaging exhibition practice, such places have the capacity to produce a model for a new type of dynamic, intellectually engaged, connected museum complex, within which the shop plays and important part in contributing to the organization’s curatorial goals.

NOTES

1. The Museums and Climate Network currently lists the following under their heading ‘Climate museums’: Climate Museum, New York; Klimahuset, Oslo; Klimahaus Bremerhaven 8° Ost, Bremerhaven; Jockey Museum of Climate Change, Hong Kong; Museum of Tomorrow, Rio de Janeiro; Museum of Water (travelling exhibition). Not listed here is the Climate Museum, London (pop-up museum). More information on the museums can be found here: <https://mccnetwork.org/climate-museums>
2. A broader example of this is Gurian’s (2001) call for museums to become more community focused ‘mixed use’ spaces. While Gurian doesn’t make the explicit connection, there are a number of ways in which we can imagine museum visitor amenities as hosting broader social services (i.e. food bank, postal services).
3. See for example, Tate Modern, London and its Tate Edit shop, which is described as selling ‘Carefully chosen artists products, limited editions, design objects and items for the home’. See: <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern/tate-edit-shop>
4. For example, the Rosetta Stone and a replica of the Rosetta Stone are both referents of Ancient Egypt.
5. As noted by Sweetman, *et al.* (2020), museums which contain collections that are tactile stimulate more effective memory response in visitors. To extend their work, presumably a tactile environment like the museum shop is therefore a forum that has the potential to codify memory more effectively than a traditional ocular-centric gallery to which it may be attached.
6. Here, an understanding of the museum shop would be to generate as much revenue for the museum as possible, while satisfying visitor desires by offering products with some relationship to the site. Here, economic and visitor satisfaction metrics would be paramount versus curatorial agendas.
7. A discussion with a London-based National Museum revealed that curators often review

products for appropriateness (i.e. to avoid egregious errors of representation), but rarely do they actively inform retail strategy in terms of curatorial insight

8. There is precedent for this in the British Museum's Grenville Room which stylistically models the galleries surrounding it.
9. More details may be found here: <https://www.thedeepest.co.uk/conservation/conservation-projects/united-kingdom/not-so-fantastic-plastic>
10. Information on Artist Set Menu available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/olafur-eliasson/artist-set-menu-olafur-eliasson-real-life>
11. Information on the One Tonne Life project available at: <https://onetonnellife.com/about-the-project/>
12. Details about this project can be found on the Tir Coed website: <http://tircoed.org.uk/galleries/hadau-craft-project>

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