COLLIDING SENSIBILITIES: EXHIBITION DEVELOPMENT AND THE PEDAGOGY OF PERIOD ROOM INTERPRETATION

A Thesis in
Art Education
By
Teresa I. Morales

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The thesis of Teresa I. Morales has been reviewed and approved* by the following:

Mary Ann Stankiewicz
Professor of Art Education
Professor in Charge of the Art Education Program
Thesis Advisor
Chair of Committee

Charles R. Garoian
Director and Professor of Art Education

David M. Ebitz
Associate Professor of Art and Art Education

Joyce Henri Robinson
Curator, Palmer Museum of Art
Affiliate Associate Professor of Art History

Christine Marmé Thompson
Professor of Art Education
Professor in Charge of Graduate Programs in Art Education

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the exhibition development process of an art museum period room (paneled room). In these pages I have adopted an alternative ethnography, drawing concepts and methods from the arts and social sciences. The two questions propelling this dissertation are: (1) How did the methodology of the exhibition development process of the Régence Room affect its intended interpretation? and (2) How do visitors respond to their Régence Room experience? This is an arts-based autoethnography, which uses ethnographic drama to express research findings. Evocative narratives communicate introspection, emotion, and subjectivity, and a reflexive dialectic of childhood memories to reflect my attempt to understand what the Régence Room is and what it means, and to locate a place for myself in the world of art education.

I review the literature on period rooms, tracing the changes wrought through time and space from their inception to recent re-examinations/installations in museums across America. I proffer a historical sketch of one paneled room's history from its original location in Paris to its acquisition, installation, and interpretation at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, California. I connect data gathered through standard academic research conducted in special collections archives, participant interviews and observations with fictionalized accounts of period interiors in literature and film. I engage in non-traditional ways of thinking about and looking at a period room. I point out some issues that have restrained a richer interpretation of the Régence Room, including aversion to change and risk-taking, intolerance for ideological differences, poor inter-departmental communication, and a lack of period room programming for visitors'
edification—general and informed public alike. Evocative narratives offer a pedagogical approach to this type of museum display that can communicate the transformational aspects of museum period rooms by questioning those who construct them and those who experience them. Engaging in non-traditional ways of thinking about and looking at period rooms can bring the varied experiences of the room to life, and this is enhanced by the ethnographic drama in Chapter Four. Scenes, based on unique participant conversations and observations of visitors, create a fictional virtual reality (incorporating some fiction) in which readers can imagine themselves and make their own interpretations. Data gathered from archival research, interviews, and observations are viewed as a complex group of performances found in and carried through sounds, words, images, gesture/movement, costume, and setting.

Finally, I speculate about the implications for developing and interpreting period rooms in ways that incorporate a strategy for an ethic of care and consideration for multiple perspectives and principles from the visual arts, performing arts (culinary, music, dance, and theatre), and literary arts.
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We are able to appreciate and understand other eras only when we find in them ideas and attitudes that have meaning today, for we remain untouched by what has no relevance to ourselves. (Brockett, 2003, p. 6)

In this dissertation, I examine the traditional methodology of installing and interpreting an art museum period room. The evolution of a methodology is a dynamic process. I wanted to display a method for creating and linking lived experience that would keep in mind critical developments in art education and ethnography. The
empirical focus is the Régence Room, but the ethnographic experience, though common to traditional qualitative methods of collecting data, is represented as an arts-based ethnographic drama. Representing my research in this manner is my attempt to add a new approach to the pedagogy of period room interpretation, a rather underdeveloped topic. I acknowledge that it is a fairly esoteric one, potentially attracting a select few among the readers for whom I am writing: art educators and museum administrators. I am advocating making the Getty Museum’s Régence Room an interesting, meaningful experience for museum visitors (Fig. 1.1). My aim is to connect with readers who wonder about the meaning(s) of museum period rooms: what are they? why do museums have them? how do they relate to my life, my students’ lives, visitors’ lives, and our experiences?

Research Questions

My assumption is that the Régence Room—an art museum period room—is a passive, isolated space, in the sense that “if a museum is first of all a place of things, its two extremes are a graveyard and a department store, things entombed or up for sale” (Harbison, 1977, p. 140), and of these two, the Régence Room would be in the graveyard realm—entombed.¹ The fundamental question that I pose is this: how did the methodology of the exhibition development process of the Régence Room affect its intended interpretation? The secondary question I ask is, how do visitors respond to their Régence Room experience?

¹See Appendix A for an excerpt from the motion picture, The Golden Bowl, based on Henry James’s book of the same title.
In 1997 I read Lisa Roberts’s newly published book entitled *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*. It was a pivotal moment for me because her content expressed the diverse, complex job of museum educators—a profession I was pursuing. In the book, Roberts carved a place for narrative in museum education. A consequence of this narrative insight was that I wanted deeper understanding of the conditions that empower or prohibit educators from performing their work in non-traditional, thought-provoking ways. I was particularly interested in how narrative might be applied to the interpretation of a material culture display, moving beyond a museum’s use of standard wall text, object label text, and teacher- or docent-led gallery tours.

I began to question how museum displays are interpreted. Having already decided that my research topic would examine the interpretation of an eighteenth-century French period room, I initiated my inquiry by deconstructing the narrative of the Régence Room. A few of the early questions that helped to focus my arts-based research (Barone, 1995; Barone & Eisner, 1997; Eisner, 1981, 1997a, 1997b) were the following: What pedagogical philosophies guided the process of developing the period room? Did the exhibition developers think in terms of a story, and, if so, what is it, and from whose point-of-view is it told? Who chose the artifacts that would tell the story?

**Narrative Ventures**

The Régence Room suggests a narrative structure, one that functions pedagogically. Narrative form and content vary in the ways they are shaped and

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2Dr. Roberts is Director of Chicago’s Garfield Park Conservatory.
shared. The Getty Museum has constructed one narrative about this period room, but there are others. There are the textual and oral narratives that interconnect and expand with various interpretations of the space, as well as with the retellings of it. Roland Barthes (1915-1980)\(^3\) describes narrative this way:

> The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances—as though any material were fit to receive man’s stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances, narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (1977, p. 79)

What happens when pedagogy is predicated on the curator’s structure of the room? What about all the possible other narratives? How are they to be constructed and expressed? Educators could offer narratives in which the pedagogy would be fleshed out making the room more accessible to the museum’s visitors as a result. Would visitors experience the room differently if the museum were to reveal how it was constructed?

This dissertation has a pedagogical purpose. By this I mean that the following narratives—the stories and play I have written—function as pedagogy. They are based on different kinds of historical information and interpretations of personal experiences, as well as analysis of research material. These structural elements are arranged in various

\(^3\)Barthes was known for his literary criticism, but he was also respected as a philosopher and semiotician, and noted for his literary and social theories.
sequences. Combined, they serve to illustrate a process of how narratives about the Régence Room can be developed. It is important for me to point out, however, that “the knowledge they present is incomplete and unfinished; that it is derived through a never-ending process of discovery and revision; and that its advancement is subject to ongoing debate” (Roberts, 1997, p. 143).

**Arts-based Research**

In this dissertation I use evidence from participants’ interviews, observations of visitors, and documentary sources to show the collective activity that was involved in the presentation of the Régence Room as well as the various roles in creating meanings for the period room. I do this following elements taken from Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner’s *Arts-Based Educational Research* (1997). To explore the significance, meaning, and interpretation of the Régence Room and how it was made, subsequently contested and renegotiated, I overlay Barone and Eisner’s seven features of arts-based research onto the accounts of my participants, observations of visitors, and documentary sources. These ingredients go into Chapter Four’s ethnographic drama and are linked to this dissertation’s overall autoethnographic layered account.

**Autoethnographic Layered Account**

I use autoethnography to tell the story of the Régence Room. It is a relatively new method in the ethnographic field, a genre of writing and research typically written in the first-person voice. The method (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) can take various forms of
connecting the personal to the cultural such as “short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose” (p. 739). A layered account (Ronai, 1992, 1995, 1996), which I use here, is one of the ways a researcher can embody the dialectic of dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness in the context of relational and institutional stories, histories, and culture (Bochner, Ellis & Tillmann-Healy, 2000). A layered account also complements the seven design elements of arts-based research listed above. A discussion of autoethnography and layered accounts follows in Chapter Three. In order to assist the reader, I have used a visual cue, ◆◆◆, to demarcate layers—illustrated by three diamonds.

Personal Background

Prior to entering the doctoral program at Penn State and moving to State College, I had been living a comfortable life with my fiancé in Burbank, California. John and I submitted to a long-distance relationship so that I could move to the farmland of central Pennsylvania. Before leaving greater Los Angeles, I had had a great job as a collections cataloger in Special Collections at the Getty Research Institute, and I really enjoyed it. The emotional and culture shock of moving from Los Angeles to State College could have been enough to put me off Penn State’s art education program, but I am tenacious. I was determined to succeed.

Upon entering Penn State’s art education program (see Appendix B), I already knew what topic I wanted to research—museum period rooms of domestic interiors. I
had been studying the subject since being a Master’s candidate and conducting research in the archive I had been processing and cataloging at the Getty Research Institute, years before applying to the art education program at Penn State. Going back even further, ever since stepping inside the U-505 at Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry in 1965, I was hooked on museums’ representations of domestic interior spaces (see Appendix C).

Huh? You might be asking yourself: What’s the connection between a submarine and period rooms of domestic interiors? Well, for the sailors onboard the U-505, those spaces were a kind of home. More to the point, the submarine triggered my fascination for foreign, three-dimensional interior spaces, spaces completely different from any in my everyday life experience. This museum experience affected how I played at school. Rather than spending my entire recess walloping a tether ball, climbing on the jungle gym, or spinning on the parallel bars, I started playing in the dirt under the outdoor lunch tables, making layouts of houses with walls made of mud and furniture fashioned from twigs, all the while making up stories. I could have been channeling Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s (1712-1754) Emile (1993/1762)—an association I can now make because of my book learning in art education (Efland, 1990, 2004; Morales, 2000). In Book II of Rousseau’s educational treatise, an orphaned boy named Emile is tutored by Rousseau. The child is brought up outdoors honing his senses playing among animals, plants, and natural objects, and experiencing climatic elements. Rousseau’s philosophy stated that education is a developmental process inscribed by Nature, basically predispositions that human beings are born with. From knowledge gathered through my own experiences, I
knew that period rooms had a lot to offer museum visitors, something that I felt museums hadn’t begun to tap. I myself didn’t know how to tap the well, but I trusted it wouldn’t dry out before I learned how.

I wanted to be a dancer from the time I saw my first performance of American Ballet theatre as an adolescent. As the years passed, ballet classes led to other kinds of dance forms: jazz, modern, and ethnic folk dancing. After high school I danced and toured with Bessarabia, a Ukrainian/Romanian folk dance company. Later, I worked with two small concert ballet companies in Los Angeles (see Appendix D). I earned little money as a dancer, and, as much as I loved dancing, I grew weary of financial struggles. Following another love that I developed in high school—the visual arts—I enrolled in a local community college and declared an art history major. It seemed a perfect solution: I’d earn a college degree and get a job somewhere working with art. I needed more money to support this new aspect of my life, and this necessity led to secretarial work. The temporary jobs I accepted helped me decide what kind of permanent job I could endure: it wouldn’t be in advertising, banking, or manufacturing! That’s how I landed

4I attended a parochial high school in South Central Los Angeles where Gerald Brommer, the renowned painter and art educator, was my art history teacher. He was also the year book advisor for which I was the assistant art editor.
5When I was in the fifth grade, my teacher, Mr. Brehm had the class write reports about various professions. My report, illustrated with pictures from LIFE and LOOK, was about secretaries. My topic was probably influenced by popular culture movies I had watched on television. One movie in particular had an impact on me, “The Best of Everything” (1959). Hope Lange played a recent college graduate taking a job in a typing pool at a publishing firm in New York City. She was ambitious, smart, and pretty, and quickly became an editor and acquired a handsome boyfriend played by Stephen Boyd. In my naïveté, I was impressed that her success began with a typing job and decided that I needed to learn how to type, convinced it would lead to my success.
an interview with Gillian Wilson at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu. The job was for Senior Secretary, and I got it. It was August 1985. During the day I was a secretary in the Decorative Arts Department and at night I attended Santa Monica College. I felt fortunate. The museum’s setting in the Santa Monica Mountains along the Pacific Coast in Malibu was idyllic because of its beautiful natural surroundings and its architecture based on the Villa di Papyri in Herculaneum. Everyday inside the museum, I saw decorative arts, drawings, medieval manuscripts, paintings, photographs, and sculpture. Occasionally I was fortunate enough to visit the decorative arts and paintings conservation labs. I was learning, visually and intellectually, all day long.

Over time, in addition to secretarial duties, I began to assist Charissa Bremer-David with her morning gallery walk-throughs. It was on such an occasion that I had an encounter with one of the period rooms. I was alone in the decorative arts galleries making sure all the barriers such as stanchions and ropes were in place. I checked all of the flower arrangements for freshness and picked up any petals that had fallen on the marble tops on which the flower pots rested. As I turned into a small alcove-like gallery, the light levels changed. It was darker than the outer gallery was because when museums are closed to the public, the gallery lights are either off or very dim for preservation. In these low light conditions I stepped into the room. My memory is that there was one light in this period room, and it was situated in the dark fireplace. The effect was surprising. Shadows were black, and there was no sound, except for my footsteps on the wooden parquet floor. The tall, wide mirrors—two on opposite walls facing each other—reflected what little illumination the security spotlight cast. The reflected light was
picked up by all of the gilding on the furniture, wall panels, and cornice, which seemed to
glow. The light reached the crystals dangling from the chandelier, and other light
fixtures, making them twinkle. For an inexplicable moment I had the sensation that I had
traveled back in time to eighteenth-century Paris.

In my capacity as Gillian’s secretary, I encountered many people at the museum,
among them Charissa Bremer-David, Brian Considine, John Walsh, and Deborah
Gibbon. Shortly before I resigned from my job in late 1988, I met Thierry Despont when he was recruited by Gillian and hired by the J. Paul Getty Trust to design the decorative arts galleries in Brentwood. I had no thoughts then that almost twenty years later I would design a research project in which they each would participate.

The Régence Room

In Paris in 1725, two years after the close of the Régence period of Philippe II (1674-1723), oak panels (boiserie) were installed in the bedroom of a new French
townhouse at 18 Place Vendôme (see Appendix E), overlooking the fashionable square of

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6When I worked as Gillian’s secretary, I also encountered Julie Tranner, Debbie’s assistant. Julie was instrumental in coordinating my access to Debbie and to the museum for this research project.

7I resigned because I was unable to reduce my work hours to half-time when I became a full-time student at UCLA. Otherwise, I would have remained in that position until my graduation.

8Mr. Despont trained as an architect in Harvard University’s Urban Planning program. Today, he owns and operates a successful architectural office in New York City, specializing in interior decoration and historic preservation.
residences commissioned by Louis XIV (1638-1715) before his death (Fig. 1.2). Over two hundred years and numerous residents later, in 1932, the panels were removed from the walls of the second floor room (called the prémier étage in France) when Société Carlhian, a family-owned and -operated firm of decorative arts dealers and interior decorators, purchased the panels for FF 55,500 (in five separate lots, equivalent to $41,990, in today’s currency exchange) from the Westminster Foreign Bank, Ltd., which owned and conducted business from 18 Place Vendôme at the time (Carlhian Records, Box 314; Bidwell, 1970).

In 1939, one year before the French government signed an armistice with Hitler’s Third Reich, the Régence boiserie was shipped on commission to Duveen Brothers, fine art dealers in New York City. Following the boiserie eight years later (1947) was a

Fig. 1.2. Place Vendôme (open square to the right, marked with red lines). Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California (930092).
watercolor *maquette* of the room illustrating the panels integrated with tapestries (Carlhian Records, Box 247) (see Appendix F; Fig. 1.3). J. Paul Getty first saw these panels—by then called “antiques”—in the New York showroom of Duveen Brothers in 1950 (see Appendix G). Twenty-one years later, Mr. Getty bought them for the decorative arts galleries in his new museum in Malibu (Carlhian Records, Box 602) (Fig. 1.4). Now, almost three centuries after they were carved, the panels make up a different room, a gallery display at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Brentwood, California (Fig. 1.1).

![Fig. 1.3. Elevation of maquette. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California (930092).](image1)

Fig. 1.3. Elevation of maquette. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California (930092).

![Fig. 1.4. Regence Room (Malibu Installation, ca. 1988). Courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles California](image2)

Fig. 1.4. Regence Room (Malibu Installation, ca. 1988). Courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles California
The Régence Room, as it is known at the Getty Museum, was originally a bedroom in a townhouse in Paris, and installed there sometime around 1725-1726. The townhouse was located in the city’s financial center, the prestigious architectural square named the Place Vendôme. At the time, the houses in this square were considered modern. Counter to traditional aristocratic styles of planning and use, architects in this area adapted the sizes and shapes of rooms according to their use.\(^9\) Number eighteen was one of twenty-eight parcels, a smaller, L-shaped plot situated along the northeastern range of the square, nearest the intersection of Rue de la Paix and Rue Neuve des Petits Champs (Ziskin, 1999).

Louis XIV conceived of the site in 1685. The site—named Place de Louis-le-Grand during his involvement—was to have been a physical manifestation of his power housing royal academies, the royal library, the mint, and residences for visiting VIPs. However, a few years later, the king re-directed money that had been allocated for his royal square, to the war being fought in Europe and Colonial America.\(^{10}\) In 1698, the project was taken over by four venture capitalists, among whom was Nicolas-Hiërosme Herlaut,\(^{11}\) the first owner of 18 Place Vendôme—the Hôtel Herlaut, home of the Régence

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\(^{10}\)The War of the League of Augsburg was about Germany fighting France’s attempted expansion along the Rhine and the English trying to prevent a French-backed restoration of James II to the throne of England. In the American Colonies, the English were fighting against the French where the war was named “King William’s War.”

\(^{11}\)Herlaut was a receiver at the siège présidial de Beauvais. In 1702, shortly after he invested in the Place

The bedroom, made up of carved oak and walnut panels, occupied a space on the second floor. The gilt, carved panels are attributed to Charles-Louis Maurisan after designs probably made by Armand-Claude Mollet; the plain, white panels in the room today are modern replacements for original gilt panels lost over time. The Getty Museum re-installed the Régence Room at Brentwood following the room’s original dimensions and configuration (with a few alterations that I will note later). It includes two windows on one side; three doors on opposite sides, two of which are arranged in enfilade; three mirrors on three sides, two of which are enfilade; and a chimneypiece. The two windows overlooked the square, and the doors led to other apartments (rooms) in the townhouse.

Gillian Wilson, the decorative arts curator at the Getty, used the gilt, carved panels as a backdrop to display early eighteenth-century objects that she had acquired, “to give them some context” (Jeffrey Weaver, personal communication, February 18, 2003). Wilson decorated the room at the Getty Museum with the same domestic furnishings used in her earlier Getty Villa installation—primarily objects made in Paris for the aristocracy. The luxurious materials include gilt bronze, gilt wood, precious woods (amaranth, kingwood, tulipwood), porcelain, hard stones (alabaster, breche d’alep), semi-

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12 Please see Appendix E for the Provenance of these panels that make up the Régence Room.
13 The term *enfilade* is used to describe a straight passage through a series of rooms with the doorways opposite one another. The effect forms a vista down the whole length of the passageway. Mirrors are also used *enfilade*. 
precious stones (agate, amethyst, carnelian, jasper, rock crystal), and silk. Positioned around the room for aesthetic effect are five chairs (fauteuils); one stool, three dressers (commodes), a desk (bureau plât) with writing tools, lighting fixtures, lighting fixture stands, a clock, a large tapestry, a large carpet, andirons, and assorted porcelain from China, Japan, and Germany. The window draperies and the chimneypiece are modern.

Transforming the Room: Sophie Dawes

Sophie Dawes (1795-1840) lived in Paris during the first half of the nineteenth century. She was the seventh owner of 18 Place Vendôme, the residence from which the Régence Room paneling was removed, and the one who transformed the bedroom (chambre de coucher) on the prémier étage into a living room/drawing room (salon). The reconstruction and redecoration of the front bedroom were to be among the last projects of Dawes’s life because of her death four years after acquiring the property. In 1841, the year after her death, her heirs sold the townhouse.

Dawes was an opportunist famous for her liaison with Louis-Henri-Joseph Condé (1756-1830), Duc de Bourbon and later the Prince de Condé. But she started her life in poverty on the Isle of Wight, making her way to London, where she ran away from the workhouse to which her father sent her. Along the way she found various kinds of employment: chamber maid, seamstress in a milliner’s shop, selling oranges at Covent

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14 Most of the craftsmen of these furnishings were employed in workshops with ties to Louis XIV and Louis XV—the bâtiments du roi.
15 This statement is based on the most current provenance of the room.
16 The Duc de Bourbon inherited the title of Prince de Condé in 1818, and held it until his death in 1830.
Garden, and, later, acting there.17 Dawes is reputed to have met the Duc de Bourbon around 1810 at a bordello where she worked as a serving-maid in London. There he bought her a house, where they lived together for three years, and had her educated in modern languages, Greek, and Latin. The Duc, who had been living in self-imposed exile in London with his father to escape the Revolution, returned to Paris in 1814, along with Dawes, to regain his fortune and public status. For propriety’s sake, he arranged her marriage to Adrien Victor de Feuchères, a major in the Royal Guards and bought de Feuchères the title of Baron. Not much later, Dawes—now the Baronne de Feuchères—was received at the court of Louis XVIII. Many years passed, during which time Dawes edged into Condé’s life (now the Prince)—beyond her physical role as mistress—through various plots to establish herself at his ancestral home, Chantilly. In fact, her numerous critics called her the “Queen of Chantilly.” The most notable of her intrigues was her alleged strangling of the Prince in 1830. Evidently, the Prince de Condé suffered from her anger both physically and emotionally, yet he left Dawes a huge inheritance in property: Saint Leu, Boissy, the forest of Montmorency, the castle of Mortefontaine, and the pavilion where she lived in the Palais Bourbon.18 The Princes de Rohan—Condé’s would-be heirs—accused Dawes of orchestrating his murder to prevent him from cutting her out of his will, but Dawes was acquitted of all charges brought against her. Despite two separate French kings banning her from court—Louis XVIII and Charles X—for her apparent unseemly social and political ambitions, Dawes eventually schemed her way back in (MacClure, 1997; Montague, 1912; Pons, 1983).

17Billault de Gérainville, however, disputes her ever being an actress in his Historie de Louis-Philippe (Montague, 1912).
18Today the Palais Bourbon is the seat of the National Assembly and Government.
After the Prince’s death, Dawes anticipated she would have to move, so in 1836, she purchased the townhouse at 18 Place Vendôme and changed the front bedroom into a salon. According to her biographer, Dawes was quite ambitious and, by all accounts, also manipulative and abusive. Her financial and social aspirations and her political endorsements, even in later years, could have driven Dawes to draw attention to herself in society (Montague, 1912). Entertaining in her home would have been one way to do this. It is possible that she—or for that matter any eighteenth-century female of means and desire—might have re-decorated her chambre à coucher into a salon as a showcase for parties. Another factor might have been that since this particular bedroom was in the front of the townhouse, facing the busy square of the Place Vendôme, the noise might have made the room unsuitable for sleep.

The architecture of Sophie’s salon altered significantly the 1725 installation. She added another doorway and new panels to fill wall spaces that had been upholstered with silk in the historical location of the bed. Her probate inventory of 1841 (Pons, 1995) describes the contents of this room, which included the following furnishings (pp. 216-217):

1 large divan (long backless sofa, usually with pillows against a wall)
1 sofa (long upholstered seat typically with a back and arms)
7 armchairs, giltwood
6 chairs (no arms), giltwood
1 piano (a six-octave Pape à Paris)
1 chandelier
numerous candelabra
1 mantel clock
matched furniture upholstery and wall hangings in red satin with yellow rosettes

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The in-depth characterizations of the room’s provenance are among the layers in this account that demonstrate education as a narrative endeavor. Museums are stewards of culture and educational institutions. As such, they—with the efforts of museum stakeholders—have shifted from a focus of disseminating knowledge, on the model of libraries and universities, to a focus on making meaning. And, they have become less object-centered. Historically, objects have been valued for perceived inherent qualities. However, increasingly, since the 1990s, objects are understood to get their value and ideas in part “from narratives constructed and imposed from without” (Roberts, 1997, p. 147).

The Problem

The Régence Room’s design was conceived to incorporate specific objects and to give each one a fixed position in the display. It is a room with restricted circulation, preventing visitors from walking in and around the space. As displayed, the room can be only looked into, not experienced with full freedom of movement. The room’s design and installation required a sizable investment of time and money to conceive and produce, especially the restoration of the panels in Paris—using eighteenth-century techniques—and their subsequent installation in the museum by French artisans. To transform this established room from its current display, which the Museum tried to present as historically accurately as possible, would be far more complicated than rehanging a paintings gallery, both logistically and conceptually. Decorative arts
departments have less practice mounting exhibitions, because their objects are lent less frequently. The objects are precarious and expensive to move, even within a museum. Decorative arts require specialized platforms or stanchions or cases, not just a picture rail. Furthermore, the surrounding architecture of the South Pavilion was literally built around the Régence Room, and the other period rooms, fixing its location within the museum.

In addition to the issues just stated, the Museum’s few period rooms (there are four) are seemingly insignificant. The Museum does not give period room tours, nor do the highlights or themed focus tours even begin to delve into the many meanings and perspectives offered by the room’s social and historical contexts or by its objects. I admit the difficulty of touring large groups through the space, but the Museum’s design for the room did not attempt to alleviate this. Domestic interiors are spaces where life is lived in all its richness, where passions are felt from woes to rapture. As survivors of a volatile historical past, the room and its objects today are passive, unable to communicate the possibilities of exploring everyday experience—from the bottom to the top of the social strata—in Paris during the Régence. More to the point, how can Los Angeles’s inner-city population relate to this simulated aristocratic interior? How can it mean something to a group of second-grade Latino children—tired and grumpy, hungry and hyperactive after being bussed in from Riverside County (over sixty miles away)? Could a static museum period room—without any creative stimulus—capture the imagination of these kids? Yet they might be more easily taken in by the room than Anglo adults, or tourists in general.

In the previous two paragraphs I explain why I think the room is a pedagogical failure, but we can learn from situations that are unsuccessful as well as from those that
triumph. We can learn from things that capture our attention and imagination and even from things to which we are indifferent. Just for a moment, let us assume that the Régence Room is the last place in the museum you would want to visit. You can make no associations with it, it has nothing to do with you personally, or culturally. What can we learn from this adverse condition, which invites learning from both the negative and positive aspects of lived experience? The Régence Room is an example of a museum display that maintains its hegemonic historic value, but its pedagogy is misplaced due to the display’s inability to connect to visitors and their everyday lives. In this dissertation, I propose an explanation of this troubled condition and a possible solution.

The idea that museums change the meaning of the objects they hold is not new. In the nineteenth century, critically informed observers noted that curators obscured their former uses (Duncan, 1995), and twenty-first-century period rooms are no exception. The interpretation of the Régence Room’s current display does little to interpret for visitors the 280-year gap between 1725, when the panels were installed at 18 Place Vendôme, and 2006, the time of this writing; neither does the interpretation consider what visitors bring to the space, their personal knowledge and experiences. The room is a decontextualized, static space, disengaged from its museum audience.

Significance of the Problem

Timeliness

The significance of the problem is that it is timely: it relates to a practical problem of interpreting a museum display and it fills a research gap, which I discuss in...
Chapter Two’s literature review; and it is potentially applicable to broader museum education and art education principles, issues that are considered in Chapter Five. Many museums throughout America have period rooms, and a fair number of them are in the process of re-considering their displays. In particular, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has a major architectural addition currently underway that will affect its period rooms, and the same is true for the Philadelphia Museum of Art and its collection of period rooms. It may be that in considering new modes of interpretation, these institutions might want to interpret period rooms in untried ways. These examples underscore the significance of the problem and coincidental timeliness of my research. Recently, in September 2005, the Philadelphia Museum of Art sponsored a symposium about American Period Rooms. In 1997, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London hosted a conference titled “The Museum and the Period Room.” In 1982, prior to these two gatherings of period room devotees, the Brooklyn Museum of Art organized a three-day symposium, “Approaching the Past: The Dilemma of Period Rooms in American Museums.” It coincided with the re-opening of seven of its period rooms, the last in a three-phase renovation plan begun in 1976. What these symposia signify is an ongoing concern by art historians and art conservators for period room display and interpretation. They are also evidence of the preponderance of art historians speaking out on the topic.

What do art educators have to say on the subject?

There are two domestic displays I know of that do set up a creative pedagogical stimulus and, I believe, demonstrate changing social and historical contexts. Both are

19The kind of sweeping period room re-evaluation taking place in Boston and Philadelphia happened during the 1970s at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, when its period rooms in the American Wing were refurbished, and in the 1980s at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, when its series of period rooms was re-installed.
found in historic houses: the Stephen Decatur House in Washington, D.C., and the Wilson-Warner House in Odessa, Delaware. The Decatur House is, to a certain extent, an archaeological site wherein layers of history are exposed as research on the house progresses—layers of paint revealed, floor boards ripped up, smoke-singed walls surrounding a kitchen hearth. In Odessa, at the Wilson-Warner House, curators have interpreted one upstairs room as if for an eighteenth-century “garage sale,” based on historical records describing the family’s unfortunate bankruptcy. Piles of ceramic dishware are stacked in front of a large trunk turned on its side, with carefully folded linens on a small table off to the side. These spaces, by virtue of how they are displayed, elicit narratives in ways the Régence Room does not. They beg visitors to ask the question, what happened here?

As a delegate at the V&A conference, I noted that presenters spoke from an art-historical perspective discussing such topics as displaying interiors, salvaging and re-using historic paneling, art dealers, changing patterns of acquisition, and researching and collecting. One speaker, Gaby Porter from Manchester’s Museum of Science and Industry, talked about what people wanted from period rooms; she was the sole person who included visitors in the discourse. These references emphasize two things: first, and again, that although there is a continuing interest or concern for period room displays, the reaction of curators has been to re-assess and re-install, just as American museums have been doing periodically since 1976. The second point is that there remains a silence from museum educators as to what to do and how best to activate period rooms for museum visitors. This last point is important because it suggests that this study becomes a key to
another way of approaching period rooms in order to understand and make meaning of the world and our place in it.

_Arts-based Practice for Interpreting Material Culture_

To concentrate on the practical problem of how to make the Régence Room a more transformative space, I have applied the seven features of arts-based research and a layered account to the process and results of making the Régence Room. In so doing, my dissertation offers a model of arts-based practice for interpreting material culture in museums.

Art educators, in their study of objects and artifacts, have focused attention on folk arts, popular culture, and mass media and how these areas of study are “often neglected or omitted from traditional studies in art history and art education” (Bolin, 1992/1993, p. 144). My research fills a gap in this category by directing research on the interpretation of material culture in a museum context. Linked to the growing relationship between material culture studies and art education, this autoethnographical layered account of the J. Paul Getty Museum’s Régence Room creates an alternative reality that functions as a heuristic device. The accounts of “familiar and nearby concerns” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 74) that raise questions are meant to affect you, my readers, and, to affect my ultimate goal of bringing ideas and imagination into the period room in order to pique museum-goers’ curiosity and interest, to help visitors to make meaning of what they see, hear, smell, and touch.

_Sighted visitors will be able to look around, but what about those who aren’t?_
What kind of experience can be created for unsighted visitors? As for hearing, during my gallery observations, a security officer told me of an event in the decorative arts galleries when a chamber music group played period compositions. He really liked working in the galleries then. Too bad, he lamented, that the musicians weren’t actually in the galleries. Apparently, they were seated in an outer non-gallery area for security purposes. Touching, well, that is a problem . . . security again. Visitors aren’t allowed to touch anything in the galleries, let alone the Régence Room. But the chairs are so tempting. I imagine that the green velvet is quite soft. The chairs are pretty low to the ground; I’d probably have difficulty getting up from the seat, given my long legs. My height is better suited to the desk chair with its worn leather upholstery. I would definitely wear pants or a long skirt before sitting down in that one; otherwise my thighs would be scratched up. And I’d really love to see the crystals and stones sparkle if I were to light the candles in the girandoles, wall lights, and candelabrum. Of course, there really isn’t anything to smell in the climate-controlled environment of the museum’s galleries. But, I wonder, what would Sophie Dawes have smelled in this room? Would there have been a stink entering through the windows rising from the Place Vendôme below? Would she have smelled the aroma of dinner cooking, meandering through opened doors from the downstairs kitchen leading to the upstairs rooms in the house?

An italicized passage such as this one is a mode of the layered account that I employ in this dissertation. It represents my internalized reflections.
Interpretation

In this section I introduce the concept of interpretation. First, I acquaint the reader with approaches to interpretation, and second I introduce the interpretive conditions that I believe currently operate in the Régence Room. Throughout this dissertation I refer to interpretation, which is a widely used word in museums. There are similar yet different perspectives on interpretation. The first two that I offer here demonstrate theoretical and practical approaches. Arthur C. Danto, an American art critic and philosopher, gives a theoretical structure to the topic, and Graham Black, a senior lecturer in Museum and Heritage Management at the Nottingham Trent University in England, contributes a practical framework. Black is also a professional interpretation consultant. Their viewpoints will shape some of the discussions of interpretation that follow below and in subsequent Chapters.

Danto (1981) contends that the act of interpreting is “determining the relationship between a work of art and its material counterpart” (p. 113). But an interpretive relationship can be tricky because “works of art may so closely resemble mere real things, [and] an act of disinterpretation may be required in cases of inverse confusion, where we take a mere thing to be a work of art” (p. 113). This perspective is relevant to interpreting material culture because things such as tables and chairs are real things used by many varied cultures, but they can also be works of art. Interpretation is a transformative act performed by individuals who see an object, and in seeing an object it is transformed by the interpretation made by virtue of seeing it. As Danto maintains, “the object was not a work [of art] until it was made one” (pp. 125-126). Moreover, “a new
identity” is created (p. 126). The Getty Museum has created a new identity for the material culture of the Régence Room. And the identities continue to shift and change with each person who sees it.

Another view of interpretation is given by Graham Black (2005), an award-winning interpretation consultant whose exhibitions have received the Gulbenkian Prize, the Museum of the Year award, the Special Judges Prize at the Interpret Britain Awards, and the English Tourist Board’s “England for Excellence” Tourist Attraction of the Year award. Black’s views on interpretation are practical and focused on how museum exhibitions are interpreted. He suggests that interpretation has two viewpoints: what museums provide for visitors and what visitors provide for museums from their “direct, individual interpretive responses . . . to our presentations” (p. 179).21 But it is the “three-way conversation between museum audience and collections” to which Black has fastened his research (p. 185). He contends that the conversation shapes the practice of creating “museum environments and exhibitions, and associated programming” (p. 185).

I believe there are two interpretive conditions at work in the room today, which are qualitatively similar to, and quite possibly exactly, how it was interpreted in Malibu. Condition number one comprises the verbal and aural, and number two, the physical. The verbal and aural interpretation is changeable, and the physical interpretation is unchangeable. Interpretation that fits the first category is didactic: for example, gallery labels, wall text, gallery cards, audioguides, and docent or gallery teacher tours. These devices are specifically designed for visitors’ edification. Changes that may occur are

My research explores visitors’ responses to the Régence Room in a limited way, which was caused by limitations placed on my study by the Museum’s director. I have not examined how people learn in museums. Readers interested in such research should look to the many studies conducted by Falk (2002), Falk & Dierking (1992, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2002), and Falk, Moussouri, & Coulson (1998).
related to content, caused by new research or object movement, or wear caused by
visitors’ handling. Making alterations to these conditions is not uncommon nor is it
exorbitantly costly. In the second category, however, where physical conditions
dominate, cost is a significant issue. Once installed, the physical interpretation of a
period/paneled room is typically static due to the expense. As you might imagine, the
costs of materials and labor required for installing a period interior are high. The time
and money that go into constructing and installing foundations, walls, floors, electrical
systems, and any conservation of objects all add up. Moreover, with regard to the
Régence Room, the curator’s choice to display specific objects there was essentially to
fix them in space and cause them to be unchangeable.

To elaborate on the changeable aspects of the Régence Room’s interpretation, the
kinds of interpretive tools and techniques displayed or utilized in the Getty Museum
period rooms are object labels (reading), wall text panels (reading), gallery cards
(reading, looking at pictures/illustrations), audioguides/acoustiguides (pushing buttons,
listening), computers located in alcoves a distance from galleries (typing, reading), and
the occasional gallery teacher/docent tours (listening, maybe talking). In my estimation,
these tools and techniques are passive and isolated, like the Régence Room itself.
Visitors stand in the room reading or listening and occasionally talking with companions,
who may be in the room also, about what they are reading or hearing. How can
interpretation of the room be expanded from the use of these tools and techniques?

Interpretation of museum displays is part of the process of planning exhibitions.
As such, the process should bring together designers, museum practitioners, and
architects on equal footing from the beginning of the design project (Grasso & Morrison, 1994; Roberts, 1997). In the case of period room interpretation, professional scriptwriters, voice coaches, and theatre groups also could be involved as consultants to assist educators (Hughes, 1998; Fricker, 2002). Another narrative of the interpretive process to consider is demystifying the creation of period rooms in order to “reveal the processes and choices which lie behind museum exhibitions” (Moore, 1997, p. 58). If goals, objectives, themes, meaning-making, and persuasion are the predominant attributes of interpretation, as scholars claim (Ham, 1983/1999, 2002, 2003; Ham & Weiler, 2003; Tilden, 1977/1957), then interactive methods such as communicating and disclosing information could encourage visitors to share opinions and insights and to review what they see.

Community involvement—meaning different kinds of individuals interacting within society—enables the public to undertake object analysis themselves. As Danielle Rice commented at a conference at Winterthur Museum titled How to Put on a Traveling Exhibition (2000), “It’s remarkable what you can learn if you just ask.” An example of this would be to borrow an academic model, distribute a “Call for Participants” to various museum and community stakeholders stating the parameters of the project and inviting anyone to contribute her or his time and knowledge to the interpretive process. Locating such narratives from another perspective potentially would generate dimensions otherwise unconsidered by museum practitioners. After the breakdown of communities—a consequence of the Industrial Revolution—education became more challenging. John Dewey wondered how a school could make itself “a genuine form of active
community life [not just the well-to-do], instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons” (Jackson, 1998, p. 167). I wonder the same about museum period rooms. What do visitors notice about the Régence Room? How has it changed over time? Is the museum’s display really how the room looked hundreds of years ago? Was Paris really different from America in the 1720s? How about today? Who lived in this room? What kind of people were they, and how did they live? What kind of jobs did they have? Were they like me or not? How so? How did aristocrats occupy themselves? Who worked for them and how were they treated?

Moreover, using evidence of real people and events taken from the history of the Régence Room would help visitors believe that what they are experiencing is not merely some distant point in history but still has an influence on them today (Black, 2005; Tilden, 1957/1977). Why not ask the community which narratives are most interesting to them? For example, might they be curious about what connections can be made between the shrewd diplomacy and loose morals of the Orléans Regency and the United States government? Or between the financial scandal affecting stockholders of the first Bank of France under the influence of John Law and today’s WorldCom and Enron scandals that destroyed some of their own stockholders?

I have used the term interpretation in three different ways. In one way I refer to the physical interpretation of how the room was re-installed and to what decisions were made by the curator and exhibition development team about installing the panels as artworks themselves—in Brentwood as a paneled room and as context for period furnishings. In this interpretation, the room is displayed as a salon during the French
Régence and not the bedroom it once was in Paris. A second avenue explains the verbal and aural educational tools used by the Museum educators, such as object labels, text panels, and audioguides. In the last approach I plead for connections that visitors might make between the Régence Room and their own experiences. I maintain that making meaning and contextualizing their experience of the period room potentially gives visitors richer associations with the space. Accessing and incorporating their prior knowledge and personal experiences are pivotal to this possibility.

What I am arguing here is that the current installation of the Régence Room and the information given for it are lacking. Neither fully stimulates interpretation to make personal connections that could enliven visitors’ experiences with the period room. Moving beyond the physical elements of interpretation is what Danto’s (1981) theory highlights:

Consider the way in which a child can play with a stick: it can be a horse, a spear, a gun, a doll, a wall, a boat, a plane; it is a universal toy. But two cognitive conditions must be satisfied in order for the child to execute his acts of imaginative reconstitution. The first, of course, is that he knows that the stick is not a horse, not a spear, not a doll. (pp. 127-128)

Danto attaches limits to such child-like behavior because “[f]or a child to be imagining or pretending that a stick is a horse, he has to know something about horses, and the limits of his knowledge are the limits of play” (p. 128). What this suggests for the Régence Room is that visitors are unable to imagine—or play—in the period room because they have little or no knowledge about it or about period rooms, as a genre. Once the Museum provides visitors with information sufficient to stir mental and emotional responses to the Régence Room, then visitors will be able to connect to the material culture through their
knowledge and imagination.

Using my imagination, I awakened my past experiences in the performing arts as a dancer in Los Angeles to explore performance methods that might encourage and spark the imaginations of museum visitors in the decorative arts galleries. After all, John Dewey’s idea was that “imagination is a common vehicle of learning and a way to bring new realities into existence” (Chambliss, 1991, p. 43). Imagination is an activity that moves; it builds experience.

Definitions, Assumptions and Pitfalls

In this section, I would like to define some terms, claim my assumptions, and point out possible pitfalls of this dissertation. I begin with the quandary of what to call the Régence Room, which is followed by more definitions and disclosures.

*Period Room, Paneled Room, or Gallery*  

For an authentic period room you have to leave your own and visit a major museum; a period room by definition is one that has been excised from its original context and recreated elsewhere with varying, frequently debated degrees of accuracy. (Smith, 2000, p. B43)

The semantic issue of how museum scholars define their displays of domestic interiors is a matter of interpretation. My favorite is *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith’s (2000) concise and easy definition of period rooms: “we all live in them” (p. B43). Where we live today could be a period room tomorrow. However, her point about

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22For this discussion about the terminology of period rooms I have narrowed the context to art museums; therefore, history museums and historic house museums are not specified.
“debated degrees of accuracy” is what I want to address here, because defining period rooms is anything but easy. In their report about period rooms, Bloom et al. (1991) identified three terms for period installations: (1) period room, (2) period setting, and (3) period gallery. A period room presents “an intact historical unit;” a period setting evokes “a particular architectural space and/or style;” and a period gallery is “a non-period space in which period elements are included” (p. 5). A new term that this group of researchers categorized is a vignette. This type of period installation “simply displays architectural elements as art objects” (p. 5). Added to these four types is a fifth—at the Getty Museum the period rooms are called paneled rooms. Is it significant that the Museum seemingly sidesteps the issue of period room vs. paneled room? By focusing on the panels as objects they ignore the inherent interpretive decisions made in the installation. In any case, I prefer the simplicity of “popular publishing” usage (Aynsley, 2006, p. 11) and apply the term period room to the various contexts these spaces represent.

The disagreement among museum workers seems to stem from broad categories of representation that highlight the paradox of period rooms. Historic preservationists, conservators, and curators tend toward stringent goals of historical accuracy; educators tend toward broader social history interests. In a very recent publication, The Modern Period Room: The construction of the exhibited interior 1870 to 1950, Jeremy Aynsley (2006), Professor of Design History at the Royal College of Art, describes three broad categories of period rooms. First are the rooms reconstructed in museums, next are the rooms in situ usually found in historic houses, and last are period rooms that represent “an interior as an imaginary or imagined space, whether realised or not” (p. 10). I think
the ambiguity of period rooms and the use of various terms to describe them originates from how differently curators, conservators, and educators ponder the genre. Each group has an intrinsically different approach to interpretation.

To get some additional perspectives, I asked my participants to explain what a period room is. The sampling of their responses denotes for my readers the linguistic nuances surrounding period rooms.

Diane Brigham\(^{23}\) (personal communication, September 10, 2003), former Head of Education at the Getty Museum, made comparisons to her previous experience at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, then ended with her definition of period room in relation to her involvement at the Getty:

I think we [at the Getty] thought there was an affective reaction to period rooms. At Philadelphia where we also had a large number of those rooms, we always struggled with that phrase period room because again it seemed to evoke for the general public tableaux that you could walk by . . . there would be a little vignette, you know, and you’d just walk by . . . possibly miniatures, like the Thorne Rooms at the Chicago Art Institute . . . Or at the American period rooms at the Met, people have this vision of . . . you just sort of walk by in a forced march . . . it’s kind of a negative connotation. When I think of the phrase “period rooms,” I think of a room organized to evoke the ambience of a particular time and place that contains objects from that time and place. I think, at the Getty, we tried to be very careful because . . . we were looking at paneled rooms, rooms that had, in fact, architectural [elements] from a particular place . . . I think that was the shift, the change from Malibu of not saying, “well, it would have been gilt like this, the molding would have looked like this”, and just to be very clear about what was original and what is ambience.

In contrast, Brigham’s associate Karen Giles\(^{24}\) (personal communication, February 11, 2003) shared her experience of working in the Getty’s decorative arts galleries. Giles also brought in some recollections of a period room from the Toledo

\(^{23}\)Diane Brigham is currently the Executive Director of the Ryman-Carroll Foundation.

\(^{24}\)Karen Giles has retired from working as an educator.
Museum of Art, where she had worked prior to joining the education staff at the Getty Museum.

I think of a period room as a space that really tries to recreate a time and a place, realizing that certainly not all museums could find a room somewhere and pick it up lock, stock, and barrel and install it somewhere else. And, I know the Régence Room is really kind of—my word, nobody else’s word—a hodgepodge of things from a variety of times. There’s paneling in part of the room but not in all of the room. So I’m wondering if the feeling was that there weren’t enough things in either of those rooms to make it from a similar period time, to make it qualify as a true, kind of, period sample. I know when you think about the Rococo Room . . . and how the furniture mimicked the lines of the wall, of the the panels . . . and that room clearly doesn’t . . . because the furniture is not the furniture that went with that wall treatment. I think about a room that we had in the Toledo Museum and it had very little in it. It was a very sparse, dark wood room with a table. And it had a beautiful, old ceramic stove. I can’t remember the name of that room, but people loved it. When I first learned about people’s views on period rooms I thought, well, yeah, I can see that. But, I’ve never seen [visitors commenting about period rooms] at the Getty. Or school kids being passionate to go back to a room.

“We do not refer to them as *period rooms*.” This is what Jeffrey Weaver, the decorative arts assistant curator, wrote in a departmental memorandum dated October, 1996. He was referring to the eighteenth-century paneling about to be installed in the decorative arts galleries in Brentwood. What I understand Jeffrey to mean by his statement is that the museum’s rooms with antique paneling are in fact galleries, not separate historical rooms. In fact, when answering my question on the subject during our interview his response was that “[we] try [to] give a sense of the context in which they were originally made . . . we prefer to call them paneled rooms because we don’t have the entire room” (personal communication, February 18, 2003).

Gillian Wilson’s (curator emeritus of decorative arts) first response to my
question was, “it’s the old-fashioned term, and it’s been supplanted by paneled room. It’s very nineteen twenties and thirties” (personal communication, February 29, 2003). Wilson concluded our back-and-forth dialogue about the semantics of translating French terms into English by telling me that the “the panels are called panneaux, but all the panneaux together make a boiserie.”

One of the two conservators I interviewed, Joe Godla (personal communication, January 28, 2003), gave this direct response:

. . . to define a period room, I would say, it’s a group of architectural components that date from the period of interest to a museum that are reinstalled into a contemporary building to educate the public about the architectural design, and not only the design but obviously the realization of that design . . . [the] architectural components should be of the period of interest, you know the Rococo period, the Régence period, or whatever . . . they should be arranged in a way that mirrors that of the historic period. And that’s where they broke down at the Getty. They do have the components necessary to install that room in such a way to reflect the period but chose not to.

Godla’s comment triggered a follow-up question from me:

So do you, as a conservator, approach the room the way you would, say, restoring another object? Whether it was a chair or a table or a piece of ceramics? Does the room get restored and displayed to a particular point in time within the context of the object?

His answer to me was:

Right. It’s an interesting idea that you’re bringing up and, yes, I would say as conservators we did try to treat [the Régence Room] in exactly that way.

Godla’s colleague, Brian Considine (personal communication, January 22, 2003), had a slightly different perspective on the use of the term period rooms for describing a museum display like the Régence Room.
Well, you know, I kind of get the sense that *period room* has become a dirty word. I think that it has a connotation of a sort of postwar nostalgia, *à la* [Colonial] Williamsburg, where they are a decorator’s concept of, you know, how elegant people would live in rooms that are made up of eighteenth-century architectural elements and furnished with eighteenth-century objects. You know, kind of like the [Hamilton] Rice rooms in Philadelphia, something like that . . . where they really are rooms out of Mrs. Rice’s house on Fifth Avenue.

His comment was similar to art historical and literary criticisms I had read during my literature review. But what interested me more was his response to my question asking him if he preferred to use the term “paneled rooms.” I was surprised to hear him say, “you know, I think that ultimately they are objects.” For clarification I asked him, “are you including the objects within the room, or that that constructed environment is an art object?”

“No. I don’t feel that,” Brian said, “I mean the panels.”

This encounter with Brian led me to pose the question to my other participants: Do you think the panels are art objects? You will find their responses in Chapter Four.

The exhibition designer, Merritt Price, evaded my question about the period room/paneled room debate. He deferred to Gillian Wilson for the definition of the term. It is impossible to know why he was unable to give his own opinion. In keeping with the variety of responses I had received about defining period rooms versus paneled rooms, the two architectural consultants had differing comments to share. Thierry Despont, architect and interior designer, had this to say:

“Period room” is a mixed bag and involves a lot of things because of the

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25I neglected to pose the question to Karen Giles. My only excuse is that I was carried away by our conversation, which of all my participants lasted the longest and focused on pedagogical issues more so than others.
way one looks at history or, more importantly, the display in museums evolved with taste and time and knowledge . . . for a while period rooms were meant to indicate that they were historical rooms and then over time it’s been realized that since they were not, maybe we should not use the word period room. I’m pretty sure that we never, at the Getty, talked of creating a “period room,” it was always to do a “paneled room,” meaning to use paneling of a specific historical provenance as a backdrop for display of the furniture. (personal communication, April 8, 2004)

In addition to his architectural project managing of the installation of the decorative arts galleries, John Robbins (personal communication, February 5, 2003) was the only historic preservationist on the exhibition development team. He answered my question about period rooms very concisely, “authentic elements of the period.” I prodded and learned that Robbins shared lighting designer Howard Brandston’s perspective on paneled rooms.

Robbins thought that using the term paneled room to describe the Régence Room is insufficient because it lacks descriptive information. Paneled room, as a definition, does not address authentic elements of a particular period, “meaning a historical period, a period not in the present.” Paneled rooms are still being made today in France. Such panels would be examples of contemporary history, but more description is required to get at just what kind of paneled rooms they are, the kind of standard description necessary to art historians: date, place of origin, maker, medium, and owner/user. *Period* is not inherent in *paneled room*, whereas it is in *period room*.

As I just mentioned, Howard Brandston had similar thoughts as John Robbins about defining a period room, though Brandston emphasized a social context. Paneled rooms, on the other hand, do not make the same specification. Here is how he explained
We build paneled rooms today, contemporary modern rooms. I wouldn’t call them period. The date establishes the time. Period means time in that context. [The Régence Room] is a room, and that is not a display it is composition of the room, in my eyes. You have to become very narrow-minded to look at that as a display . . . not look at the context of the time the people lived in and the social make up, the sociology of the moment which explains dress, customs, culture, etcetera. So all of these things reflect that. And if you had a really good teacher who would be caught up in, you know, if you’re not teaching about clothing—the costuming, the mores of the time—you’re losing the benefit of studying it. It becomes too narrow a piece, it becomes a piece of decoration. And not a piece of humanity. Those people were alive and human. They chose to live like that. (personal communication, July 16, 2003)

Brandston’s social history perspective was the most unconventional response I received, a stark difference from the matter-of-factness of Deborah Gribbon’s and Charissa Bremer-David’s points-of-view. Gribbon was clear about the nebulous quality of trying to make a distinction between usage of terms for defining contextualized museum spaces.

I think that someone who uses the term paneled room is emphasizing the fact that it is the paneling which is original. Period has something more to do with American museums, with the number of so-called period rooms installed—both American and European—in museums largely in the nineteen fifties, which in retrospect appear to have been installed largely to give context, and often invariably do. So I think the use of period or paneled, at base, signals a distinction between, one might say, something to do with the context, or something that’s valued exclusively for originality. But by the same token it’s both of those and I’m not sure that every time someone uses them they even make that distinction. (personal communication, February 6, 2003)

Bremer-David (personal communication, February 12, 2003) thought the term period room confused visitors.

These sorts of installations of paneling in museums acquired the term
“period room” because I think the designers of these spaces wanted to suggest a certain time and period. And as the room component was devoid of its context, for instance, it’s not a historic house, it’s not a historic palace or government building. It’s just the boiserie or the paneling from one of those historic houses which may have been subsequently demolished or lost completely by fire. The boiserie survives and it was reinstalled in an attempt to suggest a period as if it were a snapshot in time. I think people in museum curatorial ranks realize that this was inaccurate because a period room is stopping the clock at a certain date. This room, these panels have existed from seventeen twenty-seven and it’s now two thousand three. If you were to stop the clock at seventeen thirty-nine it would have a certain appearance. If you stopped the clock at eighteen forty-one it would have another appearance. That would be a different period. We, the curatorial ranks, began to realize how deceptive this word “period” was because within the museum installation the objects displayed predated or postdated that snapshot . . . that very particular span of years. So I think it confused visitors. And I think it’s much more accurate to say now “paneled” room. In other words, “a gallery which is fitted with paneling,” with proper labeling, and if the visitor takes advantage, the various audioguide or gallery cards or gallery labels offered. If they’re motivated they can take an interest and learn what we mean by a “paneled room.” It’s [paneling] just another object in that gallery space.

I understand Bremer-David to mean that the “snapshots in time” were taken to be literal representations of the past. This was misleading because the context was historically inaccurate. A counterpoint to Bremer-David’s position about confusion and Gribbon’s about context and originality is John Walsh’s perfunctory comment about hybridization:

I don’t have anything doctrinaire to say about this at all. I mean, particularly not, given the kind of hybrid character of the Getty’s paneled rooms. If this room [the Régence Room] has a period it’s nineteen ninety-six. (personal communication, March 5, 2003)

I prompted Walsh by explaining that I had learned the term period room was considered old-fashioned and that it seemed to me that the term paneled room was an
indicator that the panels were considered art objects, treated and restored as other objects in the museum’s collections often, if not always, are, and given accession numbers.

Yeah, that’s true. I think that may be partly an artificial distinction, in other words, I don’t think anybody at Winterthur, say, or at the Met or any other places that have entire paneled rooms would, in the twenties or now, have ever argued that these aren’t objects. It’s a question of what purpose you put them to. In the twenties in America, anyway, the dream was that we might both instruct people and evoke a certain patriotic piety in them by showing them how their ancestors lived. If—never mind that they weren’t most people’s ancestors—there was the intention of making rooms that were as much as possible furnished the way they might have been, complete in some cases with electric fires and smoking kettles and even figures, sometimes live figures, sometimes dummies with costumes. You know the whole stories. And so, the notion of period room has probably been somewhat confounded with this particular kind of purpose this sort of . . . nowadays we think of as Disney-ish purpose, or Sturbridge Village purpose, of showing people how people lived hundreds of years ago. Down to the last teaspoon and flake of tobacco on the tables. (personal communication, March 5, 2003)

For me, a period room is a historical interior furnished with a composite of historical objects—architectural elements and furnishings—that represent everyday life as lived during the era represented. They are generally located in art museums, history museums, and historic house museums. I make a distinction between period rooms and the similitude of certain art installations and nostalgia-driven popular culture environments. An example of an intact period room is the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Wayzata House at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was removed and re-installed in toto. The only evidence of it having been lived in is the presence of books, flower arrangements, sculpture, and slight wear on the upholstery. The next example is Michael C. McMillan’s *Central Meridian: The Garage* (1989), an art installation in the

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26Nevertheless there are nuances because I think that reproductions of furnishings do become, over time, historical objects. For information about the purpose and intention of collectors and the value of objects they acquire, which is excluded from this research, please see the Getty Research Institute’s Provenance Index.
contemporary art collection at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Although the enclosed space looks and sounds, feels, and smells like a garage crowded with all manner of stuff from years of occupation, it is an art work. Equally evocative of a time and place is my third example, the General Store at Knott’s Berry Farm. Even though the building itself is authentic (Mr. Knott had it relocated to Buena Park from a Western ghost town), the interior furnishings are reproduced to imitate everyday life in an early California settlement. Their differences lie in the purpose and intention of each endeavor.\footnote{Outside the purview of this study is a discussion of the political and economic aspects of these three examples. They each require money to produce and each institution or individual, in one way or another, receives, or expects to receive, money in return: museums have operating costs to meet, often requiring corporate funding, artists have personal expenses and desires that include steady income derived from their artwork, and popular culture environments are moneymaking ventures themselves.} Despite their convincing portrayals of period interiors, art installations and popular culture environments are worlds of their own, though I think experiences of these three kinds of spaces are comparable. They each evoke, invoke, and provoke. In the case of period rooms, experiences call upon emotions, feelings, and responses of viewers; they appeal to viewers seeking inspiration; they stir up and arouse imagination.

Historically, scholars have used the term \textit{period room} to describe gallery spaces like the Régence Room (material culture objects grouped to form a historical context). It is a term that has been and continues to be used broadly to identify a gallery space that simulates historical interiors. Some scholars call period rooms those gallery spaces where intact historical interiors are installed as originally planned, meaning the walls, oftentimes the ceiling, and furnishings made for the room to give a unified effect—as in the Frank Lloyd Wright room (originally from the Little house, Wayzata, Minnesota) mentioned above. At the J. Paul Getty Museum, the name \textit{period room} is considered old-
fashioned and has been replaced by *paneled rooms*, for its particularity. At the Getty, the term, *paneled room*, is used to signify the decorative arts rooms of this ilk, which are hung with historic panels from actual rooms removed from eighteenth-century residences, despite the fact that two of them, the Régence Room and Rococo Room, are furnished to suggest the room’s particular use as a *salon*. Contrary to the display of these two rooms are the other two paneled rooms, which do not suggest how they might have been used. The Ledoux Room (named after the architect, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, who designed the building from which this room removed in the late 1800s), and the le Bas de Montargis room (named after the financier Claude le Bas de Montargis, for whom the townhouse, from which this room was taken, was made). The Ledoux Room’s panels and doors are painted with eye-catching grotesques. Here, the panels are an obvious focus; the furnishings seem an after-thought: two console tables, three clocks, four matched wall lights, two armchairs, two pairs of mounted and lidded vases, and a pair of firedogs. Here, visitors can enter the room making comparisons to the scale of their bodies in relation to the room’s dimensions, the only paneled room in the Museum’s collection to offer this experience. In contrast, the highly-wrought German marquetry floor in the le Bas de Montargis room prohibits visitors’ access to experience the intimacy of its space. Stanchions are positioned across the “fourth wall,” and from this vantage point an unintelligible grouping of objects is visible to visitors, beginning with the floor itself. Here, the panels are merely a backdrop for the floor and the other objects, which are reminiscent of gems, a descriptor the curator has given objects in the decorative arts collection. My understanding is that “gems” applies to the design,
materials, and provenance of the objects. For example, in the center of the room is a small desk made about 1700 for Maximilian Emanuel, the Elector of Bavaria by an unknown craftsman. Its decorative surface gleams and shines from light reflecting off of the polished veneer of wood, brass, tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl, pewter, copper, horn, and silvered bronze mounts. On one side of the desk is a small table, attributed to Pierre Golle. It too has an elaborate veneer made of tortoiseshell, pewter, brass, mahogany, and ebony. Original ownership points to Louis XIV’s oldest son, the Grand Dauphin, because of symbolic imagery—royal emblems—such as five fleurs-de-lis and four dolphins. The opposite side of the desk is a small reading and writing table made of ivory. Louis XIV’s posthumous inventory of 1720, gives a detailed description of this table. Scholars believe it was made for his mistress Madame de Montespan. Even though, a label explains that “the furniture suits the intimate proportions of the room,” to my mind, pedigree is the overriding theme of this room—a microcosm of all of the displays in the decorative arts collection.

The four paneled rooms just mentioned are examples of the disagreement about the terms’ usage, though as I see it the nomenclature is sufficiently variable cross-institutionally to warrant my use of both expressions throughout this study—period room and paneled room—each of which is comprehensible within the context of the discussion.

More Defining and Disclosing

Although this is not a visitor studies project, reference is made to museum visitors. Visitors, viewers, students, museum-goers, general public, and audience are six
identifiers used in various places of this study to refer to people who visit the J. Paul Getty Museum Régence Room and adjacent decorative arts galleries. In each instance, the context clarifies usage.

As I stated above, my assumption is that the Régence Room is a passive, isolated space. It is a room that many of the museum’s own gallery teachers dislike and therefore do not interpret (Karen Giles, personal communication, February 11, 2003). Such disregard can amount to a virtual nullification of the space. The assertion that the room is passive and isolated and that many of the institution’s gallery teachers dislike the space makes the Régence Room, in my estimation, an ideal case study. Why is it passive and isolated? Why is it disliked and therefore dismissed? Chapter Four’s evocative narratives illustrate how some visitors respond to the room, and Chapter Five offers a summary and conclusions.

The method of writing a layered account better serves my study for its ability to communicate lived experience with all its conflict and ambiguity as conveyed through interviews, observations, and my own self-reflection (Ronai, 1992, 1996). Participant interviews and gallery observations affected my intellectual and emotional responses. I internalized concerns about prevalent power relationships between participants and me: professional/student, insider/outsider, expert/novice. From an emotional perspective, I moved outward through conversations, asking questions, sometimes recounting shared memories, and returning to documentary evidence (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). All the while, intellectually, I was conscious of Ricoeur’s (1984) notion that “narrative art characteristically links a story to a narrator” (p. 279). In other words, my relational
involvement with participants and observing visitors in the Régence Room made me aware of questions about my behavior, their behaviors, our shared commentary, and how I would write about it. Was I successful in establishing a trusting relationship/environment for narrative inquiry with each participant? Did I ask questions clearly? Was I listening well? Was I sympathetic or empathetic? Did I interrupt the flow of conversation? Did my presence in the gallery affect the behavior and conversations of visitors? Would my study affect any future relational studies at the J. Paul Getty Museum?

I question the generalizeability of this single case study because the results of multiple case studies are considered more reliable. According to Tellis (1997), replicating patterns through a multiple case study increases the robustness of generated theory, but I did not follow a social science model nor did I conduct a pilot study or a multiple case study. There is potential for broader museum education and art education principles where evocative narratives and layered accounts could be proposed.

One last comment about constraints: this study about the Régence Room may be diminished by the probability of oversimplification or exaggeration due to my inexperience both as an interviewer and as a data analyst.

Outline of Chapters

The case of the Régence Room is built on the premise that it is a passive, isolated space. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, I have applied Barone and Eisner’s (1997) seven features of arts-based education research to the period room in order to
explore its significance, meaning, and interpretation. These features overlay the accounts of my participants, visitor observations, and documentary sources. I question how the Régence Room was made and investigate how it is subsequently contested and renegotiated. The seven features of arts-based research that overlay the accounts of my participants, visitor observations, and documentary sources are:

1. the creation of a virtual reality
2. the presence of ambiguity
3. the use of expressive language
4. the use of contextualized and vernacular language
5. the promotion of empathy
6. personal signature of the researcher/writer
7. the presence of aesthetic form.

This conceptual framework intersects with three qualitative conditions/constraints of period room installation: time, money, and quality. The result of these converging elements is the autoethnographic layered account of evocative narratives characterized by the intellectual and emotional responses of participants and myself. The following outline of chapters asserts my point of view in order to distinguish the problem facing museum practitioners who want to enrich period room interpretation and experience.

Chapter One states my research questions and introduces the problem of my study, giving an overview of the Régence Room’s history. I address definitions, assumptions, and limitations surrounding my research.

Chapter Two is first a review of literature about period rooms, and of
interpretation. It will give more insight into the absence of art education publications and art-historical focus on period rooms, but, for the moment, I want to mention briefly that a very recent publication on period rooms has been edited by Keeble, Martin, & Sparke (2006). And in October 2005, an article about the conservation, restoration, and installation of the grand salon from the Hôtel Gaillard de Bouëxière at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts was published in *The Magazine Antiques* (Busch, 2005). Before that article, the most recent publication about period rooms was Bruno Pons’s 1995 text on French period rooms in museums and historic sites in America and Europe. Another book published around the same time was Peck et al.’s (1996) coffee-table-style book about the collection of period rooms at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Before these few publications, there was a spate of articles dating from the 1980s, when some museums, including the Brooklyn Museum of Art, redesigned their period rooms based on new scholarship (more on this in Chapter two). Next I consider sites of museum experience that crossover multiple fields: material culture studies in art education (Bolin, 1989, 1992/1993, 1995; Bolin & Blandy, 2003), interpretation (Combs, 1999; Ham, 1999/1989, 2002, 2003; Ham & Weiler, 2003; Tilden, 1977/1957), and narrative inquiry and narrative analysis (Bochner, 2002; Bruner, 2002; Roberts, 1997). These works point to a complex of methods discussed in Chapter Three to further understand the significance of period room narratives, interpretation, and meaning.

Previously unpublished archival documents (correspondence, photographs, stock books, and accounting books) provide a narrative portrait of the Régence Room in the twentieth century, which basically has been hidden, because no one outside the Carlhian
and Duveen businesses were even aware of the historical documentation pertaining to this *boiserie*. The archival items and participant interview transcripts, compiled specifically for this project, show that the close alliance between Carthian et Cie and Duveen Brothers, and the curator’s vision, influenced how the Régence Room was marketed, and to whom, as well as how it was physically represented to clients (Fig. 2.3), and museum visitors (Figs. 1.1 and 1.4).

Multiple research methods, elaborated in Chapter Three, are established to assist with examining the broad scope of period room narratives and interpretation. This chapter begins with a discussion of arts-based research (Eisner, 1981, 1997a, 1997b; Barone & Eisner, 1997), autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Bochner, Ellis & Tillmann-Healy, 2000), layered accounts (Ronai, 1992, 1995, 1996), and case study research (Merriam, 1988). It is followed by methods of collecting such as archival research, interviewing, and participant observation (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000).

There is a particular accounting of data taken from participant interviews and field notes made during observations of visitors in the period room. These data are represented through some of the layered accounts which move back and forth in time and in and out of fiction and non-fiction. I suggest that this method is significant to art museum education. The Régence Room forms the setting, and the narratives generate the action. As I have already stated, historical reconstruction is a complex, subjective process; as in directing a movie, every detail in the writing, production, and performance merges and molds narratives. Historian Olivier Bernier (1981) offers a cinematic image.
of the eighteenth century when he writes:

Clothes and décor, unified by a common style, created a splendid, lush spectacle, an everyday pageant in which powdered hair and diamonds, brocade and velvet gowns brought gilded wood, bronze, and porcelain to life. When visiting even the best-restored European palaces it is not enough to look around and notice the quality of the furniture. We must also imagine the glittering, perfumed crowds that filled the splendid room. (pp. 123-24)

Such pageantry, albeit romantic, evokes socio-historical films like *Ridicule* (Brillion & Leconte, 1996) and *Beaumarchais, l’insolent* (Gassot & Molinaro, 1996).

Writing the ethnographic drama, presented in Chapter Four, was my attempt at imagining and conveying narratives of social experience in relation to the design, construction, and installation of the Régence Room, both in the Getty Museum and when it was situated in the townhouse at 18 Place Vendôme during the early nineteenth century. What I do here is interpret both the physical properties of the room and the decision-making process of the exhibition developers whose colliding sensibilities overlooked broader interpretive goals for visitors’ interaction with the space.

In Chapter Five, the last chapter, I reflect on the autoethnographic layered account and explain what I believe to be the meaning and significance of a new approach for exhibition development and museum education. I will offer some implications for art museum education—in particular, how the narratives could be adapted for museum theatre performances (Brissett, 1990; Hughes, 1998; Maloney & Hughes, 1999). This is just one of the possible ramifications of this study summarized in the final chapter, which discusses possibilities for constructing narratives indicative of new and different ways of imagining and making meaning.
CHAPTER TWO

DEFINITIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW:
DEVELOPING AND INTERPRETING PERIOD ROOMS

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature affecting the dual focus of my dissertation, which is to question and study the process of re-installing and re-interpreting the Régence Room, and to appraise its results. I incorporate two factors that seem to influence period room development and interpretation: decision-making by museum practitioners and conditions that affect the decision-making process, and the results of that process. The purpose and intention behind period room display, and the design of spaces around particular questions, are important to the re-creation, reconstruction, and interpretation of such rooms (Fleming, 1972; Underwood, 1993). What were the purposes and intentions of the Régence Room’s exhibition developers? How were they carried out? I consider confrontations that flared up with intensity and then faded into relative obscurity over time. This perspective captures period room exhibition development at its most dramatic, when disagreements that are voiced and/or dismissed could impact both the interpretation and experience of period rooms. The second focus, on the results of exhibition development, takes a look at evaluating period rooms. Were the exhibition developers’ intentions effective? Do their intentions generalize to other period rooms? The results of their intentions linger long after the tedious exhibition development process, which was troubled by power issues and ideological dissent. Visitors become the Régence Room’s arbiters, demonstrating its
pedagogical impact. The complex interaction of these factors affects and influences period room development, interpretation, and experience.

Process

*Re-installing and Re-interpreting*

The process begins by looking at two inter-related problems of period rooms: a lack of pedagogical interpretation and complete absence of literature written by educators. Dianne Pilgrim (1983), Director Emeritus of the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, suggests the primary problem is that period rooms were “inherited from the past” (p. 2). Things change: fashion, taste, technology, and scholarship. As representations of the past, period rooms give an impression of a snapshot in time. But historian Scott Swank (1986) points to another problem, noting that “society does not stand still; why should the display and interpretation of its art and history remain static?” (p. 54). His comment makes it clear that museum period rooms reflect societal changes or, rather, are products of the era in which they were made. If this is true, then does it follow that a re-interpretation of the Régence Room should demonstrate advances made in art, education, museology, and preservation, highlighting new knowledge drawn from continuing research and analysis? Such a re-interpretation would be in keeping with the Getty Museum’s mission “to make the collection meaningful and attractive to a broad audience by presenting and interpreting the collection through educational programs, special exhibitions, publications, conservation, and research” (J. Paul Getty Museum, mission statement, retrieved August 1, 2006, [http://www.getty.edu/museum/about.html](http://www.getty.edu/museum/about.html)).

However, one thing seems to exert a critical influence in the design of museum
period rooms—curatorial perspective. There once was a time, before the specialization of museums about forty years ago, when curators held multiple roles: collector, dealer, curator, and author. Some would say that curators still hold these roles and that they maintain the values, methods, and goals of their counterparts—collectors and connoisseurs. “Even the most ethical curator . . . is an institutionalized collector and dealer” (Ettema, 1982, p. 139). Many curators approach their object-based research from one or two perspectives: aesthetic judgement and/or historical description. Art history was born from history, but unlike writing history, with its focus on identifying, describing, and explaining evidence—typically documents related to remarkable events or persons (Carrier, 2003)—the purpose of writing art history is “to discover the authorship, circumstances of creation and meaning of works of art” (Gordon, 2002, p. xv). Art history practice, with its emphasis on authorship, has led curators to pursue a period room’s origins in order to locate the characteristic qualities of its particular time and place. This is, in large part, according to Trevor Keeble28 (2006), “due to the fact that period rooms have tended to be used to allude to the ‘best’ examples and representative moments of high style and luxury” (p. 2).

Historians and art historians who have examined period room development write about it primarily from an authorship perspective, which includes circumstances of creation (Alexander, 1979, Fleming, 1972; Gleason, 2002; Harris, 1995, 1999, 2000; Halsey, 1924, 1925; Pilgrim, 1978, 1984; Pons, 1983, 1995; Richards, 1927; Smith, 2000; Stayton, Mills, & Weinberg, 1984; Tompkins, 1970, 1989; Victoria and Albert

28 Dr. Keeble is Head of Art and Design History at London’s Kingston University, and member of the University’s Centre for the Study of the Modern Interior.

The first Régence Room installation in Malibu predated the 1980s. During that decade, historians and art historians began to publish their ideas about re-evaluating, re-interpreting, and re-installing period rooms. Articles described “new” ways of thinking about interpreting historic interiors for the public, such as new knowledge about colors of paint, textiles, and upholstery, and other information about the objects, their makers, their users, and those who preserved them. This information then altered period room interpretation in some places (Pilgrim, 1984; Stayton et al., 1984; Swank, 1986). Yet determining the setting and the point of view were puzzling: should the objective be an artistic or a historical representation of the past? Both had been used. Scholars questioned how accurate a portrayal of the past should be, and what messages these recreations would portray (Alexander, 1964; Dakin, 1987, Fleming, 1972). For example, in 1964, Edward Alexander wrote that there were two kinds of period rooms: artistic and historical. The artistic period room display is designed to highlight the “beauty of the objects” within their “general cultural period” (p. 273). A historical period room aims to present an “actual room as it once appeared” (p. 273). The historical style, according to Alexander, is guided by research encompassing inventories and other documentary and archaeological evidence.

Several years after Alexander formulated these theories, another historian, E. M.
Fleming (1972), compared period rooms to literary texts. He argued that these displays were cultural documents of great importance to the public. Fleming identified three kinds of period rooms and codified them as historical, artistic, and utilitarian. As with Alexander, Fleming grouped historical and artistic period rooms in two separate categories. However, Fleming clarified artistic period rooms as those with more of the finest objects in a single style, individually authentic by every art-historical method—date, provenance, regional characteristics, and scale—but a historically inaccurate representation because of their unlikely numbers and groupings. He underscored that the aims of artistic period rooms were “to display in their functional interrelationship a shorthand summary, in range and depth, of the finest examples of craftsmanship and art known to have been available to this culture area and period” (p. 41). Utilitarian period rooms, Fleming’s last group, were a kind of summary of objects displayed; for example, “utensils, tools, weapons, or merchandise appropriate to some historical operation, profession, or activity” (p. 41). Just as in artistic period rooms, the non-aesthetic objects in a utilitarian period room display could be in far greater quantity than any historical equivalent.

More recently, The New York Times published an article about period rooms (Smith, 2000). Focusing exclusively on period rooms in New York City museums, the author outlined for readers what she described as “three loose categories”: all surface, alpha objects rule, and the Goldilocks effect (Smith, 2000, p. B45). The “all surface” rooms could be from four- to six-sided with elaborate walls and ceilings and sometimes floors (for example, tiled floors, mosaic, or parquetry) (p. B45). A single remarkable
object or spectacular suites of furnishings (as in grouped or matched sets) fall into the
“alpha objects rule” category (p. B45). Characteristics of the “Goldilocks effect” would
be that “everything in them is just right: container and contents form a visually balanced,
unified ensemble” (p. B45). Rooms that have the Goldilocks effect are typically
“historically authentic,” particularly those rooms that have been moved intact (p. B45),
such as the Moorish room at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.29

Proponents of art museum period rooms tend to focus on their objects and style
rather than the meaning(s) of the room. Style has often been the reason for collecting
and/or displaying period rooms in the first place, yet making meaning remains largely
unconsidered. Writing about the American Wing at The Metropolitan Museum of Art30
in 1939, with its newly installed period rooms, R. T. H. Halsey and Elizabeth Tower
stated that “our American arts unconsciously developed a style of their own . . . [s]tudents
of the industrial art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England note at a
glance this difference in our woodwork, furniture, and silver. They recognize that all of
these objects have a different feeling from those made on the other side of the water, and
that as the years rolled on these New World craftsmen created style after style which, as
they are more and more studied, will become recognized as American” (pp. xxiii-xxiv).
This statement reflects a traditional art-historical approach, which their following
comment affirms:

29John D. Rockefeller gave the Moorish Room to the Brooklyn Museum, although the room had been the
creation of Arabella Worsham, whose mansion Rockefeller purchased in 1884. Worsham is better known
as Arabella Huntington, the wife of both Collis Huntington and later Henry Huntington, whose estate in
San Marino, California, became the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens.
30The Metropolitan Museum of Art is acknowledged as being the pioneer of exhibiting early American
“arts and crafts,” for its Hudson-Fulton Celebration in 1909. Henry Hudson is credited with discovering
the Hudson River in 1609, and Robert Fulton is credited with navigating the Hudson River in a steamboat
in 1807.
No claim is made that colonial art is great art. From the art standpoint it cannot be compared with that of Raphael, Michael Angelo [sic], Cellini, and numerous others, any more than the simple lyric “Home Sweet Home” can be compared with “Tannhauser,” or “A Man Without a Country” to the “Iliad.” However, both of these simple classics make an appeal to many of our people such as is almost never made by the great masterpieces of music or literature. It is the same with our American art. In its general simplicity and fine workmanship it has an interest to many to whom great art creations cannot appeal. (pp. xxii-xxiii)

This philosophy is waning, but the ideology remains imprinted on museum culture.

Since the 1980s, a growth of curatorial scholarship regarding period rooms addresses the changing tastes of display. Whether in historic house museums or art museums, period rooms continue to attract attention (Dietz, 1994; Dietz et al., 2000; Gleason, 2002; Harris, 1995, 1999, 2001; Jobe, 2002; Keeble, Martin & Sparke, 2006; Pilgrim, 1983, 1984; Peck, A., Parker, J., Rieder, W., Raggio, O., Shepard, M. B., Mathews, A.-C. D., Kisluk-Grosheide, D. O., Koepp, W., Mertens, J. R., Murck, A., and Fong, W. C., 1996; Stayton et al., 1984). Historical origins remain a priority, even among the most recent publications, but pedagogy is slowly finding a place among scholarly disciplines that focus on museum displays of domestic interiors (Dietz, et al., 2000; Keeble, Martin & Sparke, 2006). Museums have re-evaluated and subsequently reinstalled and reinterpreted their period rooms, which I discuss in the following section.

*Historical Sketch of Period Rooms*

All across America there are museums of art, science, and history, historic house museums, and children’s museums. They are located anywhere from large metropolitan areas to small rural communities. Counted among the oldest museums in the United
States are the Brooklyn Art Museum (1897), The Art Institute of Chicago (1879), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1870), the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (1883), the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1876), the St. Louis Museum of Art (1879), and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1877). Another distinction these museums share, apart from being among the oldest museums of art in America, is that they were the earliest to install evocative period settings.

American museum period rooms of domestic spaces follow a tradition established in Europe. During the late 1790s, under the direction of Alexandre-Marie Lenoir (1761-1839), the Musée des Antiquités Monuments Français was the first museum to display objects in a chronological series of period interiors. Lenoir’s galleries had no paneling and no furnishings as the Régence Room has, but they comprised historical monuments, tombs, sculpture, and architectural elements. The objects dated from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries and were primarily religious in subject matter. Although politically unpopular, the artifacts were retained during the French Revolution and afterwards.

Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s (1717-1768) *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764/1766/2002), the first analysis of art from a historical point of view, influenced Lenoir’s exhibition design. The rooms were arranged chronologically and had theatrical flair. Each century was given its own room that was conceived and decorated by Lenoir. They reflected his concept of each century’s style (Greene, 1981; 31, 32).

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31 The old regime (pre-Revolution) protected the Catholic Church, making it exclusive and giving it privileges that were denied everyone else in society. French Revolutionists subordinated religion to the new State, which was guided by the “Reason” of French *philosophes* (Georges Goyau, *French Revolution*, retrieved January, 12, 2007, from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13009a.htm).

32 Italian painter and sculptor Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) wrote *Lives of the painters, sculptors, and architects* (1550). He is considered Italy’s first art historian for his efforts in writing biographies of important Italian artists of his day, primarily Florentines.
Turner, 2000). For example, in the thirteenth-century room, Lenoir wrote—in one of his many catalogs about the museum’s collections:

> When one enters the room which contains the monuments of this century, one sees flattened groin vaults, sprinkled with stars upon a blue background and supported by simple, crudely decorated pillars. These vaults terminate in rose windows of the period. Sepulchral lamps hang from the vaults. The doors and windows of pointed form . . . were designed by the celebrated Montereau according to the taste of the architecture revived by the Arabs. The window glass also bears the stamp of that style. (quoted in Greene, 1981 p. 213)

Even if Lenoir’s motivation was to teach visitors about national history and instill pride in being French, it is clear to me from the description above that his rooms offered visitors a visceral aesthetic experience.

About eighty years after Lenoir’s innovative method of display, the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm constructed a period room. Five years later, in 1878, Artur Hazelius (1833-1901), the curator who designed the room, made several others for the World’s Fair at the Trocadéro Palace in Paris. The public responded favorably to the rooms, bringing worldwide attention to the Nordiska Museet and the period room phenomenon. Another European institution that adopted this new display style was the Germanic Museum at Nuremberg; in 1888 period rooms were added to its collections. Boasting sixty-two period rooms in 1900, the Swiss National Museum at Zurich was outdone by the Bavarian National Museum at Munich, which had seventy-six (Alexander 1964, Tompkins 1970/1989).

Probably the earliest museum period room in the United States was displayed at the Golden Gate Park Memorial Museum\(^{33}\) in 1896 (now the M. H. de Young Museum,

\(^{33}\) The museum opened in 1895. The “memorial” in the name refers to The Midwinter Fair. The institution fashioned itself after the Philadelphia Museum, which grew from the 1876 Centennial Celebration; the
San Francisco), though writers more frequently mention the three rooms developed by George Francis Dow at the Essex Institute in Salem, Massachusetts in 1907\textsuperscript{34} (Alexander, 1964; Payson, 1978; Pilgrim, 1978; Schlereth, 1990/1992; Tompkins, 1970/1989).

Charles P. Wilcomb, a transplanted New Englander and avid collector, became the Golden Gate Park Memorial Museum’s founding curator in 1894 (Frye, 1979). Shortly after he installed the New England Hall, Wilcomb took a seven-week trip visiting thirty-three different museums and private collections, examining methods of museum administration, display, documentation, and preservation. Upon his return, Wilcomb wrote to the park commissioners stating:

If installed in a room of sufficient capacity, finished in Colonial Style, [the collection] will form a most impressive and instructive exhibit. Our Colonial department will be the most complete and from an educational standpoint, the most valuable in the United States. (Wilcomb, 1896, quoted in Frye, 1979, p. 26).

A little while later, Wilcomb designed and installed a colonial kitchen. His research strategy is relevant to my question: how can a new practice for art education shape a pedagogy for period room interpretation? Wilcomb’s strategy suggests that he wanted to learn from what other institutions were doing and, no doubt, had his own ideas of what museums, their collections, exhibitions, and object preservation should be. By spreading a wide net in visiting numerous museums and scrutinizing all aspects of their operations, Wilcomb, an intrinsically self-taught cultural historian and field ethnologist,

\textsuperscript{34}Calvin Tompkins (1989) claims that the Essex Institute installed period rooms in 1898. Huldah Smith Payson (1978) calls these “type rooms.” Today, Dow’s three period rooms are in Salem’s Phillips Library (formerly the Essex Institute); according to the curator, they have not been altered or relocated since Dow installed them in 1907 and have always been enclosed behind glass doors. Visitors can turn on dim lights, set by a timer, to look at the rooms through the glass doors. See Appendix H.
continued to learn. Granted, he lived in an era when museum workers with doctoral degrees were practically non-existent. Nevertheless, what makes Wilcomb interesting and unusual when matched against conservative museum administrators today is that he, a curator, wanted his exhibitions to be instructive. Wilcomb, the transplanted East Coast connoisseur, was interested in objects beyond their aesthetic quality. He was consciously thinking about museum visitors and about what information they would receive from the exhibition. Wilcomb recognized, based on his research, that his exhibition of a Colonial kitchen could, in his opinion, be the most valuable in the nation because of its educational viewpoint. It is evident that he did not perceive the many other museum exhibits he visited to have the pedagogical impact he anticipated for his own. Yet museums that grew out of Expositions, as the Oakland Museum did, began with pedagogical intent and usually included schools of design for craftsman. This could explain Wilcomb’s interest in pedagogical displays. Like other museums of his time, the Golden Gate Park Memorial Museum created teaching programs to correspond with school curricula, and some exhibitions were developed to appeal to students including Wilcomb’s exhibits of North American ethnology, which were among the first and most complete of their kind in the West (Frye, p. 12). Whatever the catalyst was for Wilcomb’s Colonial Kitchen, by the 1920s there was an increase in museum period rooms, especially in America.rooms were salvaged from English country houses. An astonishing number of these homes were demolished during the decades following World War I, but in actuality the damage began after 1875 and continued until after World War II (Harris, 1995). A

35For a detailed explanation of the commercial, ideological, and spectatorial motivators behind this era of tremendous increase in period room design and installation, please see Neil Harris’ keynote address for the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s Center for American Art symposium, “The Museum and the American Period Room,” September 16, 2005.
similar fate happened to French domestic interiors. Many homes were pillaged for their architectural elements by both contractors and antique dealers; key among them was the Carlhian firm. Archival records indicate that by the mid-1920s, the Carlhian firm had nearly forty boiseries in stock, all taken from various locations around France (see Appendix I), the earliest ones acquired as early as 1913, with the pace quickening in 1925.

Some of the most recent period room re-interpretations and re-installations revolve around how best to represent this dismantling of English and French heritage. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is, at the time of this writing, re-evaluating its period rooms for re-installation and re-interpretation. In 2005, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts opened a new period room, a grand salon from the Hôtel Gaillard de La Bouëxière, which “serves as an architectural context for the museum’s impressive collection of French decorative arts, which includes many objects comparable to those owned by the Gaillard family” (Busch, 2005, p. 110). This assertion suggests how sensitive and specific museum curators feel they must now be about their period rooms, because there was a time when curators lacked scholarly standards and this made it difficult to evaluate the accuracy and authenticity of a period room installation. In the 1920s, when the pace of period room installations increased, there were no guidelines for evaluating the accuracy of how to set up paneled rooms, architectural elements, and chimneypieces. According to John Harris (1995), Curator Emeritus, Royal Institute of British Architects’ Drawings Collection:

a gift would frequently be made by a donor at arm’s length from the museum, through an antiques dealer. There would be no enquiry as to the
sources for the room. Only in recent years has the sheer criminality of some dealers been exposed. It was commonplace to make up a single room from two or three, and to sell it as though it was from an original setting; if necessary, dealers would fake up the furniture in the appropriate style. It is no easy task to evaluate an historic room that might have been donated in 1908 or 1928. (p. 56)

Three recent books devoted to period rooms touch on issues of accuracy and authenticity: *French Period Rooms 1650-1800* (Pons, 1995), *Period Rooms in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Peck et al., 1996), and *The Modern Period Room* (Keeble et al., 2006). Bruno Pons, an art historian and endocrinologist, selected twenty-four rooms for his book. They either remain intact in their original location or were removed from French mansions (*châteaux*) and townhouses (*maison de ville*). Some rooms found new homes in Parisian museums; others were re-located to museums or mansions in America, Argentina, England, and Israel. In their recent study, a group of curators at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) compiled a catalog of thirty-four period rooms in its collections. The Met’s period rooms are representative of Early America, Continental Europe, England, and the Near and Far East. *The Modern Period Room* is a volume of essays drawn from a period room conference at Kingston University in London in 2003. Its contributors include academics, museum curators, doctoral candidates, an archivist, and an independent scholar. This volume is the most analytical and theoretical of the three. The Pons and Peck et al. texts are written from an antiquarian approach to the subject. As historian Michael J. Ettema (1982) has aptly commented regarding publications of this kind (meaning books typical of the genres of decorative arts and the history of furniture), “behind the gloss of expensive picture books with arty layouts lie dusty compendiums of undigested facts directed inward, to an internalistic study of
objects, rather than outward, to historical learning” (p. 135). In other words, what is missing from Pons’ (1995) and Peck, et al.’s (1996) research and writing is how period rooms “communicate[d] social messages to [their] users” and how they might uncover contemporary social values (Ettema, p. 144). These concerns and purposes lend themselves to deeper pedagogical interpretations of the Getty’s period room.

**Perspectives on Interpretation and Narrative**

Practices of museum interpretation were initiated by curators in the early twentieth century. Over time this role shifted to educators. The greatest impact of this shift is demonstrated in educators’ focus on interpretation of museums’ collections for schools, diverse audiences, and the public at large. Vital to interpretation is that it reflect visitors’ lived experience and a concern for the meaning and message of museums’ collections for its visitors. Roberts (1997) explains:

> Admittedly, some curators, particularly during the first twenty or thirty years of this century [the twentieth century], introduced some innovative approaches to the interpretive enterprise. However, it has been educators, through their efforts at making collections accessible, who have done far more radical work that has both exposed and undermined the structure of knowledge production in museums. (p. 6)

Three things are suggested by a museum’s changing interpretive role. First, the inclusion of alternative ways of interpreting museum collections is open acknowledgement that there is more than one way of knowing; second, curators no longer wield the same authority over museums’ interpretive function; and, third, the very nature of museums’ exhibit function has been altered” (Roberts, 1997, pp. 73-75). The implications are exciting. Alternative ways of communicating and conceiving have
proved to enhance visitors’ museum experiences. Shifting from the authority of curators, more museums have begun to look to educators, and the visitors themselves, to participate in the meaning-making process.

What is an interpretive process and what connection does narrative have to it? Interpretation in museums is a problematic communicative operation. There is no formula. It is a process that spans displays, research, publication, and education. Who determined the Régence Room’s display and its interpretive perspective? How and what kind of labels were written and by whom, where were labels positioned, who wrote and narrated audioguide texts, and what programs were developed by educators to communicate with visitors about the room? But the pivotal question circling interpretation is why (Ham, 2003): Why should the Régence Room be interpreted? Why does it matter? Because period rooms are doorways to learning experiences. Joe Godla, the former Getty Museum conservator, put it this way: the Régence Room is like “a keyhole for people to get interested in architecture. It’s a doorway to a wonderful world. I guess those rooms do represent, for me personally [an] entryway” (J. Godla, personal communication, January 28, 2003). Meaningful experiences can be created through material culture by viewers constructing narratives provoked by seeing the objects and the aesthetic or critical associations evoked, pondering the various social or political connections among single pieces and groups of pieces both past and present, encouraging relationships between visitors and historical characters, questioning personal assumptions, and reflecting on both long-held beliefs and things learned. Whether they are initially interested in the room or not, whether they know about material culture or
not, visitors bring with them their own knowledge and the ability to tell stories from previous experience. This can be combined with new knowledge accumulated from experiences of the Régence Room, but how much prior awareness can be assumed? And how does an educator promote associative knowledge among visitors of varied expertise?

Association and context are two conditions that give objects meaning and significance and affect interpretation. The first has to do with the place with which objects are associated and the second is related to the original environment—and later contexts as well. For instance, a prominent value of the Régence Room is its origin—the Place Vendôme. The objects in the room are associated with the general time period of the room itself, but not one is part of the original environment. The few panels, door surrounds, and mirror frames that are fixed to the walls are important (i.e. valuable) because of their relation to the original environment. What if the museum owned some of Sophie Dawes’ furnishings? Would this affect the experience and interpretation of the room? What about the value of the museum’s decorative arts collection? Objects vary widely in their inherent value and the associations they make, and making these two conditions interrelated should be addressed in interpretation (Thompson, 1994).

The credit for developing the first theory of material culture interpretation goes to Lieutenant-General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers (1827-1900) (Pearce, 1991; Schlereth, 1985a). In his essay of 1875, On the Evolution of Culture, he “urged fellow researchers in the emerging social sciences to consider material culture as the ‘outward signs and symbols of particular ideas in the mind’” (Pearce, 1991, p. 1), a statement considered shocking at the time. Another shocking thing Pitt Rivers did was to arrange
his archaeological and anthropological collections typologically, not geographically, which until then had been the standard. Pitt Rivers remarked that this kind of display was “not for the purpose of surprising anyone, either by the beauty or the value of the objects exhibited, but solely with a view to instruction. For this purpose, ordinary and typical specimens rather than rare objects have been selected and arranged in sequence” (Pearce, 1991, p. 4). Pitt Rivers’s style of displaying ordinary things influenced art museum displays of rare, treasured objects.

I return here to Charles Wilcomb because he was an innovative practitioner of teaching history with material culture, a curatorial anomaly. Attendance to the Golden Gate Park Memorial Museum lectures during the first five years of its operation (1895-1900) was high and not just because of adults. More than nineteen thousand school children attended the in-house events, and an additional sixteen thousand were visited in their classrooms by museum lecturers. Wilcomb also established an outreach program that lent duplicate museum artifacts to local schools and other institutions (Schlereth, 1990/1992). In an annual report to the Trustees of the museum, he wrote that each object considered for acquisition was put through a test that consisted of two questions: “Is it interesting? Does it move thought and appeal to the higher reaches of the imagination, or, in a word, is it ’educational’?” (p. 337). Wilcomb’s legacy is that school programs continue at both the Oakland Museum of California and M. H. de Young Museum, where the objects from his collections were dispersed.

I believe that the pedagogical impact any museum presentation has rests entirely on the success of creating narratives that connect the cultures of people’s lives, emotions,
and intellects to those that are unfamiliar to them by using the museum’s objects, exposing the museum’s intention, and expressing forthrightness in and about its modes of interpretation. Theoretical models that illustrate narrative, interpretation, and pedagogy address how to develop an ability to reflect and how to help visitors make meaning of what they see (Ham, 1993/1999, 2002, 2003; Ham & Weiler, 2003; Tilden, 1957/1977). Dispersing factual information surely is one objective of museum education. The Getty Museum accomplishes this with didactic materials, as I mention below. As tools for interpreting material culture, such methods limit visitors’ ability to make connections with what they see. As Sam Ham (2002), a communication theorist, puts it:

. . . interpretation aims to create in visitors meaning, so that they can put a place into personal perspective and identify with it in a way that is more profound and enduring than random fact-learning can alone produce. Interpretation is meaning making. (p. 1)

Interpretation is a process that places an educator in the role of a carpenter who must craft designs and build structures to support visitors. It is a role that facilitates the production of meaning.

Ham’s (1993/1999) interpretive position is informed by human psychology, particularly the synthesis of how we process the world around us through “sensory perception, pattern recognition, attention, memory, mental imagery, semantic organization, thinking, and problem-solving” (p. 161). He and his colleague Betty Weiler (2003) make the distinction between interpretation that moves a visitor and “interpretation as a fact-giving process” (p. 2). Both are forms of interpretation, but the former is achieved through persuasive themes, and the latter through narrowly focused esoteric content. A decisive component of persuasive themes is provocation, a term
Freeman Tilden (1957/1977) used to explain interpretation. He pioneered the notion of providing evocative and meaningful interpretation. Although his descriptive language for interpreting cultural heritage may be charming and romantic by today’s standards of criticism, his content endures. Provocation causes visitors to think, imagine, and reflect; and human psychology research suggests that it “produces feelings and sometimes behaviors that are consistent with new or modified beliefs” (Ham & Weiler, 2003, p. 2).

Associative inquiry—a comparative way of understanding—developed between museums and visitors could allow for “argument, complexity, or multiple perspectives” (Roberts, 1997, p. 145). The opposite side of this is, however, that narratives could rationalize any statement made. An additional sticking point is that in education there is a difference between museums teaching visitors and visitors who use the museum to their own ends. The museum and its individual visitors each have their own culture. With such differences, how can meaning be constructed? First, museum practitioners need to endorse/accept that visitors arrive at museums with personal knowledge and experience. How can visitors relate to objects with which they have no associations? Their interest must be piqued by interpretive techniques developed by the museum. Even so, drawing from visitors’ experiences can lead to their construction of meaning, and interpretation of visitors’ narratives can elicit experiential activities. In this sense, the museum educator gathers insight into her/his visitors to further visitors’ processes in making meaning from material culture. According to Colin Thompson (1994), a scholar of Scottish cultural heritage, comparing objects to ourselves is an expedient first stage of developing interpretation. The second stage in the context of interpretation is that the closest visitors
can get to the objects is through the people who made the objects and used them. Finally, the closest visitors can get to the makers and users is at the place where they lived and worked. The Régence Room is an ideal space for the Getty Museum to begin such an interpretive program. Discovering visitors’ interest and personal histories could enhance their encounters with objects (Thompson, 1994), which museum educators could cultivate. Whether or not period rooms give visitors a “fantasy of traveling back in time to peek at life in the past, looking for a practical story of what each room is for, or seeing old objects” (Dietz et al., 2000, p. 87-88), visitors have expectations. So why not talk with visitors about exhibition development and ask them what they want from a museum? What kind of exhibition would they like to see? What preconceptions might they have about the function and purpose of the museum? Why did the museum collect period rooms? Why are they displayed as they are? Why are the objects significant? A dialogic process between visitors and museum administrators could help clarify these questions.

I have extrapolated Ham’s, Weiler’s, and Tilden’s work to an art museum, primarily because of their extensive research on historical heritage sites and eco-tourism, which is widely acknowledged and implemented in living history museum sites. But as for changing the narrative approach to practicing museum education, it only “requires that museums do what they have always done, which is present messages; but they must do it in a way that is respectful of the narratives constructed by visitors and that is conscious of and explicit about the constructive process engaged by museums themselves” (Roberts, 1997, p. 146). In other words, talk with visitors, ask them
questions, and take their comments to heart when developing exhibitions and tours. The Getty Museum did more of this work before a departmental evaluator position was eliminated in the late 1990s. Regarding the decorative arts, curators never asked visitors questions and the education department asked few.

Research suggests that empathy with visitors’ motives is a way often considered to make connections with objects (Karp, 1992). Broadening this view, from Karp’s perspective, educators should remember that “communities are the setting in which the skills for appreciating museums are acquired, but museums’ audiences belong to many communities, often simultaneously” (p. 12). In 2004, the Museum of the American West, an entity of The Autry National Center, invited the public to help curate an exhibition—Encounters: El Norte—The Spanish and Mexican North. Actually, the Museum was beginning a multi-year project to re-interpret its permanent galleries. The public evaluation for this exhibition was the first part of a three-phase project soliciting public input on test installations. A broad range of two- and three-dimensional objects from the Southwest Museum’s American Indian and Hispanic collections were used to tell the story about these encounters. The public was asked to evaluate object selection, text length, visual environment, and storyline. The Museum’s test installations—experimental galleries—included a specially trained evaluator. Working “closely with museum visitors to create the best possible exhibitions that address their interests and concerns is a hallmark of the The Autry National Center,” which prides itself on its “dedication to visitor engagement and participation” (Autry National Center Press

The Autry National Center houses three institutions: The Museum of the American West, the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, and the Institute for the Study of the American West.
Release, July 13, 2004). I wonder how public participation might enliven the Régence Room? My observations of visitors suggest their perceptions of aspects of the room, and I have integrated some of their comments in Chapter Four’s play, *Requiem for a Room*.

Through experience, imagination, and interpretation, passive and isolated exhibitions of material culture like the Régence Room can become eloquent displays of material culture and even spaces for narrative.

*Educators and The Problem*

In recent history of period rooms, their development typically involves museum practitioners from two departments: curatorial and conservation. Outside professionals are often consulted (B. Considine, personal communication, January 22, 2003; Dietz et al., 2000; Keeble, Martin, & Sparkes, 2006; Roberts, 1997), but of all the museum practitioners involved in period room development, the one that seems to play the least significant role is the educator. Existing literature on period rooms has richness from an art-historical angle. Yet the weakness and real problem of period rooms from my point of view remains this: where, in all the literature, is the pedagogy of period rooms? Since the 1920s, the bulk of scholarship on period rooms has been written from a first person, connoisseur vantage point. Compounding this are costly decorative arts institutes and programs—with longstanding audiences—managed and taught by people distinguished by their connoisseurship (by which I mean a propensity for an aesthetic focus assigning authorship, validating authenticity, and appraising quality in lieu of social conditions under which objects were made, used, and preserved).37 These specialized arenas—

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37Four notable examples are Attingham Summer School, Sotheby’s Institute of Art, The Victorian Society
sometimes biased against educators—have yet to welcome a general audience.

As professionals typically trained in studio art, art history, or art education, museum educators, in general, are unequipped to take on the issues of periods rooms. These disciplines routinely ignore decorative arts (i.e. material culture). For this reason, museum educators do not have the knowledge to begin constructing an interpretation or a narrative about period rooms, but most do have the necessary research skills required to do, and at the Getty Museum, for example, educators are given access to curators’ objects files. Only students of design or interior design regularly study decorative arts, and usually for connoisseurship, but such students are unlikely to pursue a career in museum education. Three-dimensional material culture objects are more difficult to interpret than two-dimensional ones. I believe it is more challenging to interpret three-dimensional objects or to construct narratives about them. These conditions serve to explain why educators and connoisseurs use a “story” of style. But period rooms—like the Régence Room—are settings ready for action. They lend themselves to numerous and varied narrative constructions. Then what is the problem? According to art historian and educator David Ebitz (2005), “art museum educators are well versed . . . in teaching, preparing educational materials, implementing programs, and giving a human face to museums . . . but they are discouraged from participating on exhibition teams, emphasizing diversity, and conducting and publishing research on museum education and visitor and program evaluation” (p. 166). How do the impediments of their professional position within the museum and the inherent difficulty of interpreting material culture (3-D objects) affect a museum educator’s role in period room exhibition development? The

Summer School, and Winterthur’s Winter Institute.
following sections offer a closer look at the Régence Room to illustrate the information I sought in pursuit of pedagogical advocacy for the display.

*Historical Sketch of the Getty Museum’s Régence Room*

The Régence Room (Fig. 1.1) is a re-construction of a paneled room representing the French Régence (1715-1723), the period of time between the monarchies of Louis XIV (1638-1715) and Louis XV (1710-1774) when the Regent, Philippe II, the duc d’Orléans (1674-1723), ruled France. The Régence style is considered a transition from Baroque to Rococo but is sometimes called early Rococo. The roots of this style developed in aristocratic interior decoration and two of the most important practitioners of the Régence style were Gilles-Marie Oppenord, the *premier architecte du duc d’Orléans*, and Robert de Cotte, *premier architecte de Batiments du Roi*, or the leading architect of Europe (Kimball, 1943, pp. 114, 125). The complex forms and intricate patterns of rococo surface ornamentation and motifs were highly developed in furniture. One interpretation of such decorative motifs as serpentine lines, shells, masks, and sinuous foliated scrolls is that they represent the “carefree” French aristocracy’s pursuit of pleasure, which was a reaction against the sober religious courtier lifestyle under the rule of Louis XIV (Riley & Bayer, 2003). Another point of view is that these emblems are visual representations of social conditions inspired by Enlightenment philosophy (Janowitz, 2007). A new intellectual movement in its day, this philosophy about human existence was considered as innovative as the visual designs that emulated it. A motif called *rocaille*, which means rock work or shell work, and after which rococo derives its
name, became emblematic of the later phase of this style. It was considered pure
ornamentation emphasizing light, playfulness, and asymmetry. Later, this kind of art
would be criticized for being frivolous and decorative. Leading up to the French
Revolution, it was the *philosophes*—among them François Marie Arouet (Voltaire)
(1694-1778), Denis Diderot (1713-1784), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and
Montesquieu (Charles de Secondat) (1689-1755)—who recontextualized art as a social
and political tool.

Clues to identifying a Régence interior are, first, a strong vertical emphasis and
the room’s decoration centered around a curvilinear mantelpiece made of either white or
colored marble (red, yellow, violet, and gray streaks). Above the mantelpiece would be a
tall mirror. More mirrors of the same size—one to three—would be positioned on the
other walls above console tables.\(^38\) These tables would have marble tops similar to the
kind used to make the mantelpiece. Marble might be used on the floor, as might wooden
parquetry.\(^39\) The shapes of doorways and windows changed from rectilinear to
curvilinear (the Régence Room’s doors and windows are square, therefore representative
of early Rococo, closer to Baroque). Windows began to reach to floor level (the
windows in the Régence Room do not reach the floor, but they would have opened out
onto balconies overlooking the square of the Place Vendôme). Carved wall panels, if not
left plain, were painted and sometimes gilded. The decoration on the wall panels reached
to the cornice, and the ceiling included an elaborate medallion from which a chandelier
would hang. Overdoors—the area just above a doorway—were often filled in with

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38Console tables have no legs to stand on. They are like a carved, curvy, ornamental bracket topped with a
carved and fitted marble slab, and fixed to a wall. The Régence Room is not displayed with any console
tables.
39Wooden parquetry floors made of contrasting grains were inlaid in geometrical patterns.
paintings (McCorquodale, 1983; Thornton, 1984; Verlet, 1967).

French historian Remy G. Saisselin (1965) argued that the Régence generation lived in a world of illusions created by art and taste. The latter was formed by art and society and founded on universal principles: imagination, art, pleasures of society, and a search for happiness. Domestic interiors became the stage on which these illusions were practiced. New rooms were devised during the Régence, and their functions changed from the Old Regime of Louis XIV’s strict ceremonial rituals at Versailles.

Manners changed too. For example, bedrooms had been the room for social visits during Louis XIV’s reign, but when Philippe II, the duc d’Orléans, became Regent and the court moved to Paris, salons became the cultural centers—literary meeting places and political hotbeds. Salons were places for aristocrats to mingle with the haute bourgeoisie—upper middle class—in a relaxed and intimate atmosphere so unlike their experiences at Versailles. In eighteenth-century Paris, the function of a bedroom—once the most important room in a house—was replaced by the salon, which was “for the pleasure of mind, conversation, society, and hospitality” (p. 51). Housing and furnishings changed in the eighteenth century, innovations primarily due to the high cost of goods in large European cities, such as Paris, London, and St. Petersburg. Less money was spent on houses. Architects built them smaller because of the limited supply of real estate, but they contained more rooms for three different specialized purposes: reception rooms for entertaining friends, status-oriented public rooms for the display of wealth, and, lastly, private rooms for family. Small houses did little to diminish the aristocratic desire for

During the Régence, searching for happiness was considered an aspect of wisdom. Prosperous men and women liked to have their portraits painted showing themselves” writing, reading, engaged in music or some other form of refined and intelligent occupation” (Saisselin, 1965, p. 50). Their legacy of searching for happiness left a record for us to examine the social and material culture of the Régence.
luxury, which now was focused on furnishings. Actually, in the seventeenth century, the French became committed to fashion and social significance, which led to the highly specialized furniture in the eighteenth century. The attraction to comfort and intimacy affected new interior dimensions, resulting in elaborate yet delicate objects. The French even specifically named various soft upholstered armchairs to distinguish the subtle differences among them: *fauteuil cabriolet, bergère, marquise,* and *duchesse.* This unrestrained taste for luxury items affected all aspects of domestic interiors as represented in “sculpted and painted panelling, sumptuous and sometimes top-heavy silver decorations, [gilt-]bronze and lacquer, exotic and precious woods, mirrors,” and German and Asian ceramics (Braudel, 1981, p. 310). In contrast to the sumptuousness of the furnishings, the rooms offered limited comfort: they were typically cold from drafts, and the only source of heat came from the fireplace. Moreover, bathrooms were rare; pests such as fleas and lice were regular guests, and lighting came from often smoky candles and oil lamps (Pardailhè-Galabrun, 1991).41 Even though the French Régence is described to have been, foremost, a time of frivolity, licentiousness, and skepticism, these characteristics, in contrast to the austerity of its preceding Baroque period, opened the door to new ideas about knowledge, society, and politics.

After the paneled room known as the Régence Room was purchased by J. Paul Getty (1892-1976) in 1971, it was restored by craftsmen in France. It was installed in Gallery 211 on the second floor of the eastern wing of his new museum in Malibu, California, which opened to the public in 1974. The room remained unchanged until the early 1990s, when it was de-installed for restoration in preparation for re-installation at

41Gas lights were not introduced into Western culture until 1808.
the Getty Museum’s new building in Brentwood, California. This seemingly routine procedure of de-installing the panels proved to be anything but, because it led to unexpected discoveries that affected how the panels ultimately were re-installed.

The carving on the Régence Room’s panels is attributed to Charles-Louis Maurisan (c. 1682-1740) after designs probably made by Armand-Claude Mollet (1660-1742), an architect. Three of the room’s walls are intermittently clad with white gilded panels. Filling the gaps between original eighteenth-century panels are modern replacement panels, which are painted entirely white. Three tall and narrow mirrors (trumeaux) are affixed, one to the east wall (between the windows) and the two others opposite each other on the north and south walls. There are four matched, squat chairs upholstered in modern green velvet: one in front of each window and the other two across the room under the Gobelins tapestry. On the marble mantelpiece is a somber trio of two stone jars flanking an inoperative gilt-bronze clock;42 in the hearth is a large Chinese blue-and-white jar sandwiched by gilt-bronze andirons. Three dressers (commodes) with elaborate veneers are placed on the the west, north, and east walls. A desk (bureau plat), a chair, and a stool (tabouret) stand in the middle of the room on a close-napped carpet. The dressers and desk display gold-rimmed Chinese porcelain, candelabra, writing tools, and a decorative box. Parquetry floors—inlaid wood in geometric patterns—are exposed at the edges of the carpet. The panels and furnishings never shared the same space before their installation in the museum.

42During the late 1980s, the Getty Museum’s decorative arts conservation lab employed a clocksmith who tended to the operation of all the clocks in the collection. It was a treat to hear the clocks ticking and chiming the hour and quarter hour.
The room\textsuperscript{43} consists of two parts, divided lengthwise by a long, fairly low metal fence-like barrier to which object labels and a single text label are attached (Fig. 2.1). The greater portion, furnished with objects from roughly the same time span of fifteen or twenty years, is inaccessible to visitors. The smaller portion, a narrow strip of floor—3-1/2’ x 25’—is designated for visitors to enter and exit the room through two doorways. When the panels were first installed in 1725 at number 18 Place Vendôme, they covered one wall (between and on either side of the two windows) and half of two others (one with a chimneypiece and the wall across from it with a mirror). Because the room was originally a bedchamber, the wall opposite the windows and half of the two others were upholstered. Three different probate inventories of past owners of this residence—Monsieur Duché (1738), Madame Duché (1741), and Sophie Dawes (1841)—help us

\textsuperscript{43}The dimensions of the room are, 13 ft. H x 26 ft. 9 in. W x 22 ft. D
visualize how the room might have looked. Pons (1995) gives more history about the
townhouse in *French Period Rooms 1650-1800*. We learn that Jean-Baptiste Duché was
the first owner to actually live in the mansion, a rarity for other owners of the property
who apparently lived elsewhere. Duché was a modest man, even though he was a
prosperous financier and on friendly terms with the Regent, Philippe II. For example,
Monsieur Duché’s walls were upholstered with white wool embroidered with “roses and
fruits of the Indies” (Pons, 1995, p. 214; Ziskin, 1999, p. 124) rather than the more
typical luxurious silk damask. The same white wool was used to make curtains for his
bed and *portières*\(^44\) for the doors. It also covered seat furniture.\(^45\) According to Madame
Duché’s probate inventory, the room contained substantially the same furniture as when
her husband used the room: a large bed, “a sofa, fourteen chairs and armchairs, and a few
other pieces of furniture made by cabinet-makers” (Pons, 1995, p. 213). When Sophie
Dawes died in 1841, the walls of her *salon* (formerly the bedroom) were covered with red
silk embroidered with yellow rosettes. The same fabric covered numerous pieces of
furniture in her collection: “a large divan, a sofa, seven armchairs, and six chairs” (p.
216). By 1841, the room also had new panels introduced into the design scheme,
presumably in areas previously upholstered. The panels are connected to the lives of the
Duchés and Dawes and thus they link the panels in the museum to the past.

Research on this room has focused on establishing a provenance (Pons, 1983,
1995). Research topics include discussions about the Place Vendôme; the investors;\(^46\) the
\(^44\)Portières are generally curtains that are hung at doorways for insulation against drafts, often in addition to
a door.
\(^45\)Rochelle Ziskin (1999) noted that when Monsieur Duché lived at 18 Place Vendôme, he used the
bedroom, which held a prominent position overlooking the square, for a reception room—*ceremonial
chambre*—much in the manner of Louis XIV’s courtly rituals.
\(^46\)For an explanation of the structure of households and social structure during this period, see Norbert
residents of number 18, known as the Hôtel Cressart (named for the first—absentee—owner); the builders and possible designers (historical records are imprecise on this topic); the architecture of the Place Vendôme and the Hôtel Cressart; the architects of the Bâtiment du Roi (the department responsible for the King’s residences); the paneling; and the room changing from a bedroom to a salon. Pons’ article and book chapter (1983, 1997) are illustrated with pictures from the Carlhian archive, which, ten years later, surviving members of the Carlhian family sold to the Getty Research Institute. Although this research has brought to light aspects of the dwelling that before were buried in arcane publications and labyrinthine archives, educators responsible for interpreting the decorative arts collection have yet to interpret the research, and, consequently the room, for museum visitors.

Publications from the past few decades have shown an increased interest in the historical importance of the architectural elements that make up period rooms. Originally collected by museums and installed to serve as contextual backdrops for furniture and decorative arts, the architectural elements were consistently disregarded as art objects in their own right (C. Bremer-David, personal communication, February 12, 2003; B. Considine, personal communication, January 22, 2003; Pilgrim, 1983), even though, by the mid-nineteenth century European collectors appreciated them for their aesthetic qualities and began to buy panels, hanging them on their walls in the manner of a painting, sometimes to the extent of framing them (Pons, 1996). The J. Paul Getty Museum’s current display of the Régence Room was installed shortly before the Brentwood site opened to the public in 1997. The principal difference between the

Malibu representation and that in Brentwood is that, in the latter, the panels have been re-installed following archival research conducted by the Museum’s conservators, which led to previously unknown details about the paneling from 18 Place Vendôme. The furnishings have, in effect, remained the same.

The previous sketches are meant to demonstrate the variations in social and cultural interpretation. Variations imply that change is a considerable force in period room development and interpretation, a point that is examined in the next section. This theme continues and is applied to the Régence Room. The focal aspect will be questions about the exhibition developers’ intentions.

Developing The Régence Room

The attempt to recreate the context in which objects were used involves compromises. The first compromise is the very fact of preservation or reconstruction. (Underwood, 1993, p. 379)

There is a photocopy of a document in Brian Considine’s conservation file from an unidentified source (see Appendix J). All the details on the paper—a stock number, photograph negative numbers, and inventory descriptions—identify Régence panels, suggesting that the copied register belonged to the Carlhian firm, but the original document has yet to be located in the archive. There is a log explaining the work performed on the Régence panels beginning in 1932, when they were removed from Westminster Foreign Bank, and concluding in 1938 with their painting and gilding. The charges for removal, transporting, and restoring the architectural elements were
meticulously written down. One ambiguous notation is at the top center of the document: NY 1947. Does this indicate the year the panels were shipped to Duveen Brothers? Or the year the panels were installed at Duveen Brothers? Other archival items—accounting records, stock books, correspondence, and drawings—document the movement of the Régence panels.

A maquette of the room was made and, according to a Carlhian account book was shipped to Duveen Brothers, New York, in 1947 (see Appendix F). There is a maquette of the Régence Room in the Museum’s possession, which is attributed to the Carlhian atelier. To his great surprise—and the curator’s—Considine found the maquette in the Museum’s decorative arts storeroom in June 2004, when he was taking me to see a different maquette of another paneled room in the Museum’s collection. The maquette of the Régence Room was never accessioned, so it is unclear exactly when and how it entered the decorative arts collection. The assumption is that it was part of the acquisition of the room, crated and shipped along with the panels and cornice from Carlhian. A photograph of the maquette exists from the late 1930s, pointing to a Mrs. Hamilton Rice, an esteemed client to whom Carlhian was hoping to sell the room. The assumption is that the maquette was originally made for her; however, when it became clear she was not interested, the maquette was subsequently shipped to Duveen in New York.

During the inter-war years, the Carlhian business remained active.\textsuperscript{47} The family lost one brother in World War I, but the other three surviving brothers were involved in

\textsuperscript{47}Brian Considine wondered how the Carlhian firm was able to sustain their business in Paris during World War II, musing that perhaps the family colluded with the Nazis. At that time, the Carlhian office was located at 22 Place Vendôme, two doors away from 18 Place Vendôme, where rent must have been dear.
the operations of buying, selling, and reproducing decorative arts as well as interior
decoration. At the same time, Duveen Brothers was at the height of its position in the
world of fine arts, dealing from their offices in London, New York, and Paris. Sir Joseph
Duveen\textsuperscript{48} is credited with creating impressive art collections and interiors that augment
the Old Master paintings and sculpture he sold to such clients as Henry Frick, Calouste
Gulbenkian, Samuel Kress, Henry Huntington, Andrew Mellon, J. P. Morgan, and Joseph
Widener. Like J. Paul Getty, these men went on to either endow their own art institutions
or donate their art collections to established museums.\textsuperscript{49}

After World War II, the Régence panels were installed in one of Duveen’s
showrooms on Fifth Avenue in New York, naturally with the intent to be sold (Fig. 2.2).
Getty saw them there in 1950, and a disappointed Edward Fowles, the president of the
company, because he left without purchasing them (see Appendix G). The panels
eventually went into storage, where they remained until Duveen Brothers closed business
and sold its stock to Norton Simon, who in turn sold some to French & Co.,\textsuperscript{50} yet another
art dealer and the one from whom J. Paul Getty purchased the panels in 1971. French &
Co. billed the Getty Museum on July 9, 1971, and was paid thirteen days later (Carlhian,
930092, Box 602, unprocessed; JPMG Decorative Arts Conservation and Curatorial

\textsuperscript{48} For more on Sir Joseph Duveen, see S. N. Behrman’s (1952),\textit{ Duveen}; Edward Fowles’ (1976),
\textit{Memories of Duveen Brothers}; and most recently Meryle Secrest’s (2004),\textit{ Duveen: A life in art}.
\textsuperscript{49}In \textit{Exhibiting Contradiction}, art historian Alan Wallach (1998), stated that these men, so-called robber
barons, vied “to outdo one another in the richness and value of their holdings” (p. 25).
\textsuperscript{50} For more information about the operations of French & Co., please see Charissa Bremer-David’s
Decorative Arts XVI}, 36-68. Two other references include Bonnie Barrett Stretch’s (1984, Nov.), The
French connection, \textit{Art & Auction}, pp.116-120; and, Christopher Hemphill’s (1985, Sep.), Mr. French &
In 1984, ten years after the Getty Museum in Malibu opened to the public, discussions were underway for the construction of another site, the Getty Center. It would be a place to incorporate all of the newly formed Getty entities, which were scattered around West Los Angeles. From the beginning, the Museum’s paneled rooms were a cause for concern: how would they be reconstructed, restored, and installed in the new location? Stephen Rountree, Director of the Getty Center Building Program, wrote a memo on this very subject. The memo reported the findings of his research on the work

$^{51}$The Museum, the Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, the Education Center, the Conservation, the Art History Information Program, the Grant Program, and the Trust.
of “restoring panelled rooms and fitting them into new gallery spaces” (Stephen Rountree, JPGM Decorative Arts Conservation memorandum, October 9, 1984). Of particular interest is that Rountree conferred with three curators at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one who at the time was considered the expert in such matters. He even spoke to a conservator from the Getty Museum, but Gillian Wilson, the Museum’s curator of decorative arts, was not mentioned. One of the points Rountree made was based on outside curatorial advice: curators need to develop a careful plan for the room in advance of the building architect’s design decisions in relation to the configuration of the raw gallery space. “The curator must establish the ideal proportions in conjunction with proposed layout of furniture and decorative elements in the room and then compare that with the original panelled room pieces at hand in order to determine the plan for the finished panelled room” (Stephen Rountree, JPGM Decorative Arts Conservation memorandum, October 9, 1984). After these logistics were in place, the advice was to consult an interior designer to draw up working plans of the fully installed room. The building architect used these plans to carve out space in his overall design of the decorative arts galleries, which included the Régence Room (Fig. 2.3).

The scenario Rountree describes is roughly the procedure used by museum administrators and decorative arts curators at the Getty. There were snags along the way though, especially the unexpected mystery surrounding the de-installed panels from the Régence Room. The discovery of certain discrepancies in materials that made up the panels led conservators to conduct scientific tests on the panels. Time became a serious issue. Research on the panels ran parallel to construction schedules for earthmoving,
sewage lines, and pouring concrete at the new museum site. Architectural planning
meetings demanded specifications and drawings for every manner of mechanical and

Fig. 2.3. Plan of Régence Room, 1991. Courtesy of The Office of Thierry W. Despont.
electrical engineering systems to interior design. All the while, decorative arts conservators juggled to keep up with treatments required for the hundreds of objects that curators were acquiring at a rapid pace in anticipation of displaying them in the new museum. Pressure was tremendous. Another ancillary process was underway at the time of the Régence Room’s exhibition development that could have contributed to the tensions wrought by the power structure and ideological differences among the exhibition developers. The Getty Museum had begun efforts to change its elite institutional image to one of cultural pluralism (Henry-Jugan, 2001). With all this activity, some things were neglected, such as asking educators for their advice on how the room should be interpreted.

The Getty Museum’s decorative arts collection represents the aesthetic vision of J. Paul Getty and Gillian Wilson. After Getty’s death in 1976, Wilson continued collecting decorative arts, considerably increasing the number of objects in the collection. In this sense, the collection could be considered an example of her life’s work as well as her aesthetic vision. Early on in exhibition development, Wilson used a scale drawing of the Régence Room and scale photographs of all the furnishings she wanted to display (J. Weaver, personal communication, February 18, 2003; G. Wilson, personal communication, February 29, 2003) to determine gallery arrangements. As she

52The repercussions of such widespread institutional change are still being felt today. I have heard complaints expressed about gallery education programs by staff at the Museum and the Research Institute alike. Exploring these resentments may be another research project. Is the problem a displeasure with pedagogical practice? Is the problem that curators and conservators think their involvement in pedagogical processes require too much of their time? Is the problem that curators and conservators are uncomfortable or disinterested in pedagogical processes? Is it that they could not care less about what visitors think or how they respond to exhibitions? I just don’t know.
explained, “All the installations in all of the galleries were done by me. I had total autonomy.” Wilson decided what the Régence Room would contain and how objects were to be arranged; most of the same objects had been used in Malibu. At one point, when discussions turned to interpreting the space as a bedroom, there was a chance that the Museum’s embroidered bed hangings from a lit à la duchesse, the only surviving complete set slightly predating the Régence period (around 1690-1710) (see Appendix K), might be taken out of storage and displayed for the first time. But because the original seventeenth/eighteenth-century silk bed hangings were deemed too fragile to display except within a climate-controlled plexiglass box—as the Victoria & Albert Museum has done with one of its beds—that idea was scrapped. The notion of a bed inside a climate-controlled container in the Régence Room was considered an aesthetic offense. As it happened, more than sensibilities were affronted.

Conservators worked closely with the architect, Thierry Despont, who designed the interiors of the Getty galleries, supplying him with gallery specifications (Fig. 2.3).\textsuperscript{53} The period rooms were especially demanding because of the historical preservation aspect of re-installation in the museum. Preliminary rectilinear dimensions were problematic because of the stark contrast to Richard Meier’s early plans for the decorative arts galleries, which were curvilinear and severely modern and, consequently, rejected by the curator. Arguments ensued in the exhibition development meetings about the paneled rooms. Considine’s comment about how the objects were going to be interpreted was overlooked until late in the development process. Questions about what

\footnote{The notations on Despont’s plan for the Régence Room indicate windows on the east elevation, marked by the numbers one and two. On the south elevation two doorways are marked by the numbers eight and nine. The chimneypiece is opposite the doorways on the north elevation.}
the exhibition developers felt the objects and paneled rooms meant and their role in the overall scheme of the decorative arts galleries arose in “heated debate.” His recollections are that the exhibition developers lacked “foresight” and therefore were unable “to iron those things out before we stared writing specifications and doing drawings” (B. Considine, personal communication, January 22, 2003). As for the Régence Room in particular, the curator, conservator, and designer were at odds about which panels to use. Wilson was not interested in researching the Régence panels, leaving conservators to grapple with the unfolding puzzle of the panels independently. Would the nineteenth-century panels join the eighteenth-century ones as part of the Brentwood installation, as they were in Malibu? Or would new, on-going research on the panels conducted by conservators give evidence for another approach? Wilson favored a display that would highlight specific objects that were incompatible with a bedroom configuration. Historical accuracy won the day for the panels themselves, and the nineteenth-century panels—deemed inaccurate to the original 1725 room—were sent to storage. But is the room truly historic? It was a bedroom at the time but is displayed as a salon. Joe Godla recounted that Despont “was trying to blend [the Régence Room] into his overall [Beaux-Arts] aesthetic of all the decorative arts galleries. Godla’s conviction is that Despont viewed [the Régence Room] no differently [from the other decorative arts galleries] in the way that he rearranged the paneling and tried to achieve symmetry on walls where symmetry never existed . . . misaligning doorways and things like that” (J. Godla, personal communication, January 28, 2003). So, the room is displayed as a salon, but the eighteenth-century panels—all three of them—are situated as they would have been in
the bedroom, and the all-white walls from 1997 fill in spaces where “missing”
eighteenth-century panels would have hung, and obscurely referencing where the walls
would originally have been upholstered with wool.54

The two Getty Museum educators I talked with had some ideas about the display.
When I asked Karen Giles if she would like to see the room interpreted differently, her
answer was, “I’ve never thought about that because certainly that never would have been
asked of me. I don’t know what I could say to you.” A few moments later she added, “I
think I would want to be very straight in some sort of introductory way about what this
space is and why these objects were pulled together . . . that would matter a lot more to
me, being up front and very clear about that, than having lots and lots and lots of label
text” (K. Giles, personal communication, February 11, 2003). Diane Brigham had two
points to make. First, she would like to play up the “truth” of the room and explain that it
is a fiction. “These objects are placed here to give a sense of [an] overall visual style.”
The second way she wishes the interpretation would be different is for visitors to “get a
sense of the liveliness, the dynamic quality of how these objects were used. The way
things open and close . . . bits of that can happen in a photo or in a video, but boy I wish
there was more opportunity within the room to have that more manifest in some way so
that the place looked a little more dynamic and engaging from the get-go. So, is it having
one thing, [for example], the desk with everything pulled out . . . [a visitor] could say,
look I can see a little bit about how it was made because I’m seeing a little bit of the
carcass with my own eyes . . . and the ingeniousness of the pieces, rather than getting that

54The additional original architectural elements that make of the room include: two double doors and their
surrounds, two over doors, three trumeaux, and three soubasements.
kind of information secondhand through a video or picture” (D. Brigham, personal communication, September 10, 2003).

Curators and conservators are unhappy with the result. But they are optimistic that corrections can be made when the room is re-assessed sometime in the future. The Associate Curator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts, Charissa Bremer-David, said that “if the combined administration—curatorial and conservation—were to revisit this with an open mind I would engage a discussion in doing it differently.” In fact, according to Bremer-David, “there is a back burner project [that] has been perculating a long time, to get that bed in a temporary installation, and the Régence panelled room is not the only or even the front runner location. The other location possibility considered was the other Place Vendôme room, the Le Bas de Montargis” (personal communication, February 12, 2003). The two other curators had slightly different opinions. Weaver feels the display is alright as it is but wishes the museum had all the panels. And Wilson, listed many reasons why the room will stay as it is. “We couldn’t do it as the bedchamber because it’s got that door in the way, and it hasn’t got fabric, and I don’t have a bed.” But Wilson went on to say that she would like to see the Régence Room as a bedroom display with damask on the walls and a bed in it. “But that means what would I do with all the pieces [that are in there now]?” “Where would the Doirat commode go? The bed would be taking up its place, you see. Where would you put the bureau plat? I’d then have three bureaux plâts in storage instead of two, which is disgraceful. And then you’d have to take out the carpet. Where would you put . . . this fabulous Savonnerie which is so rare. There would be nowhere to put that carpet. So it is not practical to change the display.
Although it would be really nice if I could have done it, but I couldn’t ever have done it, and it’s not probably going to happen in the future” (G. Wilson, personal communication, February 29, 2003). Conservators had other perspectives. For example, Godla told me that “a lot of the spaces, including the so-called period rooms were designed to specifically display a certain group of objects. So, it’s going be a lot of hard work to rethink those installations, and I’m sure it will take several years and hundreds of thousands of dollars to reinstall those galleries. I’m sure it will happen at some time; it always does” (J. Godla, personal communication, January 28, 2003). Considine said without hesitation that he has “designs on changing it” (B. Considine, personal communication, January 22, 2003).

I was confused by Despont’s statement that the room was never a bedroom. In any case, he was opposed to displaying the Régence Room as a bedroom. “I want it to be a gallery which happens to be paneled with a beautiful set of eighteenth-century panels that is put to best use to display eighteenth-century decorative art pieces,” which is what he and Wilson designed. But when I asked him about the Getty’s lit à la duchesse, he said he would be willing to work with the museum to display “a superb bed that is truly a masterpiece of the Régence period—and its carving [is] spectacular” within the backdrop of the panels because it would be better “than in the middle of just a white painted gallery.” As an architect who designs walls, he believes the panels are merely a backdrop; he does not view them as a distinct decorative arts object in themselves. A little later during our conversation, Despont clarified his statement with an explanation of the exhibition development process: “you bring around the table a team of people that all
interact with their values, respective expertise, and qualifications. The museum director and his staff are the pedagogues in that process. They’re the ones who decide how they’re going to teach or inform or pass on information and then they ask a designer to help them in conveying that information but one should not confuse the printer and the writer” (T. Despont, personal communication, April 8, 2004).

As I write this, I find myself asking questions that have emerged long since interviewing my participants. Two that I continue to mull over are, what were the exhibit goals for the Régence Room, and was the Régence Room planned with a particular audience in mind? The elements of these two questions are among the standards for any research design: name your objective and know your audience. I can’t help but wonder if any of the exhibition developers read E. M. Fleming’s (1972) *Museum News* article, “The Period Room as a Curatorial Publication.” I suspect they were unaware of the article and its clear guidelines for developing a period room. With regard to the architectural elements, Fleming recommends beginning with a list of issues in three categories; internal woodwork, furnishings, and presentation to the public. Then he suggests noting the authorship, objectives, documentation, and questions for the room as a whole. He begins with an example of at least five questions pertaining to woodwork: “1) How true to the original internal architecture is the woodwork of the installation? 2) If the room has been moved from its original location, have the original dimensions or the original arrangement of doors and windows been changed? 3) What parts of the woodwork have been restored or reconstructed? 4) Has there been a cannibalization of members? and, 5) What documentation exists for the paint colors used?” (p.43).
Régence Room exhibition developers did address these questions, but neglected three additional ones that Fleming asks about a room’s furnishings: “1) Have the right kinds of furnishings been placed in the room? 2) And in the right quantity? and, 3) Of the right quality of material and workmanship?” (p.43). Fleming’s last set of questions about installation interests me most: “1) How is it to be presented to the public? 2) What theory of restoring the past, what assumptions about communication are being implemented? 3) How much realism and lived-in atmosphere will be attempted?” (p.43). These are questions that Fleming characterizes as “possibly the most important and least systematically discussed aspect of [a] room[’s] installation” (p. 43).

It is pedagogical questions like these that the Getty Museum’s exhibition developers disregarded until very late in the process, by which time the overwhelming conditions of time, money, and quality—as played out in building construction, design planning, an institutional image makeover, and ideological differences among planners—precluded lengthy consideration of varied means of communicating to the public. Once thoughts were focused on interpretation, developers chose the standard information conveyances of labels and audio-guide scripts. Writing and editing the text became fodder for disagreements notorious between curators and educators; even though, as Richard Faron (2003), an exhibition experience planner, claims, “labels remain the tool of choice because they are a safe, predictable, and reliable way to conduct business” (p. 31). Exhibition developers neglected “to be fully conscious of the decision[s] made, the reasons for the decision[s] and [their] implications for presentation and interpretation” (Fleming, 1972, p. 48).
This lack of awareness could explain why, in 1998, the decorative arts department de-accessioned nineteenth-century panels that had been de-installed from the Régence Room in Malibu. A total of thirty-four elements were sold through Butterfield & Butterfield, an auction house, in San Francisco. The sizes ranged from 2-inch pieces to whole panels. Considered modern, because not eighteenth-century, these panels were not integrated into Brentwood’s re-installation of the room. Is it correct curatorial practice to demonstrate indifference to such historical documents of nineteenth-century interior design and craftsmanship, especially given the history these panels had with the room, even though de-accessioning is a common practice used by curators essentially to “weed out” their collections to raise funds when departmental acquisitions budgets are nil?

Today the Régence Room looks as it did when installed almost ten years ago, and its interpretation is unchanged. It remains unpopular with educators, and, if not for the Gobelins tapestry (see Appendix L) hanging on one wall, I am doubtful they would ever enter the room! It seems the tapestry offers an easily narrated story (much like paintings in the Getty’s collection do), falling into the “teacher-tell” category of information transfer (Ham, 2003).

**Doing Critical Art Pedagogy with Material Culture**

We are surrounded by things, and we are surrounded by history. But too seldom do we use the artifacts that make up our environment to understand the past. (Lubar, 1993, p. viii)

The strong interdisciplinary grounding of material culture studies could be

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55 Personal communication with Charissa Bremer-David, June 11, 2004.
beneficial for educators interpreting period rooms for their visitors. Among the academic fields that material culture studies traverses are anthropology, architecture, art history, decorative arts, historical archaeology, museum studies, and the culture of everyday life. Because objects stand as historical evidence, they have the power to reflect cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions. How could the Régence Room’s past and the things in it connect with the present of today’s visitors? What pedagogical methods could make the room meaningful to visitors? If the aim were to touch visitors’ lives intellectually and emotionally, in what ways could educators communicate with visitors to capture those visitors whose experiences, according to the results of my observations (based on comments, behavior, and time spent in the room), tend toward disinterest? Could the answer be to link art education and material culture studies? How might art education contribute to material culture research of the Régence Room? What might be the importance of material culture research for art education? I attempt to answer these questions about researching and presenting period rooms with an analysis that focuses on the relationship between art education and material culture studies.

The pedagogy and experience of period room interpretation are strengthened by the intersections of art education and material culture. Let me begin with a definition of material culture taken from Schlereth’s (1985a) version of Melville Herskovits’ definition of material culture, which is “the totality of artifacts in a culture; the vast universe of objects used by humankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, to delight our fancy, and to create symbols of meaning” (p. 4). Herskovits was a cultural anthropologist, active through the 1960s. As Schlereth points out, material
culture is “a strong interrelation between physical objects and human behavior” (p. 3), and a study of “belief systems—the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community of society, usually across time” (Schlereth, 1985a, p. 3). The study of material culture functions on three levels (Schlereth, 1990/1992): first, as a discipline, which in Jules Prown’s (1982) words is “a mode of investigation” (p. 1). Next, it functions as research data and, lastly, as a method, because material culture investigations “use artifacts (along with relevant documentary, statistical, and oral data) to explore cultural questions both in certain established disciplines (such as history or anthropology) and in certain research fields (such as the history of technology or the applied arts)” (p. 27). In the previous two sections, I use material culture as research data (i.e., the Régence Room); what follows pertains to material culture as method, and which I discuss further in Chapter Three. Together, research data and method establish techniques that museum educators could use to connect contemporary social issues with art education for visitors and demystify the elite culture of period rooms. The institutional implications are that aristocratic material culture is unbound by ordinary, everyday common experience. As art historian Alan Wallach (1998) explains, “demystification will not ruin art . . . but will result instead in new dimensions of historical and aesthetic understanding . . . we will not achieve a new comprehension of art without the art museum’s wholesale transformation,” which “will be extremely difficult: art museums are profoundly conservative institutions and although some have in recent years made concessions to, or even encouraged, revisionist approaches, the majority continue to resist the implications of revisionist scholarship and critical theory” (p. 6). Demystification requires a critique
of the superior position held by artworks in the Getty Museum, in this case, the Régence Room.

As I mentioned previously, the Régence Room represents a function of material culture pedagogy. What does this mean? A few examples are, first, we can learn and teach about the room by reading about it. Looking at it can be instructive, too. Another example is, someone could teach us about different aspects of the room while we are in the gallery looking at the objects, or in a classroom situation looking at projected images on a wall of screen. The Getty Museum only represents what the material culture is, but does not provide how to learn from it; that is the process of pedagogy.

The most recent enthusiasts of material culture studies for art education are Bolin (1989, 1992/1993, 1995) and Bolin & Blandy (2003), though some of their predecessors and colleagues did/do their part to bring attention to investigating “non-fine art” within art education (Blandy & Congdon, 1988; Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996; Erickson, 1983; Korzenik, 1984, 1992; McFee & Degge, 1977; Szekely, 1991), including a fairly recent dissertation written on the subject (Khaderbai, 2000). Due to the conspicuous absence of a material culture discussion from The National Art Education Association’s recent *Handbook of Research and Policy in Art Education* (Eisner & Day, 2004), the discipline might be described as art education’s neglected stepchild. Moreover, the phrase “material culture” makes no appearance in the index—unlike the currently fashionable expression “visual culture,” which appears in essays and has no fewer than twenty-five index sub-headings. Perhaps the editors received no submissions about material culture studies in art education, or maybe the subject was thought unrelated to
policy. Whatever the reasons, publications about the relationship between art education and material culture studies, relevant to my study, are limited to those mentioned here.

Material culture studies in art education is rooted in democratic principles of social equality and respect for the individual within a community that supports an open, rational exchange of contradictory beliefs. This assumption, formulated by Bolin & Blandy (2003), is particularly suitable to understanding the relationship of the Régence Room to art education and material culture, along with three other assumptions that these scholars have theorized. First is the ability of material culture to cross academic disciplines and fields of study. This broadens research methods and subjects, which fundamentally promote interdisciplinary investigations of period rooms. My pursuit of understanding the Régence Room is addressed in the second assumption about commonplace objects that people experience on a daily basis in the past and the present. Despite the fact that I recognize that the quality and number of objects in the Régence Room were uncommon to most people in the past as they are to people today, my point is that period rooms typically display furnishings familiar to visitors such as chairs, tables, lighting fixtures, and carpets. The degree to which visitors do or do not relate to such furnishings, from cultures and social classes different from their own, is the purview of the third principle: material culture studies give learners the chance to look at the world around them in meaningful and immediate ways (Bolin 1989, 1992/1993, 1995; Bolin & Blandy, 2003). Material culture studies is a discipline that offers a unique perspective for studying the past in relation to the present because, as I have already mentioned, it crosses numerous genres and academic fields. Examining the pedagogical aspects of the
Régence Room initiates a line of inquiry lacking in the literature of art education and art history.

Traditional art historians are inclined to approach their research in three ways: (1) creator worship (which is a concern for the maker), (2) primacy fascination (which is a concern for who made it first, or valuing an object based on its uniqueness), and (3) normative evaluation (which is a concern for what an object is worth rather than its socio-political significance) (Schlereth, 1982, p. 40). I may seem to be attacking the inertia of traditional art historical methods, but, actually, my intent is to juxtapose it to art historians who, today, practice multiple and contending approaches to their discipline. Influenced by poststructuralist and postmodern theories, which contextualize the visual arts, art historians with newer interests have applied varying intellectual perspectives. These contexts have been shaped by the direct impact of theories such as feminism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and social politics.

Feminist approaches consider issues of gender and identity. These issues are probed, along with social history issues of race and ethnicity, in Elizabeth O’Leary’s *At Beck and Call* (1996). She “examines the representation of domestic servants in nineteenth-century painting and explores the ways in which the images embody societal prejudices, fears, and expectations concerning those individuals—both black and white—who labored in the home” (p. 2). Marxism, found in T. J. Clark’s writing, affected his examination of paintings’ imagery from a sociopolitical point of view (1985, 1999).

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*A recent popular culture example of this, demonstrating that educators fall prey to this tactic also (perhaps only in fiction), is the film remake of “The Thomas Crown Affair” (1999). Much of the action takes place in a New York museum much like The Met. One scene shows a group of children in a paintings gallery. Their teacher is failing to make her point about a Monet painting because student interest is elsewhere. Grasping for their attention, the teacher tells the kids, “It’s worth a hundred million bucks!” The wide-eyed children gasp, the teacher smiles.*
Fetishism fits within a psychoanalytical approach to art history, but it attracts others, too, as William Pietz (2003) recounts: “[s]ociological theories of institutional reification, anthropological theories of primitive religion, psychoanalytic theories of sexual perversion, and Marxian theories of cultural commodification” (p. 306). And my last example, semiosis—the theory of the sign—“gives a distinctive cast to the analysis of a work of art by focusing on its function as a vehicle to convey meaning” (Potts, 2003, p. 21).

Traditional art-historical approaches are exemplified by a recent decorative arts temporary exhibition at the Getty Museum entitled, *Casting Nature: François-Thomas Germain’s Machine d’Argent*. The exhibition highlights the Museum’s recent acquisition of a “masterpiece of French eighteenth-century silver” and “celebrates its significance, aesthetic beauty, and virtuoso execution by placing it within the context of mid-eighteenth-century French artistic production” (exhibition brochure, July 11, 2006 – March 25, 2007). Can you imagine how different this aesthetically-focused exhibition might have been were it curated to illustrate the social history surrounding the production of silver, in contrast to the context of social conditions of the dispossessed French, in relation to its American colonies, in 1756, the year it was made? For example, consider who and what was affected by silver production—where and how was it mined and exported, and at what cost. The Régence Room is also a product of the three traditional approaches to art history research described by Schlereth (1982), but the museum forgoes billing it as a “masterpiece.”

Scholars of material culture studies and their art-historical counterparts, who
study such three-dimensional objects, have begun to consider methods of presentation to
the general public that offer perspectives other than straightforward connoisseurship. I
agree with the outlook that objects of material culture transmit ideas about the world and
the place of human beings in it, something that progressive curatorial research has
asserted since the 1980s. And, though material culturists, whose work is regarded in art
history, emphasize the ability to see, evaluate, and interpret—skills that are among the
desired pedagogical outcomes of period room experience and interpretation—they fail to
propose the added dimension of using artifacts to teach in a museum about various
subjects and cultures to people of varied cultures, interests, and age levels in a brief
period of time (Knappett, 2005; Martinez & Ames, 1997; Miller, 1998; Montgomery,

In America, for at least the past three decades, decorative arts research has been
moving away from a high valuation of furniture, silver, and ceramics, becoming
increasingly focused on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American vernacular media
such as “parlour furniture, mourning pictures, hallway stands, eating utensils, cleaning
devices, family photograph albums, kitchen appliances, the domestication of the garage,
the historical role of residential gardens and landscaping, the rise and fall of the porch
and its evolution into the patio, as well as the significance of a home’s front and back
entrances as social spaces” (Schlereth, 1991, p. 15). These examples of pluralism—a
characteristic of material culture itself—indicate “private places” (Schlereth, 1982, pp.
72, 73), in other words, realms of human behavior. The field’s growing interest in a
social history approach highlights experiences of everyday life. It embraces histories of
people worldwide of every social stratum and their many experiences, including “working, child-rearing, schooling, play, social and economic mobility, marrying and dying” (Schlereth, 1982, p. 68). By shifting the context of decorative arts research from academia to museums and applying a social history approach to material culture studies as the dominant theoretical model, object study becomes “more rigorous” and museum interpretation “more sophisticated” (p. 21).

Museum educators could learn from historians of art education, such as Diana Korzenik (1984), who look for “historical evidence” that springs from items of material culture. In “Doing Historical Research”, Korzenik “wanted to see the materials that 19th century art students used, the objects artists collected and treasured in the course of their youth and schooling, anything that supported them to the pursuit of drawing, painting, sculpting, cartooning, or whatever. [She] became and remain[ed] convinced that in order to see a lot of stuff, you can’t look to books. It’s as simple as that” (p. 126). Looking at the material world as a source of evidence can inform abstract concerns like the experience and interpretation of a museum period room.

Like Korzenik (1984) interacting with her students, museum educators could collaborate with visitors in formulating questions that would in turn require them to find “physical evidence” through narratives. Museum educators could revise Korzenik’s proviso that students find “things that [they] may touch, hold, turn over, and examine closely” (p. 126). Her approach is important because it “provokes new ideas and enables [students] to think further and more deeply about their questions” (p. 126). Examining

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57 Scholars in this field, primarily historians, study the past through three-dimensional objects rather than two-dimensional documents and followed the lead of archaeologist’s whose investigation of “lowly objects” is similar to their own purposes.
objects for clues and using additional research ephemera makes it possible to experience objects and learn about their social purpose. Experiential knowledge contributes to learning about objects. It is as decisive as the objects, and it helps the researcher to understand “more fully how earlier people actually experienced such objects” (Schlereth, 1985b, p. 176). According to David Darts, most educators would agree that “dogmatic approaches to education from any perspective are more propagandistic than pedagogical.” Dart claims that by accepting the role of educator it is incumbent on us to “explor[e] the complex interconnections between images and ideology, representation and bias, art(ists) and society” (D. Darts, email listserv communication, September 28, 2006). For example, formal methods of art-historical inquiry that date back to the 1850s merely reported on style, but there is much more to art objects than their style.58

**John Dewey, Progressive Education, and Material Culture**

In *Democracy and Education* (1916), John Dewey provides us with the following educational framework:

> It is not enough to teach the horrors of war and to avoid everything which would stimulate international jealousy and animosity. The emphasis must be put upon whatever binds people together in cooperative human pursuits and results, apart from geographical limitation. The secondary and provisional character of national sovereignty in respect to the fuller, freer, and more fruitful association and intercourse of all human beings with one another must be instilled as a working disposition of mind. If these applications seem to be remote from a consideration of the philosophy of education, the impression shows that the meaning of the idea of education previously developed has not been adequately grasped. (p. 105)

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58 As discussed previously, stylistic approaches to art originate with art historians in academia. But material culturists, whose questions ponder issues beyond style, “work in diverse and decentralized institutions—museums, government agencies, state historical societies, colleges and universities” offering multiple perspectives (Schlereth 1991, p. 13).
I believe that Dewey’s theory suggests the pedagogical limitation of evidential and hypothetical narratives of material culture found in traditional historical narratives that typically describe the progress of civilization through conflicts, battles, and wars. Dewey provokes us to consider other educational applications.

In the case of the Régence Room, museum staff who are reconstructing and re-interpreting narratives of the French Régence might consider discussions about the processes and governance of such subjects as architecture, bronze casting, carpentry, ceramics production and decoration, entertainment, fashion, social etiquette, weaving, and wood carving. At the University of Chicago’s Laboratory School, established by Dewey and based on his educational theories, children were given lessons that encouraged them to interact with pottery, maps, and paintings. Observation and evaluation of the children showed that the objects “often stimulated the learning pattern more readily than rote memorization or historical chronologies” (Schlereth, 1990/1992, p. 338). Some of the interdisciplinary projects that Dewey designed comprised “re-creating historical foodways, manufacturing simple tools, and even building various forms of shelter.” His projects, considered progressive at the time, embraced “art, architecture, decorative arts, folklife, cartography, agriculture, technology, geography—all taught from a historical perspective” (p. 338). Yet Dewey did not think of himself as a “progressive educator.” Dewey was an educational innovator and that is what made him progressive.

According to historian Alan Ryan (1995), “the relationship of progressive education and Dewey is wonderfully confused” (p. 376). Ryan is referring to Dewey’s
aversion to “progressive education” as practiced by teachers who reduced his pedagogical philosophy to “undisciplined activities meant to keep . . . children interested” (p. 145). Dewey believed that in such conditions children learned nothing. His pedagogical approach, however, “involved gaining a capacity to act intelligently—that is, to formulate plans, to take relevant facts into account, to do what he regarded as particularly difficult: namely, to suspend judgement, hold on to doubt, rethink problems, but never lose sight of the ultimate end in view” (pp. 145-146). In Ryan’s opinion, Dewey was a liberal by which he means that Dewey was “unequivocally committed to progress and the expansion of human tastes, needs, and interests; [with a] focus . . . on the self-development and autonomy of the individual [and] certainly committed to the rule of intelligence” (p. 367). I am suggesting that progressive educators, like Dewey, advocate teaching material culture.

Subjects such as those developed by Dewey for his Laboratory School, that today fall under the rubric of material culture studies, could draw attention to daily life in eighteenth-century France, from the most humble to the most ostentatious levels of society (Roth, 1988). Studying material culture—objects of everyday life—makes unique approaches to museum practice possible. Schlereth (1991) offers instruction about presenting material culture in museums:

We need to realize that the selective arrangement for artefacts and other related information in a public display is a . . . museum’s special mode of communication and that such displays are one of the mediums for exploring the intersections of material culture and its larger social context of meaning. (p. 22)
Pedagogy and Material Culture?

Material culture provides curators and educators with numerous methodologies and paradigms for communicating change. Attention to philosophical assumptions about professional practices and exploration of “epistemological questions of chronology, causation, periodization, and generalization,” according to Schlereth (1978), just might lead to “more sophisticated” and “comprehensible” interpretation (p. 43).

Material culture is rich with concepts and knowledge, achieved through methods that Bolin & Blandy (2003) describe as “interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary” (p. 259). Material culture studies allows for the use of sensory receptors beyond the visual and encourage a “holistic and systemic understanding of experience (p. 247). Its broad content enables us to “assist our students in looking at the interaction of images, music, architecture, science, electronic communication, kinesthetic experience, performance, storytelling, the design of computer code, and the multitude of other materials that shape and define culture” (p. 247).

Period Room Display and Theory

Period room display is anything but simple or straightforward (Saumarez Smith, 1989; Underwood 1993). Many American museum education departments testify to the distinct possibilities of, and concern for, interpreting their collections for visitors. If museums were to advance “doing” art education with material culture, then they would get nearer the “theoretical problems and dilemmas that currently confront the use and

59 A future study would consider interpretation schemes from institutions/practitioners in other countries, notably the V&A’s recent re-design and re-interpretation of its British Galleries, including ‘period settings’. Additionally, Smith’s (2001) study of historic houses offers a new perspective on the re-interpretation of such domestic interior spaces.
display of period rooms” (Saumarez Smith, p. 17). As Swank (1986) clearly explains:

The importance of any period room lies beneath its surface. These rooms are reflections of contemporary aesthetic and historical values as well as the values of earlier times, hence the public controversy. The debate is not really over material details; it is largely a debate over who controls our social memory and who arbitrates good taste. Mankind has a long record of setting aside or ignoring history which it finds distasteful in favor of a view of the past that accords with modern purposes and sensibilities. (p. 54)

What are the theoretical problems of period rooms? What role does theory play in this research? Art education research, like that for material culture, has been mostly derivative. Neither has been a leader in producing theory. Both have used techniques and models developed by other fields. They even borrow the languages and literary formats of such disciplines as art history and archaeology (Little, 1991). Among the dominant fields from which both art educators and material culturists draw their theory are critical theory, linguistics, literary theory, and Marxism (Berger, 1992; Cary, 1998; Garoian, 1999; Knappett, 2005). What critics may perceive as a weakness of art education and material culture, I consider a strength. Why? Searching for theory has proved to strengthen the interdisciplinary characteristics of these two complementary fields. Deepening the pool of concepts to adopt and adapt is an obvious benefit. One shared characteristic of art education and material culture that I wish to highlight is the “primary phenomenon” of human experience. Thus, the dilemma of material culture—not just the Régence Room—has to do with the mystery of experience. Material culture objects—and art objects—are intrinsically historic events and as such are ineffable, sensory, and affective (Schlereth, 1990/1992, p. 31).

Creating a period room requires purpose and intention. For curators, the first step
is to decide which objects and paneling would be used. At the Getty Museum, conservators provided assistance with this by researching the panels. However, according to historian Susan Underwood (1993), the first step for designing a period room is to generate questions that are important to the re-creation, reconstruction, and interpretation of a room. The who, what, where, when, why, and how of “architectural elements, political history, social history, decorative arts, or even [on] the history of period room museology and interpretation” (Bloom, J., DiChiera, L., Harrison, S., Isaksen, M., Kang, E., Lingeman, A., Mikelberg, S., Myers, C., Papazian, L., and Pennell, S., 1990, p. 46) offer numerous communication options. Underwood examined the intellectual framework of the social history of period rooms and their displays in history museums and made these points:

The messages that period rooms convey are never simple and cannot be taken for granted. Just as individual objects do not speak for themselves, groups of objects in period settings need interpretation. The context can make interpretation much easier, by providing an atmosphere sympathetic to the objects which is human in scale and stimulates the imagination and the interest of the visitor. But the interest and empathy must be given more than visual information about how the past looked. Whether you are trying to capture changes that took place over time, or convey what daily life was like for people in the past, uninterpreted period rooms are not enough in themselves. (p. 381)

The methodology, practice, and interpretation of social history fits with material culture and its associations with broad historical questions. Family relationships, gender roles, aging patterns, and community all have an effect on domestic life. Domestic interiors are rich conceptual frameworks from which to view the past in relation to the present, due to their multiple perspectives and the associations surrounding everyday life in the home.
If we are to believe Arthur C. Danto’s (1981) philosophical concept of medium and its similarity to consciousness, then the Régence Room and its objects are metaphysical effigies for consciousness. Therefore it is not really a room, nor its furnishings part of a room. This concept of medium is an “intermediary substance and avenue of transmission from subject to spectator” (p. 152). The material culture objects have been sacrificed, so to speak, leaving only content. The Régence Room and its objects convey a message, become a message, are the message and the various media from which they are made, are nothingness, in the way that existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) considers consciousness to be nothingness. The media of these material culture objects are “not part of the world but that through which the world is given, not being given itself” (p. 152). The medium is the world, as it were, and serves the purpose of giving the audience (i.e. museum visitors, viewers) a way to see through to the meaning of the artworks (i.e. the Régence Room and its objects). How can this theory move into practice?

Period rooms (i.e. paneled rooms) are practical locations for exploring themes of lived experience in all its variety across social strata. But visitors rarely conceive of this because the Régence Room is presented, like the majority of museum period rooms in other institutions, according to a single traditional perspective developed nearly one hundred years ago. This conventional perspective is basically putting furnishings in a room to give an illusion of a historical context, blocking visitors from entering the room completely by using stanchions and ropes or fences, and positioning object labels with
cursory text.⁶⁰  As I explore below, Winterthur Museum is an exception to this description, because that museum employs period room guides who are trained to use an educational device called the Wheel of Interpretation and because the rooms do not have barriers or labels. How would meanings of objects change if there were multiple perspectives? Would the process of exhibition design and interpretation, such as the reconstruction of the Régence Room, become more complex if there were an effort to communicate multiple narratives? Or, at the least, would the process highlight issues of daily life that are of interest to visitors, as museum market research reveals (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994/1999)?

When I talked with former Museum Director John Walsh (personal communication, March 5, 2003) about the interpretation of the Régence Room, one of the things he said was that “[it] comes largely from the mind of the curator whose interpretation of the situation—here the contending forces and desires favors the function of gallery over architectural context and original function . . . and somebody else will feel differently. One thing you can be sure of is that somebody else will feel differently. The next [curator] who comes in here who’s really an expert on French eighteenth-century furniture is going to re-think a lot of Gillian’s decisions. That’s what happens. And that person will make mistakes, too, but will be interpreting the whole time, and will see these trade-offs in a different way. Because that’s all very time-bound, these decisions. Gillian is a person of her time.”

But in a century of art museum period rooms, little has changed in how period

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⁶⁰Curators also conduct provenance research for each object in the room that may, or may not, get published.
rooms are installed and interpreted, leaving them for the most part passive, isolated spaces. Former Getty Museum educator Karen Giles (personal communication, February 11, 2003) found the Régence Room unappealing and never taught there. In fact, in conversations she had with colleagues at the museum about my research, Giles learned that “maybe a third of the gallery teachers used that room.” Giles went on to say, “A good educator can teach probably anything but when you’re given the option—and there are so many options—a work of art, or in this case a room that doesn’t excite you in any way . . . why would you go there?” Her colleagues expressed surprise that a researcher in art education would focus on such an uninviting subject. This information raised more questions for me: What would make the room appealing? How could educators enliven the space?

The structure of dramatic action suggests there are ways that museum educators could make the Régence Room inviting for themselves and for museum-goers by considering period rooms in their broadest possible contexts (Smiley, 1971, 2005). They could think about period rooms as a specialization in museum display, as a forum to study social history through objects of material culture, as a synergistic tool for interdepartmental museum associations, or as a place for visitors and educators to learn about the world and their place in it. Objects of everyday life are so familiar—a chair is a chair, as is a mirror, a desk, and so on—that “we commonly fail to recognize [their] power and feel [their] presence” (St. George, 1988, p. 4). But part of the intangible dynamism of a period room is that the room and its furnishings are open to numerous interpretations and therefore serve as various doorways to learning and
meaning-making. *Requiem for a Room*, the ethnographic drama in Chapter Four, is one of the doorways.

Without human agency, period rooms and their objects are in effect mute. Yes, historical contexts are implied, and, yes, domestic furnishings are identifiable within their respective contexts, and, yes, visitors undoubtedly enjoy aesthetic responses to them. However, the presentation of the Régence Room (and period rooms and domestic furnishings, generally) is vague about who designed and crafted it and how these artisans operated within the social and political structure of eighteenth-century Paris. And what about the persons who owned the objects? How did they use the objects? How would the objects have been positioned in a particular room? What did the objects symbolize in their historical context, and what do they continue to symbolize in terms of, for example, social status and political economy? To my mind, the objects, presented as they are, have substantially little meaning. Why and how did the museum acquire them? Why and how were they restored? Why and how were they displayed the way they are? The textual and visual narratives of the research materials listed above tell us how objects similar to those displayed in the Régence Room were used, at least from the perspective of the person recording the information. This kind of resource material also functions as a record of the politics highlighted in critical theory: who is being represented, and who decides this; who is favored and who is absent? (Cary, 1998; p. 67). What can the elaborate decorative objects represented in the room tell us about the people that used them? What can they tell us about the people who are absent from these scenes? For instance, servants? How did they live? What were their relationships to aristocrats?
What objects did they own and use, and what did they look like? Who was the audience for contemporaneous drawings and prints that represented aristocratic life? What can be learned by the Museum’s choice in collecting only luxurious, aristocratic objects?

According to educator Richard Cary (1998), “identifying structures that favor certain groups and exclude others is the first step toward subverting” such ideological frameworks (p. 67). “The tendencies of art and art education to open access to often obscure inner realities and meanings make it a valuable critical tool. Critical art pedagogy underscores the ways art can harbor dangerous memories. Thus, a critical art pedagogy should make contact with dangerous memory and bring it to the surface in educational encounters with art. As such, in a curriculum concerned with liberation, art becomes a subject for all students, not just the so-called “talented” few” (p. 35). Along with these claims, Cary asserts that the influence of critical theory on art requires an examination of social hierarchy. The important task is “to uncover and transform embedded sources of oppression and injustice.” Moreover, “facts” and “truths” do not have the same meanings for everyone (p. 16).

Questions like those asked above were unanswered by the Museum’s interpretive materials. Is this a sample of the ideological differences that exist between educators—who want visitors to have meaningful experiences—and curators who privilege objects in their collections? Rowanne Henry-Jugan (2001), an anthropologist, discusses these competing professional visions in her dissertation about the Getty Museum. Curators feel compromised when educators ask them to change their professional practices about interpretation. Yet there may be curators who care about visitors, and educators are, after
all, beholden to curators for the information they use to construct pedagogical materials or to communicate to visitors. What such a request does is “challeng[e] historically defined power relations of the museum enterprise” (p. 114). Change can highlight disapproval and resentment, two characteristics incompatible to thoughtful communication. I suspect we would all agree that change is difficult, especially the longer held a principle or practice has been. Could the experience of change be a catalyzing factor for a pedagogical interpretation of the Régence Room? “Change makes growth possible, and stability provides the continuity needed for community. Community without change is stagnant. Change without community has no social merit. We need both.” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 92). Change is good for its own sake, and in this case study it is interesting to imagine it in association with reinstalling the Régence Room as a bedroom, rethinking museum hierarchies, and revising the role of museum educator in the Getty Museum’s exhibition development process.

Results

Evaluating Pedagogical Impact

This part of Chapter Two examines the results of the exhibition development process. I consider the content of three unpublished survey reports from the Getty Museum. They offer insight into the relationship between the museum, its visitors, and their interest and comprehension of French decorative arts. I also review a few published sources pertaining to evaluating the pedagogical impact of museum displays: Arthur W. Melton’s (1935) study which offers a psychological point of view and Bloom, et al.’s
(1990) a historic preservation point of view. The setting of these two research projects is the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Two additional sources include The Ballantine House, affiliated with the Newark Museum in New Jersey, and the Winterthur Museum in Delaware.

The Getty Museum has not published its survey reports of visitors’ responses to the decorative arts galleries. Neither has the museum conducted any survey pertaining to its period rooms nor published on the topic of interpretation of its period rooms. Bruno Pons’ (1983) article about the Régence Room printed in the Museum’s Journal was solely a history of the room.

Getty Museum visitors who take the time to read the labels in the Régence Room find this narrative about the paneling:

The boiserie (carved and gilded paneling) in this room is from a bedroom of a Parisian hôtel (townhouse). Beginning in 1723, the hôtel was constructed at 18 Place Vendôme for Guillaume Cressart, a master locksmith. During a two-year period, the interiors of the house were fitted with boiserie. Not all the paneling from this room has survived, and this installation approximates the architect’s configuration. (Note that the modern replacement panels do not have gilding.) The room is now furnished as a salon, intended for the reception of visitors.

An inquisitive visitor unfamiliar with French history and its decorative arts might wonder how a locksmith could afford such fancy panels with all the carving and gold. She might ask herself, where in Paris is the Place Vendôme located, and how is it that the Museum’s panels survived and the others did not? A number next to the label text cues the visitor, offering more information available through the Museum’s GettyGuide™ computer stations positioned around various Pavilions, and GettyGuide™ audioguides (at a cost of $5), which are dispensed in the Entrance Hall. If she is curious enough, our
hypothetical visitor could leave the decorative arts galleries and walk to the lounge area already in the South Pavilion, where the nearest GettyGuide™ station is. Or maybe she borrowed an audioguide upon entering the museum. In either case, this is what our visitor would hear:

Carved, painted, and gilded wood paneling (boiserie) formed the main decoration of walls in important eighteenth-century rooms. This room was originally used as a bedroom or large cabinet in a private Parisian home at number 18 Place Vendôme. In its original state, half of the room was paneled: the pier glass, the window surrounds, and the fireplace wall. The back wall, where the bed was placed, was hung with fabric.

Not all the paneling from this room has survived, but the present installation approximates the room’s original configuration. Additional modern panels, discernible by their lack of gilding, replace the lost elements. The floor, though old, is not contemporary with the room.

Key Information: The panels above the mirrors are elaborately gilded and carved with masks, shell motifs, leafy branches, and garlands of flowers. The rope molding decorated with a gilded twisted ribbon is made from carved wood.

This narrative offers a bit more historical information about the room. We learn that paneling was the main decoration in important eighteenth-century rooms, and we also learn that some of the panels were lost. But our visitor’s questions remain unanswered. In fact, I imagine she might have more questions about the room. Were panels the main decoration in Paris only, or were they also important in other European countries such as England and America? Which wall is the back wall? What is a pier glass and a window surround? What did the lost elements look like? Is the pattern in the wood floor the same as it would have been originally? At the outset, I posed that our hypothetical visitor is especially inquisitive, so it would follow that upon leaving the museum she would make time to search for the answers to her questions, and with
perseverance find satisfaction. I have no doubt that museums have such visitors, yet, research is proving that many more visitors, though equally inquisitive, are less inclined to explore for answers once they leave the museum. What does this group of visitors want from their period room experience?

I reviewed two unpublished decorative arts survey reports from the Getty Museum. The reports, from 1992 and 1997, were designed “to determine visitor interest in topics and issues concerning French furniture” and “to determine if visitors went to look at French furniture after visiting an interactive gallery.” Educators in the 1997 survey, used a model gallery to try and “create a group discussion atmosphere where visitors [could] reflect and exchange ideas about gallery resources and materials in order to obtain perceptions from visitors on specific issues related to interpretative materials in galleries” (JPWM gallery survey reports, 1992, 1997). The surveys indicate the Getty’s educators’ desire to learn what their visitors thought about their experiences in the decorative arts galleries, presumably to assist them in interpreting the collections for visitors.

For the study of French furniture, the museum recruited eighty-four visitors—an expensive undertaking. Visitors were given forty-eight questions to respond to after looking at a single object—a Boulle cabinet-on-stand (see Appendix M). The top eight

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61 The 1992 surveys were administered by museum education staff member, Margaret Menninger.
62 The subject of the interactive gallery was “The Corner Cupboard by Dubois: A Closer Look,” at Getty Villa in Malibu, formerly called the J. Paul Getty Museum.
63 The survey reports from 1997 were written by Diane Manuel, an in-house evaluator with a doctorate in psychology. Around 1997, when the model gallery survey report was distributed, art educator Diane Brigham, the head of the museum’s education department, resigned her position. She was replaced by Peggy Fogelman, a former sculpture curator, who to my knowledge has discontinued qualitative gallery evaluations. Dr. Manuel was one of the many educators who left the Getty Museum following Brigham’s resignation.
responses were ranked statistically. Menninger noted that they “are not intended to prescribe content for programming” but merely “to inform museum staff about visitor interests in . . . French furniture” (JPGM gallery survey report, 1992). The interviewers comprised museum staff and, primarily, Margaret Menninger.\textsuperscript{64} Results of the 1992 interactive gallery survey showed that visitors liked having a person nearby to explain objects and to answer questions. Visitors also demonstrated the desire to examine the object—a corner cupboard—and to explore a hands-on station that explained marquetry and bronze mounts. Indications of why visitors, after visiting the interactive gallery, went to galleries other than French decorative arts were inconclusive.

I include the 1997 survey from the Getty Museum, even though it was administered before the gallery was exhibited, because its results are pertinent to the Régence Room’s interpretation. The visitor review panel was conducted prior to the opening of the new Museum’s Brentwood location. Fifty-six residents were recruited “through the use of community and personal contacts” to participate, again, at great expense (JPGM gallery survey report, April, 1997). They all had college degrees but had no professional or academic training in the arts. The participants were joined by “outside guests”—Getty Museum curators, educators, exhibition designers, and publications staff. This was the first collaboration of its kind at the Getty Museum. The participants focused on one transitional gallery with two-dimensional mocked-up objects and fabric swatches to handle; they were asked to imagine the objects in their three-dimensional form. Educators wanted feedback on their interpretive (i.e. didactic) materials: gallery cards, introductory panels, and labels (both short and long) (JPGM gallery survey report, April, 1997). \textsuperscript{64}Thanks to David Ebitz for this information, which was missing from the Survey Report.
The Getty Museum gallery survey reports that I researched failed to either ask or expand on the issue of in-gallery educators, to which the 1992 report alluded. Perhaps the museum feels that they have addressed this issue by stationing volunteers in Art Information and GettyGuide™ rooms. But these areas, although adjacent to galleries, are disconnected and remote from the spontaneity of visitors queries in the moment, within a gallery looking at and experiencing objects. In this sense, the Art Information and GettyGuide™ rooms are poor substitutes for in-gallery educators. Perhaps curators are unwilling to allow educators regular “stations” in their galleries. The Getty Museum survey reports indicate that visitors prefer looking at art and asking questions about it immediately. They are discouraged by didactic materials, but, if that is their only option, visitors will scan labels for information. What kind of experiences could visitors have through experimenting with uncommon interpretive methods? I am baffled by the continued dependence on didactic materials by museums with means, especially since visitors’ lukewarm responses to such materials, like these at the Getty Museum, are not new. Conceivably, curators are wary of the inherent unreliability of docents and educators, thinking that they do not have sufficient knowledge to be consistently accurate.

Looking Backward and Forward

In 1925, Arthur W. Melton, a behavioral psychologist, began supervising psychological studies of East Coast public museums. These early studies served to
establish Melton, and the scientific method he applied, in the field of museum education. One of the earliest studies of the pedagogical impact of museum displays on visitors was written by Melton and published in 1935 by the American Association of Museums. The site was the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, now called the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Melton’s case study of galleries at the Pennsylvania Museum of Art (PMA) focused on visitors’ responses to museum objects: their location, their spacing, and their contextual display (Melton, 1935). In the first part of his study, Melton examined visitors’ interest in the location of objects. For example, his statistics showed that 75% of visitors make a right turn into a gallery. Naturally, anything displayed on the right draws more attention. The second part of his evaluation considered the number of paintings hanging in a gallery and concluded that the maximum number of paintings to increase visitors’ interest was eighteen. More or fewer than that decreased visitors’ interest in the artworks. In his final study—relevant to my own—Melton investigated the context of displaying furniture and paintings of the same period together. At the time, museum theory and practice suggested that visitors’ interest and understanding increased when a period style approach was used. But Melton discovered that visitors were distracted by displays that combined furniture and paintings. His interpretation of these findings was that objects compete with each other for visitors’ attention. He concluded that museums need to produce information that makes connections between objects in mixed galleries for visitors.

In summarizing his results, Melton made the point that “museums must define their aims in no uncertain terms” (p. 269). Doing so has the potential to overcome what
he called “museum situations.” A museum must decide whether to direct the greatest audience to what the museum considers its most important objects or to direct the audience to the greatest number of different objects in its collections. The effect of his scholarship can be seen in museums across the nation that offer either or both highlights and focus tours of their collections or printed brochures for self-guided experiences. Melton’s research established that visitors respond favorably to context in museum displays. The museum’s new style of display suggested domesticated spaces and made a difference in visitors’ experience of paintings and furnishings. So what can a fairly recent study of period rooms tell us about the genre and how it is interpreted?

The search of literature written in English specifically pertaining to art museum period room interpretation turned up only one source on the subject, originating from the department of historic preservation in the Graduate School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania (Bloom, et al., 1990). Graduate students from the Department of Historic Preservation researched this report and based their study on three different groups of period rooms at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Their results give a historical overview of period rooms, three interpretive methods that they call treatments, and a brief section discussing interpretation and education.

Bloom, et al. (1990) questioned how period room installations—both established and new—could “remain viable in the contemporary museum” (p. 23). Their report discusses disputes surrounding interpretation, specifically choices made by curatorial departments. This research team identified three period room “treatments”—orthodox, modified, and deconstructive. Their theory is that the treatments give curator’s options

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65In Bloom, et al.’s (1990) report, exhibition development and design is the domain of object curators.
for interpreting period rooms, largely to overcome disputes about display. Three sub-categories divide the treatments into (1) physical and structural quality, (2) exhibition design, and (3) function (See Appendix N).

Although the three “treatments,” or options, for interpreting period rooms are identified and described, the authors offer no new possibilities for disentangling them for visitors. They explain an already familiar use of object labels, audioguides, guided tours, and supplementary publications. In fact, each of these interpretive tools, with the exception of audioguides, are exactly those identified in Melton’s study conducted sixty years before. Are there really no newer approaches to interpreting objects than labels (including wall text, text panels, and gallery cards), audioguides, guided tours, and in-gallery brochures? What does this say about the state of museum education? Are museums ineffective in moving period room interpretation into the twenty-first century? Maybe not.

The Ballantine House project is included here because of its recent period room interpretation overhaul. The project was motivated by a combination of the 1989 renovation of Newark Museum’s building complex, designed by Michael Graves, and a need to replace an out-dated climate control system (Dietz et al., 2000) from the late 1920s. Museum administrators saw an opportunity to re-evaluate the Ballantine House period rooms; after writing and receiving a grant, they started to plan. Two planning teams were selected, and focus groups were arranged. One team consisted of museum staff—the objects curator, the director of education, the assistant director of education, and an exhibition designer. The second team of consultants included specialists in
thematic development, design development, and an outside curator for another content perspective. A marketing company managed all aspects of conducting focus groups.

Ulysses Dietz (curator), Lucy Brotman (educator), and Timothy Wintemberg (exhibition designer) (2000) were diplomatic about the team selection process, commenting that “we needed to come up with a new way to present our collections and a new way to involve our curatorial, education, and design staff throughout the process” (p. 82). No matter who decided it was time to move away from curatorial autonomy in exhibition development to a new exhibition program, a choice was made—they displaced the old paradigm of “curator . . . select[s] objects, write[s] labels, then submit[s]s them first to the exhibitions department to figure out how to install them, and then . . . the education department . . . determine[s] the best way to build a program around them” (p. 81). These two teams worked in concert from the beginning of the project to create a new paradigm that was, among other things, “sensitive to the needs of the Museum’s wider community” (p. 82).

The re-interpreted Ballantine House re-opened in 1995. It changed from a single narrative interpretation—one focus group member, an inner-city school teacher described it as “a grand house that was built for long-dead, rich white people”—to multiple narrative interpretations drawn from “the objects’ makers, owner, inheritor, and caretaker” (p. 86). How did the teams meet the challenge they set themselves? For the period rooms, the team used a comic strip model to make what they called “storybook panels” (p. 88). In each period room, a storybook created a dialogue between two different characters—real and/or fictitious—as a means especially “to lure school-aged
children into caring about . . . dark, fussy Victorian rooms” (p. 88). For example, in the billiard room, Alice Ballantine, a factual character, discusses a party she and her fictitious girlfriend are planning. In the parlor, an Irish kitchen maid and a German parlor maid talk about the objects in the room. And in the reception room, a Mr. and Mrs. James Baxter—an African-American couple—wait to speak to Mrs. Ballantine about making a charitable donation to the local church. The inclusion of these multiple narratives proved surprising to visitors, making their experiences more memorable. The Newark Museum of Art, a museum without the means of the Getty Museum, developed and designed a laudable solution for period room interpretation in the Ballantine House, albeit heavy on didactic materials.

The Winterthur Museum in Delaware gives focused guided tours of its period rooms. Numerous historic house museums across America offer guided tours, but Winterthur’s program for training guides is exemplary. Educators there train paid guides over a two-year period. As you might imagine, this is a costly investment, and one that has paid off because they have a low attrition rate, compared to the Getty Museum, whose Gallery Teachers seldom remain in their jobs the length of Winterthur’s training period. Guides at Winterthur study the objects within a framework of social history, political history, economic history, and international relations. Their training program teaches guides to convey multiple viewpoints by using what Winterthur educators call “The Wheel of Interpretation” (see Appendix O). The Wheel is a direct result of visitors research that was conducted in-house in 1998 in order to learn why visitors came to the museum. Theoretically, the Wheel’s pedagogical approach is non-linear and designed to
foster back-and-forth communication among guides and visitors by making associations, descriptions, evaluations, and classifications. However, in practice, some guides monopolize the conversations, and though it is pardonable, dominating conversations is discouraged. While guiding, it is difficult to assess the interests and knowledge of visitors in the moment and to identify which of the four areas visitors are using. It is also challenging to encourage moving from one conceptual area of the Wheel to another with ease and confidence. Therefore, the two years of study and practice required of Winterthur’s guides is a measure of not only the museum’s support and confidence in its staff to meet the challenging job of interpreter, but also of its advocacy of visitor learning, wanting them to have meaningful experiences on the tours (Combs, 1999; Eversmann & Krill, 1992, Eversmann et al., 1997; Twiss-Garrity, 2000).

While all of the evaluators mentioned above polled visitors for answers to questions about how to make museum exhibits more meaningful, their reliance upon art-historical organizational methods that emphasize style, origin, date, and material dominated pedagogical approaches. Attempts to make period rooms compelling for their audiences are laudable, but educators have yet to recognize the need to transform long-held educational processes that currently define museum education. “Traditional art pedagogy simply reinforces general conformity” (Cary, 1998, p. 60) as opposed to critical art pedagogy, which enlivens the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of lived experience. The Getty Museum’s survey reports evaluated visitors’ responses to the didactic materials associated with objects in exhibitions, but no suggestions for new approaches to education were broached. Melton (1935), Dietz et al. (2000), and Bloom et
al. (1990) quantified their survey data and described how visitors respond to and what they want from material culture displays, but suggestions or directions for exploring educational programs different from those used for two-dimensional artworks were lacking. I acknowledge that assessment programs do not propose, but, rather evaluate exists. Yet, what if educators considered studio art approaches such as installation, new media, and performance for new ideas about interpreting their period rooms? Could the technology that contemporary artists use in making and performing their work—computers, light, sound, and video—inspire new approaches to interpreting material culture objects?

Summary

In this chapter I explored the dual focus of my research, which is process and results. First, I questioned the process of period room re-installation and re-interpretation based on confrontations that flare up with intensity and then fade into relative obscurity over time. This captures period room exhibition development at its most dramatic when disagreements that are voiced and overlooked can impact interpretation and how period rooms are experienced; and, finally, I questioned the results of the Régence Room’s development. Period rooms are museum spaces that persist long after ideological dissent has waned; then the general public becomes the arbiter—but only if they are asked do we know the verdict.

This chapter emphasizes the paucity of pedagogical literature about interpreting museum period rooms. It also looks at the internal developmental processes that
contributed to and resulted in the design and interpretation of the Régence Room, a
museum period room. I pointed to my concerns about learning from material culture in
museums and evaluating their pedagogical impact through a discussion about art
education and interpreting material culture in museums, which extended a slowly
growing field of interest.

The overarching theoretical issue is the transformational relationship between
museum period rooms and narratives, which subsequent chapters reveal. Narratives
interlace like the design of the acanthus leaves, garlands, and ribbons woven into the
Savonnerie carpet that covers most of the floor in the Régence Room (see Appendix P).
The carpet’s pattern is made of various pictorial elements arranged into a pattern.
Plotting the pattern (i.e. conceptual framework) for this study included arranging
elements that tracked the exhibition development process of re-creating the room in both
time and space, from the Parisian townhouse of its origin to the results of the process—
re-creating the Régence Room at the J. Paul Getty Museum, where its fragments have
been preserved and interpreted for museum visitors.

In the next chapter, readers will learn how I assembled my research material.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS: ASSEMBLING THE MATERIAL

The content of this dissertation is arranged in a traditional quantitative research format: a statement of the problem and its background, definitions of relevant terminology, a review of literature, a description of the methodology (the topic of this chapter), a presentation and analysis of the data and a summary, discussion of the findings and implications for the field (Barone & Eisner, 1997). But my approach to the content—my style of writing—is strictly qualitative, a hybrid of arts-based research, autoethnography, and ethnographic drama. I resisted authoritative conventions with aims at accuracy, truth, and objectivist notions of cultural reality. Instead, I sought a novel approach to express “the concrete details and confusing practices of historically specific conditions in which people live out their days” (Neumann, 1996, p. 194), in order to convey the incomplete, ongoing, and emergent qualities of actual minds and possible worlds (Bruner, 1986) alive with thoughts and feelings. I did this by mixing and blurring methods and genres. The indeterminate texts move among layered accounts, evocative narratives, standard dissertation textual formats, and ethnographic drama. I investigated the setting of the Régence Room and the situation of its display, adapting ethnographic methods of interviewing and observing. I followed historical methods of analyzing documents and material culture methods of analyzing the room and its furnishings.
Methods of Presenting Information

*Arts-based Research in Education*

Arts-based research branched out from postmodern social science nearly thirty years ago, as a response to the deficiencies of modern social science; for example, “the unfilled promises of the social sciences to produce remedies for twentieth- and twenty-first-century social ills such as poverty and environmental ruin; the apparent discrepancy between the way science is supposed to function in theory and the way it really works; the use and abuse of scientific findings by the powerful in legitimating positions that are in fact mere preference; and the inability of science to speak to normative and ethical questions” (Barone, 1995, p. 170). Thomas Barone argues that the purpose of arts-based educational research is to promote the enhancement of uncertainty and to encourage non-scientific researchers, particularly those who aim at getting their readers “to ask important educational questions” (p. 178). In “On the Differences Between Scientific and Artistic Approaches to Qualitative Research,” Eisner (1981) underscores the unique approach of this method of research. He makes the point that artistic approaches are concerned with the “creation of meaning.” Meaning implies “relativism and diversity” which merges with “diverse interpretation and coherence” (p. 9). The ultimate aim of a scientific approach, that of discovering truth through consistency and logic, runs counter to my own, which is to create a virtual reality through which my readers can construct their own interpretation of what they read by altering or rejecting the content.

In Chapter One, I listed the design elements of Tom Barone’s and Elliot Eisner’s *Arts-based Educational Research* (1997), and I repeat them here:
Chapter Four is an example of the first element, creating a virtual reality. For the second element, I created an ambiguous presentation of research evidence and described it in Chapter Two. I have interjected the use of expressive language, as the third element instructs, but I want my readers to fill in the gaps with their own personal meaning made from their own experiences, which is another characteristic of Barone & Eisner's (1997) third feature. To use a theatrical metaphor, regarding the fourth element, I want to know more about the rest of the cast. I adopted ethnographic drama as my aesthetic form (number seven), to address the exhibition development and interpretation of the Régence Room in relation to a former historical resident of the townhouse from which the room originated. Element number six—my personal signature—takes the shape of reflections on the research process and in *Requiem for a Room*, the ethnographic drama in Chapter Four. How did the room end up passive and isolated? Who can help tell the story? How might the room have been different when it was occupied in the eighteenth century? I use expressive language to evoke feelings in my readers. Additionally, because I am writing to art educators and museum administrators, I used contextualized and vernacular
language rather than the rational-logical language used in an empiricist model of modernist social science. My goal was to promote empathy (number five) by establishing an intersubjective context: by that I mean, a place for readers to interpret and reconstruct my perspective within themselves, a mental atmosphere in which “readers are brought to vicariously experience events from a different experience” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 77). The hybrid format that I describe above is essentially the aesthetic form I took to convey my research. The cutting back and forth between actual minds and possible worlds—in other words, fact and fiction—also highlights the aesthetic form, which is rendered in the format of a theatrical script.

Some of the challenges arts-based researchers have faced are criticism that it is self-indulgent and under-theorized, that it is neither good research nor good art, that its followers fail to connect with pure disciplines, and that research results are inadequate (Sparkes, 2002; A/r/tography, http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca:16080/Artography/, Retrieved September 25, 2006). But, based on a two-year research project performed by art educators at the University of British Columbia (UBC), arts-based research has proven to have many capabilities. Through their efforts, scholars have identified, described, and documented the practice of arts-based educational research at UBC, its methodology, epistemology, and ontology. The products of their research included collaborative exhibitions, installations, and performances of visual, musical, and verbal texts. These few examples push the boundaries of social science methods and question how this form of inquiry is practiced and represented in academic and public spheres.
Ethnography offers a richness and depth of description. Autoethnography incorporates the subjectivity of the researcher’s reflections as a participant in a research process. Along with the traditional model for gathering data, autoethnography pushes beyond objective narratives (Martineau, 2001). Carolyn Ellis (Bochner & Ellis, 1996), a sociologist, gives this advice: “make ethnography dangerous, political, and personal” (p. 42). It is all about taking risks and writing from your head and your heart, turning your research back on yourself and against canonical stories. So my reflections become evocative narratives juxtaposed against those of the exhibition developers and visitors. This mode allowed me to consider belief systems, behaviors, and relationships.

Theoretically, evocative narratives of autoethnography find their roots in the structuralist category of postmodern critique in which the presence of the author is encouraged and her/his reflections valued as part of the research process and data. Sociological introspection is an expression of this, theorized by Ellis (1991a) to locate the emotions of lived experience. Many phenomenological studies focus on the rational order in the world that results in superficial reports attempting to impose order, but “introspection permits us to prompt and collect our own and other people’s stories about the lived details of socially constructed experience” (p. 45). In this method, emotional sociology is “consciously and reflectively feeling for ourselves, our subjects, and our topics of study, and evoking those feelings in our readers” (Ellis, 1991b, p. 126).

Modern ethnography dates to the nineteenth century, but the practice of fieldwork can be followed back in time to Herodotus (5th century BCE), who was also a pioneer in
writing history and anthropology (Thomas, 2000). Although modern ethnography is sophisticated in its understanding of contemporary epistemological problems, it would be remiss for anyone wanting to explore new approaches to describing research to neglect adopting literary and rhetorical devices that present the social world. I was inspired by ethnographer John Van Maanen’s (1988) model of writing up fieldwork as an impressionist’s tale, one of three literary genres he conceptualized (the other two being realist tales and confessional tales). I found additional connections in Lee Gutkind’s (1997) views on writing creative non-fiction and sociologist Carol Rambo Ronai’s (1992, 1995, 1996) layered-account method of expressing lived experience. My evocative narratives are a composite dialogue made from transcripts, field notes, and reflective journal notes.

The strength of impressionist tales is that they are written in the first person with a purpose to “startle their audience” (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 101). They are typically directed at colleagues but also suited to a general reader. The author is a participant in the events that transpired and that are related on the page as remembered from the field. The tale describes the action of doing fieldwork, consolidating spontaneity and imagination, which are key elements to writing creative non-fiction, all the while “remaining true to the validity and integrity of the information it contains” (Gutkind, 1997, p. 5). As Van Maanen puts it, “The impressionist’s tale is a representational means of cracking open the culture and the fieldworker’s way of knowing it so that both can be jointly examined.” The impressionist’s tale is linked to epistemology by maintaining the goal of balancing the object and subject, the “knower with the known” (p. 102).

66 This genre came to my attention in reading Sarah Messer’s The Red House (2004).
The dominant idea of Van Maanen’s and Gutkind’s work is their imaginative approach to narrative. In their respective fields of ethnography and creative non-fiction, they uphold the practices of conceptualizing, reflecting, narrating, and evaluating. I got hooked on the dramatic recall expressed in impressionist tales that gives readers insight into otherwise inaccessible situations. These practices shaped my narrative, which provides a voice for each of my participants. Van Maanen’s framework is a recognition of the importance of giving participants “names, faces, motives, and things to do” (p. 105). I wanted to “imaginatively place the [readers]” (p. 103) at the museum in the Régence Room and also to give myself the opportunity to step out of the narrative to make reflective, analytic comments. “Ethnography tends to lead to a much deeper involvement in people’s lives” (Miller, 1998, p. 12). Through careful observation of visitors in the period room, I learned what people actually do and say in the gallery in association with the material culture, while interviewing exhibition developers taught me what they did to install and present the material culture.

“We must find our own criteria for determining why some things matter” (p. 12), according to Daniel Miller, Professor of Material Culture at University College London. I took his words to heart and strove to balance descriptive reporting and formal schemes of analysis. As a result, I adopted alternate modes of data representation, which are finding a place in qualitative research. In this art education study, I have used a layered account, borrowing methods from the social sciences—autoethnography and evocative narrative—where different approaches to expressing data are growing in numbers and acceptance. These methods are here connected, making an abstract assemblage including
elements such as participant interviews, visitors’ observations, historical characters, and my own point of view.

A layered account includes the researcher’s cognitive and emotional impressions, allowing readers to construct and reconstruct their own interpretation of the text. Telling the research story draws upon the personal experience that brought me to my topic, what I learned from my participants, and my emotional responses in the course of interviews and observations. I used my personal knowledge and that of my subject to understand what my participants shared with me. “Evocative narratives show how people cope with exceptional, difficult, and transforming crises” (Bochner, 2002, p.82). In addition to establishing the positive and empathetic feelings that grow while interacting with participants, evocative narratives can also indicate the negative or differing emotions that shape ethnographic relationships (Ellis & Berger, 2002). A layered account is a process that mirrors my suggestion for expanding pedagogical work on the Régence Room, specifically, the incorporation of multiple perspectives and writing and speaking narratives from varying points of view: those of the museum (as social/cultural institution), curators, conservators, educators, archivists, and visitors. Layered accounts form impressionistic stories or a continuous dialectic of experience (Ronai, 1992). They are made up of narrative sketches that are essentially layers of experience that empower readers to construct their own interpretation. By projecting themselves into the subject, readers become part of this reflexive process.

An autoethnographical approach affirms the view that there are “multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Such
impressionistic approaches run counter to a slow and laborious traditional ethnography that requires years spent in the field observing, interviewing, coding, sorting, searching for patterns, and organizing a report of data findings. Personal narratives break the rules of canonical narratives (both in and out of academia) and can “show how people can and do resist the forms of social control that marginalize or silence counternarratives” (p. 744). Autoethnographic impressionistic tales and evocative narratives make up the arts-based layered account of this project. It is a methodology that tries to demonstrate the blurring of art and life, and fact and creative non-fiction (Bochner & Ellis, 2000; Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 2000; Gutkind, 1998; Ronai, 1995; Van Maanen, 1988). I want the framework of my research to be accessible to people, places, and events, allowing them to make their own conclusions. Therefore, I do not give primacy to theory over narrative but seek a balance of showing and telling my reader about the Régence Room’s exhibition development and interpretation (Childress, 1998).

The concepts just mentioned are a means to convey the incomplete, ongoing, and emergent qualities of actual minds and possible worlds (Bruner, 1986). It may help readers to think of the layered account as a collage, of the kind meant to amuse, annoy, bewilder, mystify, and inspire reflection—to dispel an aura of authority and sanctity. The collage elements I assembled take the form of theatrical dramatic scenes—ethnographic drama—and are a mixture of fictionalized historical characters (portrayed as ghosts), a real-life architect, art historians, conservators, a designer, educators, a graduate student, and museum visitors. As in a collage, their edges touch and overlap. Readers will move in and out of recognizing singular pieces within the overall pattern or Gestalt,\textsuperscript{67} using

\textsuperscript{67}Gestalt, in this context, means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Each element in a given
their imaginations to develop their own interpretations and conclusions.

**Ethnographic Drama**

Robert Stake’s *Evaluating the Arts in Education: A Responsive Approach* (1975), is considered the earliest text promoting participant observation for educational evaluation. It focused on the complexities of reality and the multiple perspectives of participants in educational settings (Alexander, 1982). At its core, this dissertation is about evaluating the educational setting of the Régence Room; to do this, I involved the stakeholders surrounding the Régence Room: museum administrators, consultants, and visitors. The responsive approach, to which the title of Stakes’s book refers, is interactive, for example, asking participants questions and researching them. In looking for the best form to present my research, I have chosen to experiment with one that employs a wide range of artistic and literary forms (Eisner, 1981, 1994, 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Saks, 1996). In adopting and adapting ethnographic drama together with autoethnography, evocative narratives, and layered accounts, this dissertation attempts to answer Eisner’s call for artistic approaches to educational research. Ethnographic drama itself borrows from theatrical conventions of dramatic scenes and ultimately from performance (Mienczakowski, 1997; Norris, 2000; Saldaña, 1999), though *Requiem for a Room* remains unperformed.

In Australia, educator Jim Mienczakowski (1997) uses “theatre as a means of collectively constructing change for groups of health consumers.” Ethnographic drama,

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pattern is altered by its participation in a relational unity. Pieces are affected by relationships to each other, and the whole is different than the pieces.
or “public voice researches” as Mienczakowski and the team of university and health care professionals like to call it, combines “word and action” in the manner of Heidegger’s theory of “showing of saying” (p. 159). This educator affirms that ethnographic drama “represent[s] informant voices conducted or orchestrated through a research mechanism; by consensually constructing our performance narratives we are producing a collective response and a more coherent voice” (p. 169). The team at different times has comprised “dramaturges, ethnographers, nurses, psychologists, actors, directors, and, always, health consumers” (p. 169). The casts are made up of students and nurses. Published scripts, which are distributed to audiences, undergo regular review by health professionals and health consumers. Post-performance discussions are a forum that creates “the foundation of an epistemology of audience members’ emotional positions” and establishes a place to debate them and often results in script revisions. It is “the immediacy and currency of the performances . . . in the everyday words of informants and not in the codes of academic discourses which bind most research reports” (p. 159). By collaborating with their “audience,” Mienczakowski co-constructs his scripts. The research method does not adhere to precise texts nor does it guarantee beneficial enlightened results. Mienczakowski and his team make the claim that “there will be participants on the journey towards enlightenment” making them visible in ways they previously were not (p. 170).

Practitioners of drama education have much to offer education research. Their experience with the dramatic process of making meaning and its “presentational/representational” form (Norris, 2000, p. 40) makes dramatic method
attractive to researchers seeking new approaches to communicate their studies. Joe Norris, professor of drama education at University of Alberta, Canada, argues that drama integrates five significant ways of making meaning. Within an interdisciplinary educational framework, Norris begins with “word,” as “in the teaching of all subjects focused on language arts.” The other four ways to make meaning are through the use of numbers, which connect to mathematics, science, and music; “image with the visual arts; gesture in dance; and sound in music.” Norris urges educational researchers to become “literate in all five ways” to enable us “to look and re-look at the world around us” (p. 40). In a graduate course in arts-based educational research that he teaches, Norris introduces improvisational techniques to help his students examine their research questions. Dramatic scenes are developed in class and, then, later, they are performed. Themes that have emerged include “violence in schools, inclusion and exclusion, equality and respect in the workplace, prejudice, body image, human sexuality, addiction, risk taking and student teaching” (pp. 47-48). For Norris, “drama becomes a complete research activity when data is collected, analyzed and presented in dramatic fashion” (p. 45). The last point regarding “dramatic fashion” is important to his statement about the validity of dramatic research. Drama as research is not fully realized without it being performed. Mirror Theatre publishes and performs their research as plays. This is the company under which students perform commissions from outside agencies. They even produced a video using a theme from one of their improvisational sessions—prejudice. The work was commissioned by the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s Safe and Caring Schools program. The ATAS committee believes “that research through drama, by its
evocative nature, can influence the change process in ways that statistical computations fail. This format can make research accessible to those who are not conversant in the language of research” (pp. 48-49). Live performances allow the researchers to interact with their audience in an immediate way, an aptitude that traditional research methods lack. Norris and his students succeed in communicating to their audiences not only through performances but also, as in Mienczakowski’s experience, through post-performance discussions.

Ethnographic drama or ethnotheatre, as theatre professor Johnny Saldaña (1999) calls it, “employs traditional techniques of formal theatre production to mount a performance event whose characters are actual research participants portrayed by actors” (p. 60). The method that Saldaña uses at Arizona State University, and one that I imitated in Chapter Four’s Requiem for a Room, is to make “significant selections from interview transcripts, field notes, and/or research journal entries or memoranda,” which are then “carefully arranged, scripted, and dramatized for an audience to enhance their understanding of the participants’ lives through aural and visual enactment” (p. 60). There is, however, a caveat regarding Requiem for a Room, as I mentioned above, it is yet to be performed.

**Ethnographic Drama and Narrative**

Many who do artistic research utilize narrative to communicate their results. In fact, in this study I employ evocative narratives. Narrative is a popular research-reporting genre (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995). Narratives come naturally to
human beings, and their construction is a way of organizing experience. A story describes a sequence of action and experiences of a certain number of characters, whether real or imaginary. These characters are represented in situations that change, causing a reaction. These changes in turn reveal hidden aspects of the situations and the characters, giving rise to a new predicament that calls for thought or action or both. Through the expectations of characters found in stories either in literature or theatre, readers and/or viewers can identify, connect, and empathize (Bruner, 1990/2002, 2002). Narratives are a way of constructing meaning from experiences. They are a way to interpret things and order them.

Narratives have sequences that follow from action and experience. Sequences affect a character’s ability—real or imagined—to tell stories. In his seminal text *Time and Narrative* (1984), Ricoeur analyzed action and experience: “To follow a story is to understand successive actions, thoughts and feelings” (Ricoeur, 1991b, p. 277). Building on Aristotle’s theory of *mimesis*, which basically claims that imitation is not necessarily about copying but about freely creating some form of art, Ricoeur explained that narrative activity blends chronological and non-chronological sequences in varied measure. Gathering and constructing “meaningful totalities out of scattered events” (p. 278) is an activity paved by the art of telling a story and following one. “To narrate and to follow a story is already to ‘reflect upon’ events with the aim of encompassing them in successive totalities” (p. 279).

Uncertainty about how to write a dramatic narrative led me to Sam Smiley’s (1971, 2005) texts, *Playwriting: The Structure of Action*, and Robert Lipsky’s
Playwriting for Museums (1999), a case study published by the American Association of Museums. At this juncture, I would like to invite readers to mentally insert “museum educator(s)” for “playwright(s)” in the following text. In doing so, I hope you will begin to imagine the possibility of dramatic narratives for museum educators. As Lipsky puts it, “whatever we do as playwrights, whatever form it takes, has to capture the imagination of the public and contribute something to their experience” (p. 9). According to Smiley (2005), “a playwright takes action, structures the action…, and stimulates action in others” (p. 294). Playwrights are “committed to action, to ingenious structure, to a vision of human existence . . . and to the creation of vivid images” (p. 285). For Lipsky (1999), playwriting for museums is all about “getting your attention and reshaping the truth” (p. 9), through a dual focus of information and drama.

The focal point of Chapter Four’s ethnographic drama—Requiem for a Room—is content from participant interviews and observations of visitors in the Régence Room expressed in fourteen dramatic scenes. They are an abstraction of the interview process, compounded by interjections—interruptions—from visitors and historical characters (in ghostly aspect). I want readers to translate and unite the scenic fragments. The Régence Room is like a misunderstood wallflower, reticent and unresponsive in the South Pavilion of the Getty Museum. How can the room possibly speak for itself when it clearly needs coaxing? This notion of objects speaking for themselves is a modernist philosophical approach set forth by traditional museum displays during the early nineteenth century, a time when grand narratives of an authoritative cultural aesthetic and intellectual experience were prime. Even though there are labels positioned inside the period room
they do little to maximize the possibilities for enlivening the period room or for promoting meaningful experiences for museum-goers. My gallery observations indicate that a majority of visitors stand in front of the mirror (between the two doorways) and either primp or take photographs of themselves (usually silly ones). Is this for lack of interest in the content of the room, or possible incomprehension of what the room is, or is meant to be? How can this dynamic be flipped so that the period room engages visitors and sparks curiosity, leading them to question what they see and its possible meanings? How can background information about the everyday aspect of the room and its furnishings be transmitted: How were these things made? Who made these things? For whom were they made? How were they used? What do they symbolize? If questions like these were broached, visitors might be inclined to linger, sharing and telling stories, transforming the period room into an engaging location in which museum-goers can explore their experiences.

Since becoming interested in the Régence Room in 1986, I have imagined narratives that surround the people who lived and worked in the room, and the contemporary historical characters. I have asked myself questions like those just mentioned, and others, too: Why did the museum buy the objects? Is there a difference between how the objects looked when they were bought and when they were put on display? What activities may have taken place in the room? As Wilson said of the Régence Room:

[It] has had so many people living in it throughout the times since it was sold in the 1930s to Duveen. Amazing ghosts must be (pause) you know, if you think that people’s emotions are absorbed into the pores of the wood . . . it’s just an amazing . . . what’s been going on in that room. You
can say the same for all the rooms, but, you know, that one being so early is really quite amazing. And, I think that people should be able to stand and think about things like that (personal communication, February 18, 2003).

I agree with Wilson that people—students, general public, informed visitors—should be able to stand and think about the history of the residents who lived in the room and the events that shaped their lives, weighing those things against their own lives and experiences. Is this something the museum should promote or exploit? There are issues through which visitors can explore their lives next to people who lived during the time this room was in Paris, and asking questions like those just raised about who designed it, built it, lived in it, and worked in it.

The panels and furnishings from which the Régence Room was made are rare survivors of a time long past. What historical events occurred in Paris during the centuries the room remained in situ? What was going on across the Atlantic, in America, during the same historical period? And how could exploring these questions and many others generated by museum-goers affect the experience and meaning of the period room?

It is unfortunate that the room is ignored by educators, because, as it exists now, the panels are essentially window dressing used to legitimate the furnishings inside it. The outcome is not unlike Christmastime at Marshall Fields in Chicago. For over a century, people had walked around outside the building, looking into the pretty window displays, physically distanced from the iconic stories represented and isolated on the other side of the glass. Like snowglobes, the Fields window displays and the Régence Room are contained spaces. They are dioramas designed to be looked at and admired for
aesthetic qualities, not—as I argue about the Régence Room—to trigger thought and reflection and make meaning from the experience.

What the Régence Room interpretation highlights is the disparity between insider and outsider points of view. The evocative narratives in the scenes that follow offer one example of what it might be like to disrupt routine, to shift points of view, to stand and think about the Régence Room, and to rouse creative and imaginative thinking by the experience of stepping into the room, looking around, and questioning.

Case Study Research

The most common approach to qualitative inquiry is the case study. The Régence Room at the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center is the site of this investigation. The single room allowed for the conceptual structure of questioning the significance and meaning of this kind of museum display. An important aim was to understand the uniqueness of this single case and its varied contexts. I wanted to pull in my readers through the narrative and experiential accounts of participants and visitor observations. Like an ethnographer, I wanted to describe and interpret my participants’ perspectives on the exhibition development process that resulted in the room’s display, not simply to make value judgments of right and wrong or true and false. This interpretive format recognizes that “existing theory does not adequately explain the phenomenon [of period rooms]” (Merriam, 1988, p. 29). Therefore, I assembled as much information as possible to theorize a new approach to exhibition development and museum education.

Case studies “are concerned with understanding and describing process more than
behavioral outcomes” (Merriam, 1988, p. 31). Their focus on process and interpretation makes this method ideal for promoting new approaches to situations that could benefit from further conceptualization. With regard to perspectives of participants, this case study integrates both processual “monitoring” and “causal explanation” (p. 31). I monitored the exhibition development process by describing the context and participants, and by investigating its boundaries. Causal explanations depend upon describing the hows and whys of causal links, the conditions developing from a cause-effect relationship. They strengthen empirical generalizations. As observer and analyzer, I considered the “context and population” and the opinions expressed in interviews while trying to understand how decisions of both design and interpretation were implemented, as well as “confirming the process by which the treatment had the effect that it did” (Reichardt & Cook, 1979, p. 21, quoted in Merriam, 1988, p. 31).

Educational ethnographic case studies “are characterized by [their] socio-cultural interpretation” (Merriam, 1988, p. 24). Whereas a school study might incorporate demographic aspects of its surrounding community and parental standpoints, I position the case of the Régence Room within the process of exhibition development and interpretation. The socio-cultural conditions here are the dynamics among the design team in relation to observations of visitors, and the history of the room and its contents.

Historical case study methods used here established a context within which to develop a theory of active pedagogical space. I attempted to balance what Stankiewicz (1997) has called the compiling and the shaping of history. Some historians compile facts and report their findings, while others shape interpretive patterns. Combining each,
something “the best historical research does,” (p. 59) was natural for me, since I had already begun to compile facts while researching my master’s thesis. I had also spent considerable time visiting the Régence Room at the J. Paul Getty Museum, reviewing the labels and observing visitors.

Methods of Collecting Information

Thinking about period rooms in their broadest possible contexts launches questions and issues about object interpretation. A wide range of materials is available and essential for research. Knowledge about material culture objects is gathered from many different sources. The historical reconstruction of fabricating interiors is a complex, subjective process, similar to directing a theatrical play where every detail in the writing, production, and performance converges to form narratives and experiences. For example, documentary evidence shows how furnishings were positioned and distributed in a room and how many and what kind of objects were used. The range of sources consulted points to where my questions about the Régence Room led. The fields covered include architectural history, art history, material culture studies, and social history. My research combined investigating visual material—both documentary and artifactual—before and after the development of photography and mass media. Examples of the materials are as follows: contemporary inventories and business records; maps; contemporary prints, drawings, and paintings; architectural drawings and plans; photographs; contemporaneous novels; diaries; letters; panels; and furnishings. Primary sources like these offer noteworthy evidence about the Régence Room’s origins, but if
the room were from a lower social scale such evidence would be scarce (Porter & MacDonald, 1990).

Material Culture: Formal and Analytical

My interpretive objective for the Régence Room is to conceive of ways to enliven it with and for visitors. I pursue this dilemma through Ettema’s (1987) two approaches to material culture interpretation, which he identifies as formalist and analytical. The first approach to learning from objects is supported by three aspects: aesthetics, individualism, and technological progress. These characteristics of the formalist approach are connected to Victorian social reforms that imbued objects of material culture with abstract moral qualities. From symbols of genteel culture that strove for proper social values and standards, and nostalgia for the self-reliance of ancestors who settled America, to curiosity and appreciation for modern science and technology, the formalist perspective reflects the Victorian belief that objects have the power to communicate values that they held dear. This perspective endures to this day, but in the 1930s museum administrators began to question the veracity of continuing to conform to Victorian sensibilities and unreflective educational content. During this era, and continuing in some institutions today, museum education shifted from the moral uplift espoused by Victorians to objects themselves becoming the sole content; visitors’ responses were attached to what they could see. Contrast this to the social, political, and economic perspectives found in academia, and you have the source of the analytical approach to understanding material culture. We art educators who have been influenced
by academia take its rhetoric seriously. After all, we want to understand historical facts and organize them in such a way that we can explain how events transpired and make sense of the experience of history. For an educator, the idea behind the analytical perspective is to empower the learner. This approach informs and allows visitors to “use the past to formulate reasonable explanations for the way we live, the things we value, and the problems we have in the present” (Ettema, 1987, p. 75). The focus is on the hows and whys of history, not the whos and whats of the formalist approach. Notions of use and behavior that are external to the objects take precedence over the materials and physical function that dominate the educational thought of formalist ideas. The dilemma is this:

The analytical mode clearly sees the artifact as subservient to the idea, a symbol or concrete manifestation of the historical message. Yet formalists counter with the observation that people go to museums to see objects. (p. 77)

The meanings and symbols of objects come from our minds. We synthesize and make connections. But the meanings of things constantly change. So how can visitors, left to make sense of objects that allegedly speak for themselves, do such a thing without any external help to decode the meanings of them? How can educators persuade visitors to think and question and build ideas for themselves? Objects are the material aspects of social behavior; and exhibitions that focus on ideas, rather than solely on techniques, would direct attention to visitors who would match objects to types of behavior “that [they themselves] have experienced” (p. 83). But more significantly, meaning and symbols connect exhibitions to contemporary social issues.
Archival Research

Years of archival research about the room’s origins, found in the Getty Research Institute’s Special Collections, helped me to establish contexts of interpretation, meaning, and ultimately understanding, initially for my own edification but clearly germane to formulating ideas about critical art pedagogy for the Régence Room. Historical facts described below were compiled from the material evidence in the archives.

I explored records pertaining to the paneling in the Régence Room found in the Carlhian Firm Records (Carlhian records, 1867-1975), The Duveen Brothers Records (Duveen Brothers Records, 1876-1981), and The French and Co. Records (French & Company records, 1911-1998 [bulk 1950-1969]). All represent a history of art dealing, collecting, decorating, and manufacture to which the Régence Room is linked. The bulk of archival data comes from the Carlhian archive, a collection the Getty Research Institute acquired in 1993. This collection’s records document the business activity of the Parisian family-operated firm of decorators and dealers. Recording over a century of activity, the archive comprises architectural drawings, furniture designs, fabrics, scenic wallpapers, stock books, ledgers, 14,000 photographs, correspondence, and plans for interior spaces, including reinstallations of eighteenth-century paneled rooms.

Carlhian et Cie and Duveen Brothers collaborated extensively, beginning shortly before World War I and decreasing after Sir Joseph Duveen’s death in 1939 (Carlhian, 930092; Duveen, 950016). Together they produced luxurious interiors for numerous private residences in America, Europe, and South America, integrating historical furnishings and Old Master sculptures and paintings, newly woven textiles, and
reproduction hardware in the manner of rooms found in English country houses. In their
desire to demonstrate a cultured life, American *nouveau riche*, of the late-nineteenth and
early-twentieth centuries, looked to European entrepreneurs. Sir Joseph Duveen, who
scoured England and Europe for fine things to sell, assisted many of these industrialists.
From around 1897 to 1964, Duveen Brothers sent representatives to England, New York,
and Canada, and recorded what they saw in journals totaling eight volumes. A primary
purpose of this activity was scouting objects for potential purchase. Taking advantage of
the depressed economy after the first world war, when many of England’s upper class
were strapped with taxes, Duveen swept in, buying family heirlooms—furnishings,
paintings, or architectural elements. Many of America’s museums are the beneficiaries
of Duveen’s business dealings (Behrman, 1952; Duveen Brothers Records, 950016;
Secrest, 2004).

Many American millionaires of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century
decorated their homes in an eighteenth-century French style with actual antique
furnishings and period art. What unified the décor was paneling (*boiserie*), typically of
painted and gilded carved oak or walnut. A stock book (Fig. 3.1) shows that Carlhian
acquired a Régence *boiserie* in 1932 from Westminster Foreign Bank in the Place
Vendôme (no. 18), the prestigious square designed by Jules Hardouin-Mansart (1646-
1708) for Louis XIV (1638-1715). These architectural elements from a *salon*, illustrated
in drawings and photographs (Figs. 3.2 and 3.3), were removed from their original setting
and put into storage. Sometime around 1939, Carlhian shipped the panels to Duveen
Brothers, New York, with whom the firm had a business relationship.68

68Duveen Brothers was then at the height of its position in the world of fine arts, dealing from offices in
Shortly after World War II, Duveen Brothers director Edward Fowles and André Carlhian exchanged numerous letters and telegrams discussing the panels, specifically regarding their installation in a Duveen showroom, and discussing the art market’s shift from individuals to museums. During and after the war, private collectors’ interests in acquiring French boiserie waned. In 1950, after they were installed in Duveen’s New York showroom, J. Paul Getty first saw the panels. The panels again went into storage in the late 1950s, when Duveen Brothers moved location from Fifth Avenue to 79th Street and remained packed up when Duveen went out of business a few years later, selling all of its stock to Norton Simon in 1964. Simon in turn sold off much of the inventory, which included sculpture, ceramics, tapestries, furniture, paintings, a 15,000-volume library, and Duveen’s building on 79th Street. These panels wound up in French & Company’s stock—to my knowledge they were never displayed in the company showroom. In 1971, J. Paul Getty purchased them from French & Company. He
intended them for the decorative arts galleries in his new museum in Malibu.

![Diagram of Régence panels, ca. 1932.]

Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California (930092).

I received further insight into the room’s history from both a curator and a conservator at the Museum, who generously gave of their time to answer my questions about the acquisition and preservation of the architectural elements and gave me permission to read object files related to the Régence Room. My research, in collaboration with the curator and her documents, expanded the provenance of the Régence Room. It was this inquiry process encompassing archives and departmental
Interviewing

In order to conduct interviews, I needed to follow the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process set forth by the University’s Office for Research Protections (ORP). Established by Penn State in 1990, this office regulates the conduct of research whose goal is the protection of research subjects. This office is important because it has structured codes of ethics for all research developed by University faculty, staff, administrators, or students. For all involved in the research process, there is a shared responsibility to garner trust and respect among the ORP, the researchers, and the community involved.

After my application was reviewed and approved, and following the protocol procedures for Human Participants Research, I mailed a copy of an Informed Consent
Form to each person I would interview (see Appendix Q). In an effort to maximize my time, I conducted observations in the Régence Room before speaking with participants. This was a lengthy phase of the data-gathering process, spanning a two-year period from IRB approval to the last recorded and transcribed interview. Once I received the signed Informed Consent Forms from my participants, I began to schedule interviews. The unstructured interviews, though guided by fifteen questions (See Appendix R), were often fluid and led to other unexpected questions and responses.

I interviewed art conservators, art curators, art educators, art historians, an exhibition designer, and museum directors from the J. Paul Getty Museum. I also talked with architects and designers, and a lighting designer; the last three of whom practice historic preservation. The interviews offer insight into their shared activity of developing and interpreting the Régence Room (Gallery S105). I met with each participant for an hour, with the exception of both educators, whose sessions went an additional thirty to forty-five minutes. Twelve of the thirteen participants agreed to have their interviews audio-recorded. At the time of the interviews, four of the thirteen interviewees were living and working on the East Coast (Massachusetts, New York, and Washington, D.C.). These sessions were conducted over the telephone. The other nine participants worked in the Los Angeles area. Of this group, seven participants chose to meet in either their offices or a colleague’s; one chose her residence. A sole local participant wanted to be interviewed over the telephone and also declined to be audio-recorded. One participant asked to begin our conversation in the Régence Room, and from there we returned to an office to continue our dialogue. A few participants
expressed curiosity about the other participants. Generally, I answered by sharing participants’ names, though, if pressed for additional names that I had not given, I became conscious of potential conflicts and gave evasive responses. Does this mean that my results are skewed? That the data is severely biased? The extent to which certain informants talked with each other to refresh their memories about the chronology and sequence of events might have affected their responses.

Unlike accounts of museum visitors’ experiences, which are researched and written about and structured by visitor studies professionals and academics, the voices of museum administrators and consultants are seldom heard unless, or until, some special event or exhibition draws media attention. Otherwise, their experiences and points of view are developed in relative obscurity to those of museum visitors; yet they control the environment in which visitor experiences occur at the museum. Readers may think that Chapter Four’s Requiem for a Room privileges participant’s voices over those of visitors, but that was not my intention. Without participants’ shared experiences, the exhibition development process would remain an enigma. Their characters are fleshed out because I was able to sit, ask questions, and talk with them to elicit perceptions, attitudes, and opinions about the exhibition development of the Régence Room. For me, those experiences conflicted with the ones I had with museum visitors, whom I was only permitted to observe. I did my best to describe visitors’ appearances and behaviors to substantiate the fewer comments and to provide additional insight about their knowledge and experiences.
Interview Questions

Research questions, as posed in qualitative studies, “are typically oriented to cases or phenomena, seeking patterns of unanticipated as well as expected relationships” (Stake, 1995, p. 41). I asked scripted questions to guide the conversation as well as to activate responses that I anticipated receiving. Each participant was asked the same fifteen questions (see Appendix R) that were guided by my research questions. To remind the reader, I have listed them here:

1. How did the exhibition development process of the Régence Room affect its interpretation?
2. How do visitors respond to the Régence Room?

In some instances, conversations were informed by the ongoing archival research I had been performing—reviewing and analyzing correspondence, stock books, drawings, accounting documents and photographs—before and during the time interviews were taking place. With certain participants, scripted questions were an obstacle, causing conversation to falter and the dialogue to become stilted. I interpreted such sessions with wary participants as possibly either an inability to recall clearly the situation under discussion (in some instances experiences dating to 1983) or a performance of institutional or professional diplomacy. Considering the latter case from a theatrical perspective (Burns, 1972), the participants who were performing diplomacy may have reacted to questioning by “[being] always ‘on stage’, always aware of other actors and of the ‘frame’ which bounds the relevant actors and action” (p. 136). With some participants, the scripted questions simply served as a springboard for a deeper, more
candid conversation.

The conversational process spawned by my interview questions relates to Paul Ricoeur’s (1991a) literary theory of narrative in which a back and forth movement is shared by a text and a critic. The maneuver progresses like this: A reader reads the text, reflects on it, inserts her/himself into it, interprets it, criticizes it, and remakes it. The text becomes something different with each individual reader’s unique perspective. I observed something comparable within my participants and myself. In answering my questions, participants took on the role of critic. They moved back and forth between a text of recollecting the exhibition development process and offering current opinions about the room. In analyzing the room, I became a critic moving back and forth between the text of participants’ responses and my own interpretation of the room. (My readers will perform the same action in reading this dissertation.) According to Ricoeur, “the text must be inserted into the dialectic process of interpretation as part of the thrust of explanation” (p. 11). The beneficiaries of this interaction are the critic and all readers of the text. In other words, everyone achieves some sense of knowledge through explaining his or her perspective or through reading someone else’s. The readers whose expectations of particular content are not met in the text may give up on it, refusing to be “remade into the kind of reader implied within the text” (Barone, 1995, p. 175).

The improvisational effect of interpretation is never complete. The implication is that the back and forth dialectic process is continually repeated in innumerable variations. Therefore, interpretation is a natural occurrence during narrative sequences and, consequently, in participants’ narrative responses to questions. This effect was apparent
in my decision-making process for selecting transcript segments. My choices were based on my vision of framing the data into narratives. The process combined creative intuition and reflective thought. My vision also carried with it ethical assumptions based not only on my own sense of right and wrong but also on the University’s protocol for human subjects research. Ethical concerns steered the selection and composition of transcript fragments that drive Chapter Four’s layered account.

Participant Observation

Along with talking to the professionals described above, and for a deeper understanding of the room’s significance, I observed visitors in the Régence Room. I watched visitors’ physical behaviors, and I listened to their comments to determine how the exhibition developers’ intentions affected visitors’ experiences of the period room. My idea was to concentrate on meaning and interaction from the point of view of each participant and to immerse myself in their spoken recollections. Another consideration for this juxtaposition is that I believe visitors need to be included in exhibition development in some manner.

I visited the gallery over a four-week period, selecting two weekdays and observing for two non-consecutive hours each day. Additionally, I observed one weekend day for three non-consecutive hours. In an attempt to get a large sample, I chose the Chanukah, Christmas, and New Year’s holiday period, a time of year when museums traditionally have greater concentrations of visitors.

I moved around in the visitor area within the room, a narrow slice of floor space
between the two separate doorways from which the room is entered and exited and a
fence-like barrier protecting the room’s furnishings (Figs. 2.1 and 3.4). During each hour
in the room, I varied my position, moving back and forth, either stopping between two
available corners or standing in one. From these vantage points, I wrote observations in a
template in a spiral bound sketchbook (see Appendix S). My quick notes included
overheard verbatim quotes and records of visitors’ physical movement in the Régence
Room, such as, gestures and poses. I also took note of clothing in order to get a sense of
whether visitors approached their day at the museum formally or casually. After each
hour in the period room, I would walk around the corner to sit on a museum bench and
write my reflections. I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible, but visitors appeared
curious about me. When a few visitors questioned me about what I was doing, I
explained that I was researching a dissertation.

Transcript Analysis

I made typewritten transcripts of each audio-recorded interview and gave a copy
to each participant for editing. I used the edited transcripts to analyze and interpret for
this dissertation. The analysis consisted of reading each transcript numerous times,
identifying patterns and themes found in recurring concepts and words. Rather than
verifying a pre-existing theory, I used a qualitative research software program called
ATLAS.ti. I imported the transcripts from both my interviews and observations into the
software program to contain and manage the data. The benefits of this approach kept my
data well organized and helped me to make connections across and comparisons among
the various components of the data.

I think it worth mentioning that participants did not make significant alterations when they edited their transcripts. In fact, out of thirteen participants, three made no changes at all. The other nine removed natural patterns of speech such as “uhs” and “ums,” as well as a perceived overuse of the conjunction “and.” Revisions such as these were typically made to clarify how a thought was expressed or to underscore a train of thought. For the single participant who declined a recorded interview, there was no transcript. In that instance, I worked from notes written during our telephone conversation. Each person was given the choice of having his/her recorded material

Fig. 3.4. Two doorways and the narrow slice of floor space, as seen from behind the fence-like barrier. Note the label panels on the barrier. Digital image by Teresa Morales, 2005.
destroyed, or archived in the Getty Museum's permanent archive, upon completion of the project.

As for in-gallery participant observation, my plan was to tally the number of visitors who entered the Régence Room and to record what they did and/or said. I gathered the best demographics I could, speculating on age and ethnicity. I approximated visitors’ duration in the room and recorded whether they were alone, in pairs, in groups of three to five, or more. I observed behaviors such as demonstrated interest in certain objects. Did visitors read labels or not, or did they read aloud to one another? Did they speak, and if so, did they whisper or speak with normal volume? How did they move? Did visitors return to the room? As best as I was able, I recorded their behaviors and remarks in a notebook.

The next chapter presents an arts-based ethnographic drama. It is a non-sequential arrangement of data compiled from visitors’ behaviors and comments, from participants’ experiential narratives of developing the Régence Room, and from my own emotional and intellectual reflections of the data and the research process. If readers are willing to suspend disbelief while reading the following narrative account, then the illusive arts-based virtual reality will be no impediment. If readers are able to overlook conditioned expectations of narrative logic, then the layered account will have succeeded in simulating our modern fractured consciousness. Fill in the open spaces between meta-narratives with your own imagination.
CHAPTER FOUR

One piece of furniture does not reveal a whole picture; and the whole picture is what matters most. Museums, with their isolated objects, generally only teach the basic elements of a complex history. The essential is not contained within these pieces of furniture themselves but in their arrangement, whether free or formal, in an atmosphere, an art of living both in the room containing them and outside it, in the house of which the room is a part. How then did people live, eat and sleep in these furnished interiors of the past—which were of course havens of luxury? (Braudel, 1981, p. 306)

PRESENTING THE DATA: IMAGINING THE POSSIBILITIES

In Chapter Three I explained ethnographic drama and its relationship to Requiem for a Room. This qualitative method promotes writing and presenting data in a “less hierarchical and univocal” way (Richardson, 2000, p. 939). This ethnographic drama made up of scenes that incorporate re-organized excerpts from participant interviews, visitors’ observations, and a fair dose of historical fiction, follows in the footsteps of Johnny Saldaña (1999), whose research methods employ “traditional techniques of formal theatre production . . . and actual research participants.” Saldaña does this by using “significant selections from interview transcripts, field notes, and/or research journal entries or memoranda,” which are then “carefully arranged, scripted, and dramatized for an audience to enhance their understanding of the participants’ lives through aural and visual enactment” (p. 60). Requiem for a Room is a synthesis of the methodological development of the Régence Room. I suggest that the performers be seated on tall stools, with back support, and music stands in front them to hold their
scripts. I recommend an offstage focus, which means there is no eye contact between performers. In this method, they “see each other in an imagined scene out in front of them in the midst of the audience” (Coger & White, 1983; p. 7). Sophie Dawes is the single omniscient character. Her thoughts, as established in various scenes, are self-serving. She is an unhappy, miserable ghost stuck in the room where she last lived in Paris before returning to London. In order to be released from her purgatory of living in the Régence Room—inflicted upon her for her iniquities against the Prince de Condé—Dawes must learn about the history of her former residence, what happened there after she left, and help museum administrators understand why she changed her front bedroom (chambre à coucher) to a living room (salon).69 She interacts with museum staff, consultants, visitors, and a graduate student, though they are unable to sense her presence. Dawes relates to the museum characters through the history of the Régence Room and may seem to engage in dialogue with them. The action takes place in the Régence Room and a museum conference room. There are also scenes set in the mid-1830s, when Dawes owned 18 Place Vendôme. The story, directed to art educators and museum administrators, is written in the present tense yet speaks of past events; therefore the action occurs in the present—one day during winter holidays at the Getty Museum.

I am taking extraordinary license with time and place to encourage looking at the world in new ways and to learn from the past as it shapes the present and influences the future. The action plays with temporality, moving in and out of the present to times and places in the past. Parallel narratives are developed from the interrelationship of

69When the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu began planning galleries for the new museum in Brentwood, one of the subjects discussed by administrators was the reinstallation of period rooms in the decorative arts galleries. It was decided that the Régence Room would be displayed as a salon, and not a chambre à coucher.
historical figures (in the form of ghosts) from Paris around 1836, 1931, and 1941 and with museum staff and visitors from around 1986 to 1997. The one implausible character is John Dewey, because he had no experience of the Régence Room. In his role as progressive pedagogue, however, the presence of this American philosopher and educator is relevant because of his theories of making schools agents of a democratic society—in the sense that everyone in a society should participate in the social, political, and economic decisions that affect their lives. In *Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey stated that “the *furniture* of the mind is the mind” (p. 82). It is an apt metaphor for the Régence Room. His statement continues and underscores the material culture allusion, “mind is wholly a matter of *contents*” (p. 82). What Dewey’s metaphor suggests for the period room is that the room and its objects are the mind made manifest, that “the formation of mind” is made of “associations or connections of content by means of a subject matter presented from without.” For Dewey, “the formation of mind” has three educational implications (p. 82).

1. This or that kind of mind is formed by the use of objects which evoke this or that kind of reaction and which produce this or that arrangement among the reactions called out. The formation of mind is wholly a matter of the presentation of the proper educational materials.

2. The business of the educator is, first, to select the proper material in order to fix the nature of the original reactions, and, secondly, to arrange the sequence of subsequent presentations on the basis of the store of ideas secured by prior transactions. The control is from behind, from the past, instead of, as in the unfolding conception, in the ultimate goal.

3. Certain formal steps of all method in teaching may be laid down. Presentation of new subject matter is obviously the central thing, but since knowing consists in the way in which this interacts with
the contents already submerged below consciousness, the first thing is the step of “preparation,”—that is, calling into special activity and getting above the floor of consciousness those older presentations which are to assimilate the new one. Then after the presentation, follow the processes of interaction of new and old; then comes the application of the newly formed content to the performance of some task. Everything must go through this course; consequently there is a perfectly uniform method in instruction in all subjects for all pupils of all ages. (pp. 82-83)

His premise of a democratic society, which to my mind is the origin of critical art pedagogy, comprise these three educational references—all of which I believe are applicable to museum exhibition development.

I struggled to create a text that would bring readers as close as possible to the original research and characters. The activities and comments of museum visitors actually took place in the Régence Room during a four-week period in 2002, but I have edited and condensed the days and times in which they occurred. Additionally, in keeping with conventions of ethnographic drama, “I abbreviated comments, but strove for accurate renditions of tone and content” (Richardson, 1993, p. 697). The museum visitors have no names but are identified by gender, ethnicity, and age. I identified ethnicity through observation and generalized the descriptions, such as, Black Female and Young Asian Male. Visitors are seemingly anonymous individuals, yet by identifying gender, ethnicity, and particular behaviors, I am able to give readers a sense of the people who do visit the Régence Room. (Is the Régence Room’s isolation a microcosm of the museum’s cultural position in greater Los Angeles?) The actions and comments of museum staff, consultants, and the researcher, were taken from interview transcripts, cut and pasted to simulate group interviews instead of individual. Everything
spoken by participants and visitors in the ethnographic drama is a direct quote—albeit sometimes abbreviated—taken from interviews and observations transcripts. Dewey’s few monologues are direct quotations from two of his seminal texts, *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Art as Experience* (1934). Mr. Getty’s comments were gleaned from his book *Joys of Collecting* (1965). All other dialogue is historical fiction.
Picture yourself standing at the top of the hill at the J. Paul Getty Museum where asphalt meets a man-made grid of Italian stone laying out postmodern plazas and colonnades (Fig. 4.1). You will see that, bright even in overcast skies, the Getty Center is covered in a creamy-colored skin of cold, smooth enameled metal contrasted by another of cold, rough, ancient travertine. The travertine spreads three hundred and sixty degrees across the site’s architectural footprint, rising and forming geometrical planes and curves. Square pieces of metal continue the grid, clamped like armor to the Harold Williams Auditorium, the J. Paul Getty Trust building (also called the North Building), the
Conservation Institute (also called the East Building), the Museum, the Research Institute, and the Restaurant. On the Arrival Plaza, it is impossible for any sighted person to miss Martin Puryear’s sculpture, *That Profile*, crafted of interconnecting bands of tubular steel whose joins are wrapped in bronze. The sculpture, looking like a colossal jungle gym, is bolted to the ancient travertine. Marking the way to the next plaza are two wide, parallel, rising stairways of shallow steps, between which are planted pots of trailing rosemary and sweet alyssum, punctuating and softening the flat planes. The light perfume of the flowers follows you to the museum. The steps lead to giant glass and

![Entrance to South Pavilion. Digital image by Teresa Morales, 2005.](image)
chrome doors that open to the lobby of the museum. Inside the doorway is more travertine, this time in the form of floors and accents on walls, but mostly the interior impression is one of bright white painted walls and ceilings. Quickly passing through the rotunda (in fair weather a wall of glass, actually a cunning sliding glass door that opens to the outside), you enter the main museum courtyard, which is architecturally surrounded by five buildings (pavilions) named for cardinal compass points. The museum’s decorative arts collection lives in the South Pavilion, furthest from the entrance. To reach this pavilion through the courtyard, you walk past modern water features, one with delicate vertical spraying fountains next to an allée of Mexican cypress, and two others

Fig. 4.3. Tapestry gallery. Digital image by Teresa Morales.
with big rugged boulders. Just a little beyond this courtyard and to the left is the entrance to the decorative arts galleries. The doors are the same kind that open to the lobby: tall, white, enameled metal and glass with cold tubular steel handles (Fig. 4.2).

It is at this spot where the colliding sensibilities of Richard Meier’s austere modernism and the voluptuous Baroque and Rococo interiors connect. Meier’s bright, cold, hard and rough angular architecture makes a striking contrast to the curvilinear eighteenth-century French decorative arts galleries of low light, warm wood, glowing gold, soft jewel-toned textiles, and many ornamented objects (Figs. 4.3 and 4.4).

Fig. 4.4. Gallery S106. Digital image by Teresa Morales.

We are a great distance from eighteenth-century Paris and the Place Vendôme,
which is the location of the bedroom where the panels in the Régence Room originated. Stepping into the decorative arts galleries, however, gives an illusion of traveling back in time. With everyday objects all around suggesting the domestic interiors of prosperous eighteenth-century Parisians, it is not too difficult to ignore the labels and to imagine the sound of rustling silk or the muffled taps of high wooden heels or muted conversations, as Edmond de Goncourt (1822-1896) (1903/1927) noted about French society of the 1700’s. It was during the eighteenth century in rooms like these where conversation—l’art de vivre—reached its fullest development. And it is this social convention—the art of conversation—that provoked my questions about narrative. Would it be possible to construct narratives centered on the social history of everyday objects from a remote historical past? Could communication (i.e. dialogue/conversation) shape dynamic narratives that foster learning and understanding derived from evocative objects, both decorative and utilitarian? And could such narratives, made from the experiences of museum practitioners, visitors, and a researcher, have a pedagogical impact on interpreting the Régence Room?

◆ ◆ ◆

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

SOPHIE DAWES (GHOST). A nineteenth-century resident of 18 Place Vendôme. She is responsible for changing the bedchamber to a salon.

MUSEUM VISITORS. Various men, women, and children, from very young to quite old, both healthy and infirm, from Eastern and Western cultures; all of them visiting the Régence Room during winter holidays.

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (GHOST). Polish composer and pianist who lived, performed, and taught piano in early nineteenth-century Paris. He was a consumptive dandy and Georges Sand’s lover.

ARCHITECT (GHOST). Hired by Dawes to remodel her first-floor front bedchamber to a salon.

CRAFTSMEN (GHOSTS). French cabinetmakers hired by the architect to make and install new panels for Dawes’ new salon.

TERESA MORALES. In her capacity as a doctoral candidate in the art education program at The Pennsylvania State University, Morales researched the exhibition development and interpretive process of the Régence Room at the Getty Museum for her dissertation. She has a Bachelor’s degree in art history from UCLA and a Master’s degree in art education from California State University, Northridge. She has worked in Special Collections at the Getty Research Institute (GRI), where she processed and cataloged two- and three-dimensional items and wrote finding aids and condition reports, notably for both the Carlhian and Duveen archives. While at the GRI, Morales curated a display of archival items pertaining to the Régence Room. She has taught art education to undergraduates. Before that, she interned in the education department at the Winterthur Museum, which exposed her to the problems and challenges of interpreting museum period rooms.

JOE GODLA. His introduction into the field of furniture was guitar-making school. It led to furniture-making school and conservation training in New England. He went on to work as a self-employed furniture maker for about ten years before pursuing graduate studies in conservation, including at the Smithsonian Institution Training Program. In the fourth year of that program he worked at the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) as a furniture conservator responsible for collections. In 1991, he was hired by the J. Paul Getty Museum as the Assistant Conservator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts; after a few years, he was promoted to Associate Conservator. In 1999 he accepted a fellowship to study with Vincent Mouchez, a French master carver. Part of the fellowship was to study drawing, modeling, and carving at the École Boulle. The following year, he left the Getty Museum to become Senior Conservator for Historic New England (formerly SPNEA). He managed 110,000 objects, dating from 1650 to the present, that are displayed in thirty-five different historic houses across New England. In 2005, he took over as Chief Curator at The Frick Collection in New York and The Frick Art Reference Library.

JOHN ROBBINS. This architect graduated from University of Virginia in 1975 and
began working for the National Park Service in historic preservation. His work on archaeological ruins stabilization took him to Massachusetts, New York, Colorado, and Arizona. In 1983, he began work as project architect for the restoration of the Statue of Liberty. In 1986 he joined Despont’s office. Robbins worked on historic preservation projects while with Despont, such as the restoration of Henry Clay Frick’s home in Pittsburgh. In 1988 he began working on the Getty Museum project as well as opening his own practice in Mississippi. Today, Robbins works for the Department of the Interior where he administers the National Register of Historic Places, the National Historic Landmarks Survey, and Native American Topics, with a staff of two hundred people.

ROBERT CARLHIAN (GHOST). Son of A. Carlhian, and heir to Carlhian & Cie. He knew Getty through his father’s introduction, and met Wilson when discussion of acquiring the Régence boiserie was renewed in the 1970s.

CHARISSA BREMER-DAVID. The Associate Curator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Getty Museum. Her Bachelor’s degree is in art history. A Sotheby’s auction house training course in London introduced her to the decorative arts, something not included in the American academic curriculum, and she learned she wanted more experience with objects. Before launching into graduate work, she did just that. In 1981 Bremer-David volunteered to assist Barbara Roberts, former Head of Decorative Arts Conservation at the Getty Museum, who had just embarked on surveying the condition of each object in the decorative arts collection. When she completed that project eight months later, Wilson offered her a job as curatorial assistant. She also holds a Master’s degree in European History from UCLA.

DIANE BRIGHAM. At the time of the Getty Museum’s Brentwood project, Brigham was Head of Education at the museum and had been since in 1992. In 1987, she came from the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where she had been Assistant Curator of Education to the Getty to oversee its gallery programs for school students and the general public. Before embarking on museum work, she was a public school art teacher for several years. She received her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in art education from Kutztown University in Pennsylvania.

JOHN WALSH. He retired as Director of the Getty Museum and Vice-President of the Getty Trust in 2000. His career as a paintings curator began at the Frick Collection, after undergraduate and graduate studies at Yale University, Columbia University, and the University of Leiden. He went on to curate paintings and exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. From there he came to the Getty Museum in Malibu to replace Stephen Garrett as Director of the Museum, a position he held for about eighteen years.

JOHN DEWEY (GHOST). American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, active from the late-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century.

JEFFREY WEAVER. He studied architecture at the University of Cincinnati but two
years into the program learned that he wanted a broader scope of the arts. Shortly after he began his art history studies, he volunteered at a local museum. For three years he assisted a curator in cataloging prints, drawings, and photographs. Weaver continued to work at the museum while he pursued his Master’s in art history, but he also taught. A desire to work with Henry Hawley at the Cleveland Museum Art, due to a shared interest in eighteenth-century French decorative arts, led him to doctoral studies at Case Western Reserve. In 1989, he accepted an internship at the Getty Museum in Malibu and set to work on a project labeling porcelain. About ten months later, he began another internship at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, assisting a curator there with his catalog of French eighteenth-century paintings, drawings, and decorative arts. Weaver moved back to California in 1991, for the job he now holds at the Getty Museum, Assistant Curator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts.

BRIAN CONSIDINE. He developed an early love of furniture during his childhood experiences of growing up in Virginia among collectors of antique American furniture—his parents and grandparents. An architectural degree from the University of Pennsylvania led to furniture-making in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, with the North Family Joiners. The tactile, hand-building process responded to his artistic cravings so much that he opened his own furniture-making business in eastern Vermont. Many of his antique-collecting clients asked him to restore pieces of furniture, as well as to make them reproductions and original pieces of furniture. Over time, he become focused on the restoration aspect of his work. This caught the attention of a curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, who offered Considine a job in the museum’s furniture conservation department. He worked there from 1980 to 1983. In 1983, he went to the Getty Museum, but he was quickly sent off to Paris to study gilding in the Goujon workshop and marquetry with Pierre Armand at the École Boulle. He is now Head of Sculpture and Decorative Arts Conservation at the Getty Museum.

HOWARD BRANDSTON. A lighting designer who consulted on the lighting for the decorative arts galleries, including the Régence Room. He began his career as a lighting designer and scene designer for theatre. Brandston worked for renowned lighting designer Stanley McCandless, who encouraged him to study architecture. For the past forty years, he has completed twenty-five hundred to three thousand projects in about sixty countries around the world. Two of the more notable ones are the lighting of the Statue of Liberty and the Petranas Towers in Kuala Lumpur.

THIERRY DESPONT. He was licensed by the French government after graduating from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris with a degree in architecture. After that, he went to Harvard and studied for a Master’s in urban design and city planning. Upon graduating, he returned to France to work with the chief historical architect there. Following that experience, he moved to the Middle East to work for an architecture and planning firm. Around 1980, he moved to New York and opened his own practice a year later. Despont’s practice is devoted to very fine residential work involving architecture and interiors. His office mainly designs buildings and interiors, but it also does just interiors,
including furniture design. His office does do some renovation work; he served as the associate architect for the centennial restoration of the Statue of Liberty. He was the architect for the restoration of Clayton, the Frick family mansion in Pittsburgh which included the mandate of turning it into a house museum. He received an award from the Upper East Side Historic Preservation Committee for work he performed on a mansion on Seventy-First Street in New York. Despont’s work for the Getty Museum in Brentwood began with designing the decorative arts galleries but grew to encompass all the galleries in the museum.

GILLIAN WILSON. She studied art in London in the 1960s. Soon after her school experience, Wilson got a job at the Victoria & Albert Museum assisting in the textile conservation department and restored textiles for nearly two years. Around 1963, she transferred to the Woodwork Department and began taking evening courses at London University in the history of fine art. She took a four-year diploma to ensure a grounding in architecture, paintings, and sculpture. She calls herself an autodidact. In 1970 she was a Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where she met Burton Frederickson, who was at the time J. Paul Getty’s sole curator. The following year, Frederickson offered her a job as Curator of Decorative Arts at the Getty Museum, and she accepted it. She held that position until her retirement in 2002.

DEBORAH GRI BBON. She received her Bachelor’s degree in art history from Wellesley College. She immediately went to graduate school and got a Master’s and a Ph.D. from Harvard University, specializing in French nineteenth-century paintings and drawings. Her first job out of college was at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, as its first curator. For seven years she was responsible for research, publications, conservation, and some building renovation. At the same time, she taught courses on nineteenth-century paintings at Harvard University’s extension school. In 1989 she accepted the position of Assistant Director at the Getty Museum in Malibu, working under Walsh. During the course of several years, she became Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs, and then Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs and Education, then Deputy Directory, and finally Director of the museum and Vice-President of the Getty Trust, after Walsh retired in 2000. She was active in that role until 2004.

KAREN GILES. After receiving her undergraduate degree in art history, she worked as a high school art teacher. While still teaching, she began graduate studies in art education at the California State University, Long Beach. She received a museum education internship at the Getty Museum, based on her graduate advisor’s recommendation.70 About half-way through the nine-month internship, she decided to leave classroom teaching. Following her internship, Giles accepted a job at the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio. In her capacity as assistant chair of gallery education, she worked with docents and teachers, and taught in the galleries herself. By 1996, before leaving Toledo for the

70Mary Ann Stankiewicz, Giles’ advisor, taught in the art education program at CSULB from 1988-1990, just before joining the Getty Center for Education in the Arts as Program Officer, a position she held from 1990 to 1992.
Getty Museum, she had been promoted to Head of the Art Experience Team. At the Getty, she was the Manager of Adult and Community Audiences, where she remained for six-and-a-half years.

MERRITT PRICE. In 1995, the Getty Museum hired him to create exhibition designs for permanent and special exhibitions, which includes graphics, ephemera, and signage. Before coming to the Getty, he was head of art gallery design at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. Prior to that, Price had his own consulting business.

ANDRÉ CARLHIAN (GHOST). Owner and patriarch of Carlhian & Cie. A twentieth-century interior designer, decorator, and fabricator. He tried to sell the Régence boiserie to Getty in the 1950s.


FRANZ LISZT (GHOST). Nineteenth-century Hungarian composer and virtuoso pianist living in Paris during the 1830s. He was a friend and associate of Chopin.

GEORGES SAND (GHOST). Nineteenth-century French author renowned for her outspokenness and shocking habit of wearing men’s clothes. She was Chopin’s lover.


Production Notes

TERESA, an enterprising graduate student studying art education, is fascinated with museum displays of material culture. She investigates the Régence Room and its Parisian origins at 18 Place Vendôme to learn how and why the room is displayed as it is. Like a history detective following many different leads, she interviews several museum staff, and their consultants, who were involved with developing the display of SOPHIE’S salon, called the Régence Room. Dramatic license is taken with meetings between
TERESA and museum staff and consultants and among SOPHIE, her friends, and museum visitors. Interviews that in fact were conducted individually occur here in the play collectively, to produce and illustrate how discussions might have transpired. All of the meetings take place at a conference table downstage.

Ghosts of historical characters who come and go in the Régence Room create counterpoint. Vignettes with visitors are interjected for added movement. There is sweeping interconnectedness and overlapping among the actions on stage.

The curtain is open. The house lights are up, but the stage is dimly lit and set as the Régence Room period room display at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Brentwood in 2000 (Fig. 1.1). No pre-performance music. The only sounds heard by the theatre audience are mumbled conversations, coughs, sneezes, laughs, cell phone buzzes and rings, and shuffled paper.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the script is to be read silently. “Silent readers explore [a] world and create meaning by taking the writer’s literary world into their own realms of experience. In this sense, silent readers are creative artists in many of the same ways as original writers” (Kleinau & McHughes, 1980, p. 3). Future plans to adapt Requiem for a Room for live performance could include such venues as educational or ethnographic conferences, classrooms, radio (in the manner of Ira Glass’s “This American Life”), or in the Régence Room or some other space adjacent to the period room. Ideally, the piece would be performed with live musical accompaniment (a classical pianist and a jazz quartet), a foley artist to perform sound effects,

71 All of these ingredients have been inspired by Charlie Kaufman’s Theatre of the New Ear; specifically, “Hope Leaves the Theatre” and “Anomalisa.” See http://www.carterburwell.com/tbi_project_pages/TONE.shtml#Prod_Notes.
mechanism to reproduce smells in specific scenes.

SCENE I

“What Happened Here”

House lights dim to Chopin’s Ballade in A Flat major, Op. 47. A figure enters through closed doorway upstage right. As stage light increases slightly, we see SOPHIE, dressed circa 1836 in heavy lavender silk satin with a wide open neckline, a deep “V” waistline, and generous puffed sleeves to the elbow. Large yellow bows adorn each shoulder and elbow and are scattered down the front of her full, gathered skirt. SOPHIE’s hair is fashioned for the time with cascading ringlets covering each ear, the rest piled above the nape of her neck and decorated with two yellow ostrich plumes and lavender roses. A striking gemstone necklace flashes with light.

SOPHIE dazed, appears to glide around the room accentuating her ghostly aspect, with her full silk skirt brushing the ground. She passes the bureau plât, touches the crystals on the girandoles, causing a tinkling sound; she pauses and lifts the lid of the casket sees it is empty and drops the lid. She removes one of the quills from the inkstand and walks over to the mantel clock and strokes the face with it, then looks up into the mirror. With her free hand, SOPHIE adjusts some curls and fusses with the roses and plumes.

SOPHIE sighs and turns around to see . . .

Security officer CARBAJAL enters upstage left doorway, dressed in white shirt, blue tie, gray slacks and blue blazer. He wears an earpiece like a Secret Service agent, and a walkie-talkie squawks from his inside jacket.

SECURITY CONTROL

CARBAJAL

He takes out his walkie-talkie and clicks the switch.


SECURITY CONTROL

Roger that. Over.

CARBAJAL looks around the room neither seeing SOPHIE nor hearing the music. He steps to a panel in the doorway and opens a hidden cabinet. We hear a click, and the room lights up as if daylight were filtering through the two windows (which originally had an eastern exposure). He closes the cabinet, takes a glance at the room, moves to upstage left open doorway, and exits.

SOPHIE moves to window and looks out . . . sighs again, then turns and exits through door she entered.

Music stops.

MALE VISITOR #1

Entering the open doorway downstage.

There should be music.

FEMALE VISITOR #1

Following next to him pointing at desk chair.

That’s kind of an interesting chair.

MALE VISITOR #1

Ignores her, whistles Für Elise.
SOPHIE

Entering through doorway just exited.

Merde! Beethoven!

Male and Female Visitors #1 EXIT.

SOPHIE

Starts to pace.

Quel péquenaud! (what a country bumpkin!) Chopin is the musical genius! It is too long since I heard him play.

FEMALE VISITOR #2

Entering upstage doorway, oblivious to SOPHIE.

Oooh la la!

SOPHIE stops pacing and looks quizzically at FEMALE VISITOR #2, who quickly exits.

SOPHIE

What an evening it was, the last time he played here. His compositions made women swoon . . . .

Two visitors enter.

LITTLE GIRL #1

In her father’s arms.

What happened here? What happened?
SOPHIE

Let me tell you what happened here . . . .

LITTLE GIRL #1’s father responds in a foreign language and exits.

CHOPIN

He enters through upstage door dressed very bon ton.

Baronne Feuchères, please, I beg you do not be sad.

Enter FEMALE VISITOR #3 with three children.

CHOPIN walks toward SOPHIE, sneaking a peek of himself in the pier glass and adjusting his jabot.

FEMALE VISITOR #3

Whistles.

Wheeew!

CHOPIN offers a small smile. FEMALE VISITOR #3 and children quickly exit.

SOPHIE

Ignoring FEMALE VISITOR #3, SOPHIE walks to CHOPIN, hand outstretched for a kiss.

Monsieur Chopin! How lovely it is to see you.

CHOPIN

Taking her hand and kissing it.

Madame, Baroness, my pleasure.
SOPHIE

*Monsieur* Chopin, would not you agree that what happened here was *glorieux*? These… these…cretins do not understand. They will never understand.

*A young male and female couple enter through the audience, reading the museum brochure as they walk. They mount the stage and stand with their backs to SOPHIE and CHOPIN, and the objects, continuing to read the pamphlet.*

CHOPIN

*Sympathetically, coughing into his handkerchief.*

*Oui, Madame*, though they could not hear, were you to tell what happened.

*Two women and a young male adult enter: the older of the two women speaks.*

OLDER FEMALE #1

This is Louis XIII . . . the chairs came later . . .

SOPHIE

Louis XIII?!?! Bah!

CHOPIN

*Offering his arm.*

Come, *Madame*, let us leave this room.

*SOPHIE sighs and takes his arm, and they exit through door she entered. As light changes dimming upstage and spotting downstage conference table, as remaining visitors stroll through the room.*

YOUNG MALE #1

To his companion.
Is this American, or what?”

FEMALE COMPANION

...don’t know.

◆◆◆

SCENE II

“New Panels”

Two men dressed head to toe in black enter from opposite wings and begin to clear
the stage.

Musical change evoking Paris, 1836 (a Chopin Prelude). Late spring. Lights up and
bright, filtering through open windows in SOPHIE’s bedchamber. Two 19th-century
workmen enter upstage carrying toolbags and begin to install a wall panel. The
ARCHITECT, in luxurious clothes, enters upstage left. SOPHIE reappears through
the double door.

ARCHITECT (from 19th century)

Bonjour, Madame Baronne. Comment ça va?

SOPHIE

Extending her hand, which he kisses.

Monsieur. I am pleased to see the workmen have arrived. It has been days since they
have been here. Must I remind you that I cannot proceed until the panels are complete?

ARCHITECT (from 19th century)

Of course not, Madame. I do apologize for the delay. The men have been waiting for the
panels that arrived earlier this morning, as you see (he waves a hand toward the workers).

SOPHIE: Bon, bon.

The two craftsmen collect their tools and exit, followed by the ARCHITECT who
bows farewell to SOPHIE. She remains on stage as lights dim to the rising sounds of jangling harnesses, clopping horse hooves, and carriage wheels clattering on the cobbles outside on the square of the Place Vendôme. The odor of horse manure makes its way to the audience.

◆ ◆ ◆

SCENE III

“A Lost Opportunity”

Lights brighten over conference table. TERESA shuffles papers, checks audio equipment, and waits for JOE. She wears a predominantly black outfit: black skirt, black tights, black shoes. JOE enters. He is fitted in menswear from Santa Barbara’s, The Territory Ahead (“Exceptional clothing for life’s adventures.”) They greet each other, and he takes a seat.

TERESA

Do you think of the Régence Room as a historical representation, or an aesthetic representation?

JOE

I view it as really a lost opportunity . . . the way it’s currently displayed it’s not only not an educational tool but it’s also very misleading and confusing, so if . . . a visitor that does have some sense of . . . of architecture of that period and that country walks through there, they’re scratching their head just wondering, “what the heck has gone on here?” So, I think it’s really a disservice to . . . to the museum visitor.

TERESA

Mm hm . . .

JOE

I think that . . . the majority of the visitors at the Getty Museum are not there to see
French period rooms, they’re there to see Impressionist paintings or the architecture or something, and I think the details of the installation of that room is lost on the vast majority of the visitors to the museum. But I think that doesn’t give us any excuses. I think that we should be faithful enough to that object, if I can refer to that whole room as an object, to install it in an accurate way that will allow those that are interested to learn from it, and I think it should be done to a level at which, you know, an educated visitor can confirm what they already know or pick up additional information from it.

TERESA

Do you have any idea how that might be achieved?

JOE

Huh . . . hmmm. I guess the first thing, would be to . . . to my mind, would be to first arrange it in a historically accurate way—as a bedroom with the silk damask at the end, the two-thirds of the room in which the bed sat with the doors aligned enfilade, and there are some historic panels that never got installed and are in storage. I would install it accurately first, and the Getty has a great Régence bed in storage that could be installed there in a case, or something. It’s not impossible. It’s got very light-sensitive textiles, bed-hangings. It’s one of the great beds in this country, and it should be out. The V&A just installed a couple of beds in their new British galleries. You can figure it out, you know, if you really want to. It would probably have to be behind a vitrine to protect from light. That bed would be such a key component to making the visitor understand this, sort of, cozy, textile-laden end of the room. So, I think that would be an important addition to the gallery, and I know, at the time of the opening of the Getty, there was much discussion about labeling and gallery cards, and things, and in the end because of the administration’s take on labels at the time, they’re pretty minimal. I would love to see either some gallery cards that contrast this space, you know, the period room, with the adjacent spaces and big old labels talking about maybe the division of . . . of the Régence design and their use of molding and how those moldings may differ from those used in the Rococo period. (coughs) I know there are a lot of curators and actually museum administrators at the Getty that really feel that the objects should speak for themselves. I guess, I just don’t agree with that take. Certain people learn well that way but a lot of people really need to be pointed in a certain direction. So, I would say that that’s key to being a useful tool for . . . for informing the public about French Régence architecture.

TERESA

Mm hm. Um, you’ve talked a little bit about how you’d like to see the room interpreted but what about the general public’s take on it? What would you like them to know about
the room?

JOE

Well . . .

TERESA

Is there something that really jumps out that you think would be great for them to take away from a visit?

JOE

Let me kick that around for just a second here.

TERESA

Of course.

Pause.

JOE

Well, clearly this room and the entire Getty decorative arts collection is indicative of a certain class in eighteenth-century France, and while the Getty is a fine arts museum and therefore they buy the best art work, decorative art work of a given period which was generally purchased by the very wealthy, you know, you can’t expect that the Getty is going to really show how a vast part of the French population lived at that time. But it does have the means, and the objects to represent very well this upper, upper class of French culture at that time. I think they should do that but I think it should be made clear . . . that the wealthy are the people that lived with this room. Maybe it's because I’m a conservator, I take sort of a technical look of things. I think one way to illustrate that is to talk about the enormous amount of work that goes into producing like this paneled room, all of the carving and the layers of gilding, and the work that goes into that gilding and the expense of the silk-lined room. I guess (laughs) I’m not really answering your question exactly but . . .
TERESA

I think you are, I think you are!

JOE

... I think it could be a tool to talk about culture on a broader front, but to get there, to make those points, I think you have to talk about the object in a very detailed way.

TERESA

What do you think of the criticism about museums with regard to showing one point of view, not allowing for multiple interpretations of the space because each visitor that comes into the galleries is a unique individual with unique knowledge and so forth, and if a room only is allowing for one point of view it’s essentially negating all others?

JOE

Mm hm.

TERESA

In other words, do you think that one version is better, or multiple versions?

JOE

I guess I, um, would argue for ... a single installation but to my mind that doesn’t mean a single narrative.

TERESA

Can you please elaborate?

JOE

I think you can tell many stories from one prop. And, I don’t think the prop should be changed because the prop is what it is.
TERESA

Right.

JOE

And when I say that, I’m pulling from a prop that is an accurate reinterpretation of the room as it was. Although we only know what the architecture was, so, in terms of moving the objects around the room, I think you could have many narratives, or many sort of settings. But I don’t see why that same one installation can’t tell you about…can’t engage those interested in the sleeping patterns in eighteenth-century France . . .

TERESA

Right . . .

JOE

. . . or people that are interested in molding profiles, or people that are interested . . . in the formality of entertaining guests in Europe in bedchambers, you could just go in a zillion different directions, it seems to me, with that one prop, but I think it’s more the role . . . well, I was going to say of the education department . . . but clearly there’s got to be a lively narrative going on between the curatorial, conservation, and education departments for that to happen. That’s the ideal, I suppose.

TERESA

How do you think that could happen? Whether at your current institution or what you know of the Getty, hypothetically speaking?

JOE

Whew! Some personnel changes (laughs)!

TERESA

*Laughs.*
JOE

... and I think they’ve already gone down that road.

TERESA

Uh huh . . .

JOE

There’s such a long history of interpretation belonging to curatorial that it’s a tough thing to change. There are turf battles, not only at the Getty but every museum I’ve ever been around. Curators . . . you know, they are the historians, they bring an understanding to these objects that is very important, but conservators know the physical evidence that an object holds better than anyone, and educators know methods by which to relay this information to people, so there should be interpretation committees or something that bring all these people to the table. Who’s going to chair this meeting? (laughs) The historical roles of these different departments have to be dealt with, or wrestled with. I think there’s a new generation of curators and educators and conservators that are coming along that see these roles as being a little more fluid than past generations . . . I hope.

Two young women enter the room and look around and read labels.

YOUNG FEMALE VISITOR #1

To her friend.

Could you live here?

TERESA

Unaware of young women.

Uh . . . is there anything else you’d like to comment on?

JOE

No. Well, I guess that I just would add that although I am fairly critical of the installation of that room, I think the building of that museum was . . . was an enormous task and the administration was involved in thousands and thousands of decisions. I think it’s understandable what happened. I think, though, they’ve been open for five years now . . .
it’s probably time to begin thinking about correcting errors, and . . . and think that would not be a bad error to correct . . . the installation of that room. I think that looking at interpretation as a group would allow this important period room to tell many stories, and I think that it would give the education department a little more freedom in how they . . . they talk to their public (laughs).

TERESA

I have another question that you’ve just raised for me . . .

JOE

Sure . . .

TERESA

What makes the room important to you?

JOE

Oh . . .

Laughs

. . . well, um . . . to me. (Pause.) To me?

TERESA

Yeah.

JOE

To me . . .

(Pause.)

I’m a wood carver and I admire, you know, the craftsmanship that went into producing that room. So, I admire it first in that way. I went to the Getty in 1991 and knew very little about European architecture. Those rooms were my introduction, and they did open a door for me. Of course, I wasn’t a visitor, I was working with the head conservator, and he gave me opportunities to travel in Europe to see these wonderful buildings, but I
think that room can be a sort of a keyhole for people to get interested in architecture. It’s a doorway to a wonderful world. I guess, those rooms do represent, for me personally, they represent this entryway, as it were.


SCENE IV

“IT WAS SIMPLY A BACKDROP”

_A musical change from Chopin to Tomasz Stanko Quartet’s, “Lontano, Part 1.”_

Spotlight on conference table. Seated and about to begin another meeting are TERESA, JOE, JOHN R. The architect is dressed in a white oxford shirt, navy blue blazer, a solid color tie, probably patterned in some shade of blue, loose around his neck, khakis, nubucks, and argyle socks. R. CARLHIAN wears a Brioni suit, circa 1950. CHARISSA wears a dark blue pant suit with white merino sweater and black, low-heeled shoes. Her dark, short-trimmed hair is tucked behind her ears. DIANE has an unusual silk scarf draped around her neck, accenting her sage green pant suit. JOHN W. arrives later. SOPHIE is dimly visible at the edge of the lighted area behind the conference table, looking as she did in 1836. She advances into the scene, becoming more visible when she speaks in response to JOHN R.’s comment about no one living in the Régence Room.

A lone FEMALE VISITOR has been in the room over two minutes, looking all around and moving from far door to near door. She walks up to the tapestry and grabbing the corner nearest her, flips it over and looks at the underside. She turns it back and forth again, the movement of which causes ripples to move across the middle and top of tapestry. Oblivious to this bold move, the Security Officer stands in the downstage doorway watching two other visitors in the room who are wearing audioguides.

TERESA

Thanks for meeting with me today.

JOE

I hope it’s useful in your study. I think it’s great that you’re undertaking this, and think
it’s a really interesting, um, if not politically sensitive issue and I hope that in the end it means that the Getty and other museums will do something to bring these period rooms to life. It’s funny, I was just down at the Baltimore Museum a few weeks ago, and I walked through their . . . they have . . . I don’t know . . . countless American period rooms. They’re so stale and there’s nobody in them!

JOHN R.

You know, you have chosen a very unusual topic, don’t you think?

TERESA

*Flustered.*

I do, but I’m also working . . . I live a very insular existence . . . and I don’t get enough feedback to . . . to know what many people think about it.

JOHN R.

Yeah, I think it’s an unusual topic, period rooms in general, there’s a connoisseurship aspect to it. I mean, the cultural and social history of having museums at all. The whole idea of having a museum, what is it? Why do we do that? And the investment, that’s some of the most expensive square footage constructed at any time—this museum.

TERESA

*Looking around the table at each person.*

OK . . . so . . . do you have knowledge of the decisions that led to the room’s current display?

ROBERT CARLHIAN ENTERS *through double doors and stands next to the chimneypiece.*

JOE

I can’t say that I was always sitting in the room when they were made, but I, you know, was sort of behind the scenes during a lot of that, and I remember . . . as with most interpretation issues, the decision-making usually falls to the curatorial department in museums and that was the case in this installation. The curator made it very clear that her
desire was to have a backdrop, sort of a stage set, to display the Getty’s collection of French furniture of that period. She was not so concerned about reproducing the period installation scheme in this installation. So, in a way, the installation of this room was not to be so different from the other surrounding galleries. It was simply a backdrop that sort of evoked a sense of that period . . . I think to the casual visitor. Anyway, getting back to your question, that was the curator’s initial take. The head conservator, and I along with him, felt strongly that, as I said earlier, it should be represented as it was originally. There was a pretty heated discussion about this that went on really, literally to the day that the contractors that were competing for the contract to install these rooms showed up at the Villa, because I remember madly supplying documents to him that morning as he was going into a discussion with the chief curator. The architect, who the curator relied on heavily for how this room was going to be installed, had proposed this very symmetrical installation and, um, we were arguing for the asymmetrical installation with the textile at one end where the bed had originally been located. I had scanned in copies of all the drawings that had been done, I think by Carlhian at the time of the deinstallation of the room, and I color-coded them to show what was original and what panels we had and I remember the head conservator had to go off to a meeting the morning that those contractors showed up to argue this point with the chief curator. But in the end, or that day, the decision was to go with architect’s installation . . . the architect and curator’s installation plan.

ROBERT CARLHIAN

Responding proudly to JOE, who neither sees nor hears him.

Oui, oui. They are our drawings.

TERESA

Speaking to JOHN R.

Well, in the case of the Régence Room, can you talk a little bit about the decisions made to install it in its current configuration as a room with only a few original panels, no more nineteenth-century panels . . . modern panel replacements . . . ?

JOHN R.

Right. There was a lot of discussion on that, and a lot of it came down to making sure, subtly, that the visitors who wanted that kind of information . . . that it could be . . . that you could get that kind of information . . . what was original, what wasn’t . . . from the room itself without a lot of, sort of, didactic labels trying to explain what’s behind a room like that.
ROBERT CARLHIAN exits, shaking his head from side to side.

TERESA

Still a bit discomposed, turning to CHARISSA.

In your support role, do you recall in any of the discussions as a department ... um ... uh ... underlying themes for a particular gallery, whether it be one of the paneled rooms or one of the other gallery spaces?

CHARISSA

The Régence Room had always been a foil for the objects to be displayed in it. In the Villa there was not an intent to recreate its prior incarnations. Not that we were necessarily aware of them. We had some drawings from ... we may not have had drawings from Duveen and Norton Simon but eventually some came down, elevations from Carlhian to us. But the curator had always perceived the room to be a backdrop for her installation. It was never intended then or subsequently here at the site to be “a period room.” It was evocative. For instance, if it were to be installed as a salon, there’s three commodes and only four chairs and a bureau plat, that assemblage of objects was not consistent with the residential space in the 17th, 18th, or 19th centuries, so it was always intended to be a foil for the collection display. Um, were there discussions about how to achieve that? There were but I was not part of them.

TERESA

Speaking to everyone at the table

OK. Um, so in the description that CHARISSA just gave about these objects in the Régence Room not being representative of a late-17th, early-18th century interior, what is it a representation of then? How would you describe that display?

DIANE

I think the Régence Room, and overall rooms, um, the galleries at the Getty, were a bit of a hybrid but more emphasized the artistic aesthetic [than historical]. Putting objects of a particular style together so that you could see across a, uh, an array of objects ... similarities that you’d be able to make some visual comparisons, and, uh, make some sense of how things would go together. For example, the rooms don’t work as, kind of historically, to say, “this is what a drawing room would have looked like” or a certain
type, a public room would have looked like particularly. Because we’ve got too many commodes in them or there are not enough chairs or, you know, the lighting is exactly right . . . certainly, and that’s hard for the public to understand. And so, you want to be careful not to say “this is what it would have . . . this is a bedroom”, you know, there . . . we don’t have a bedroom because that’s not what our collection supports. So, I think that’s a challenge, so it’s more about an aesthetic artistic combination so that you could see a style and sorts of things that might have been together in a particular room and, insofar as we have the architectural elements, somewhat of the relationship between the architecture and the objects, the furnishings of the room . . . the textiles, the, um, the furniture itself, the carpet, you know, that kind of thing. For example, you could get a sense, in the mirrored rooms, with lighting, but you couldn’t get a complete sense, I mean, you know, you could have sense of, you know, where a window would be and the idea of reflected light and the idea of light coming from several sources and how for a public room that would be, you know, important, and so the glow of a central, you know, chandelier—one thing—but reflected in, you know, a mirror, wall sconces, you know, displayed so that, again, the light is reflected and refracted, and that kind of sense you could bring out for visitors by looking at the room but you’re not literally looking at the room in its particularities. It’s a little generalized.

CHARISSA

It’s difficult for me to describe it. I think it still serves as a foil for the objects in the space. It also introduces architectural elements of a quite specific date but they’re out of context of their original setting. They do not survive en suite, or if they do they’re dispersed. So I’m speaking now of the boiserie paneling . . . so it is a museum gallery, it has—as opposed to a painted drywall or fabric-covered wall—a paneled surface, so these panels are old, others are modern . . .

DIANE

Well, certainly some. The idea that we had part of the panels, that what we had been looking at in Malibu wasn’t original, and so, wanting to make it more true to its original source, so that being a factor would strongly impact decisions. I mean, I think that was one of the key decisions, that there was a serious rationale behind that.

CHARISSA

It’s certainly not historical in presentation, it’s removed from its original context. It does not have its original furnishing although there are inventories for what they were in the 1730-40 period. We do have photographs of the mid-19th century installation. You have to remember that this room was never frozen in time. It had its own life and subsequent uses, subsequent owners, and reconfigurations so . . . it’s, it’s a living, it’s a living object,
in other words, it will probably have future incarnations than the present. I could easily see that, um, so, it’s not historical in that sense. Is it artistic, is it aesthetic? I hesitate to group it under the Dupont model because it is not suggestive of a revival. This particular room—gallery—it’s wrong to call it a room, this gallery is not a revival, it’s a display of some old remnants of a room. And if . . . it’s wrong to present it as an aesthetic or artistic interpretation of what was there in the past. It’s a late-20th century installation of 1725 panels.

TERESA

OK. In my research, years prior to speaking to you today, I have referred to the Régence Room, and the other rooms of its ilk at the Getty Museum, as period rooms. And other museums in the United States have similar spaces that I’ve always referred to as period rooms, and there are many publications, whether books or articles, that also use that term. So . . . I have found in my conversations with all of you that another term is used, paneled rooms. I have become confused and want to get some clarification. Could you help me out and let me know . . .

CHARISSA

I’ll give my perspective, it’s by no means speaking for other people, or I don’t present it to be inclusive of all ideas out there, but, you’re right, these sorts of installations of paneling in museums acquired the term period room, because I think the designers of these spaces wanted to suggest a certain time and period, and the room component was devoid of its context, so, we . . . for instance, it’s not a historic house, it’s not a historic palace or government building. It’s just the boiserie or the paneling from one of those historic houses which may have been subsequently demolished or lost completely by fire. The boiserie survives and it was reinstalled in an attempt to suggest a period, as if it were, a snapshot in time and, and I think people, people in museum curatorial ranks realize that this was inaccurate because a period room is stopping the clock at a certain date. This room, these panels have existed from 1727 and it’s now 2003. If you were to stop the clock at 1739, it would have a certain appearance. If you stopped the clock at 1841, it would have another appearance. That would be a different period. Um, we . . . the curatorial ranks, began to realize how deceptive this word period was because within the museum installation the objects displayed were predated or postdated that snapshot . . . very particular span of years. So, it I think it gave, I think it confused visitors and I think it’s much more accurate to say now paneled room. In other words, a gallery which is fitted with paneling and with proper labeling and if the visitor takes advantage of the various audioguide or gallery cards or gallery labels offered . . . if they’re motivated they can take an interest and learn what we mean by a paneled room. It’s just another object in that gallery space.
DIANE

I think we thought there was both an affective reaction to period rooms and a . . . I know at Philadelphia, where we also had a large number of those rooms, too, we always struggled with that phrase “period rooms” because again it seemed to evoke for the general public, I don’t know, tableaus almost that you could walk by and there would be a little vignette, you know, and you’d just walk by and they would have been miniatures, you know, for all the . . . you know, the Thorne Rooms at the Chicago Art Institute . . . or you know, the American period rooms at the Met, you know, people have this vision of, you just sort of walk by in a forced march and, you know, they’re little things, so, that’s often on people’s minds, and it’s kind of a negative connotation. I think when I think of the word *period rooms*, I think of a room organized to evoke the ambience, um, of a particular time and place, and that contains objects from that time and place. At the Getty we tried to be very careful though, because really in some cases we were looking at paneled rooms, rooms that had, in fact the architectural installation from a particular place, and it was really and separate that from a place where you’re trying to evoke something and to be very guarded or careful about not evoking erroneously by making up stuff.

CHARISSA

No, no, no. I’ll interject something here. Just like a painting or another work of art which has its original paint surface but maybe has later varnishes or later touch-ups or in an art object, a decorative arts object let’s say it’s being re-gilded, that later treatment becomes integral with that object and is part of its history. And removing or altering the subsequent additions or layers or stratum is an ethical decision. How much documentation does one have of the existing state? Is the existing state detrimental? Is it deteriorating? Is its appearance misleading? Could it be done over or superseded with a more accurate or more informed interpretation of what was there originally? All of these questions come into the play of the ethical decision of what to do. And, I think in this case, the weeding out of the later panels was fine, was done with the knowledge of deciding what was old, what was less old, what was more recent but to deaccession those panels . . . I question the ethics of that.

TERESA

Mm hm. But why not use the nineteenth-century panels?

JOHN R.

I don’t think there’s a yes or no answer to that, in the sense that using the nineteenth-
century panels would have been bad. It’s a decision.

TERESA

Mm hm. How about it being displayed . . .

JOHN R.

. . . if it was to have paneling that was less ornamented, uh, when it’s not original . . . and that would be the sign, you know, the distinction, between what’s period paneling and what’s new.

TERESA

Right.

JOHN R.

Whereas the nineteenth-century stuff had all been carved in the imitation of the eighteenth-century stuff.

TERESA

Right.

JOHN R.

So that was the difference and that was the decision, to have less ornament in subtle contrast with the eighteenth-century paneling.

TERESA

She checks her notes, then raises her eyes to look at everyone at the table. Then she asks . . .

How about the room being displayed now as a salon instead of a bedchamber, like the room had been originally?
JOHN W.

There were conversations about the installation of the room as a bedroom, or a salon, and the decision was to go with the salon. Were there any (pause) was there any possibility of the room, you know, alternating display—six months like this or six months like that—no, no, there there was no discussion of using that room. I mean, somebody may change it. Some future curator may decide, ah, wait a minute now, there’s a way to show the yellow bed there, let’s put the Régence Room right finally and go all the way to the Bruno Pons scheme. Let’s do away with its present furnishing. That could happen.

TERESA

Mr. Robbins, what are your thoughts?

JOHN R.

Well, (laughs) it’s a . . . the paneling is on exhibit. How do you do things? You mount them as if the individual panels are works of art. I guess, first of all, how many panels can you mount as a work of art? Also, they were not created as . . . panels were not created as individual works of art they were created as, um, a set of panels. Paneling is not . . . I can see it going either way. To a certain extent the use of the . . . Again, the rooms are a setting for the collection, so if the panels can be displayed and it can be discussed . . . I can’t remember whether it is in the text panels or not, for the Régence Room . . . but the panels can be displayed as, um, you know, the backdrop, in a sense, for the collection and people can still see authentic eighteenth-century French boiserie, and I’m thinking, you know, is that a problem for the visitor that they’re not seeing it arranged as a bedroom? Not for me. This isn’t . . . you know, I’ve also done historic houses where everything’s intact. And there’s . . . that’s different from this. This is . . . it’s in a new building . . . things on exhibit, the furniture’s obviously (laughs) not from the building it’s in. It’s not as if a family lived in the museum.

SOPHIE

She has slowly advanced into the room, listening to each speaker. She stands beside JOHN R., who obviously does not see her.

And what of my friends and I?
TERESA

*Pauses, as if she heard* SOPHIE.

So . . . is it through your involvement with the architect’s office that you came to be involved in the . . .

JOHN R.

Right, because when that project came, I had substantial preservation experience and to a certain extent this project was viewed as a preservation project. It certainly had a preservation component.

TERESA

And is that predominantly because of the paneled rooms?

SOPHIE

*Springs to JOHN R.’s other side. Sophie’s lowly British origins crack her French veneer.*

Bollocks! What have you preserved?! My panels are gone . . . my things . . . bloody hell, all of my things . . . gone!

*Gripping the back of his chair, SOPHIE struggles to regain her composure.*

JOHN R.

That’s correct. At the outset of the project, it was not, um, it was not exactly known how many rooms would be *pause* paneled rooms, you know, period paneled rooms, and there was a certain amount of discovery in how these would be used, what sort of condition were they in, could they be used, that kind of thing.

SOPHIE *sweeps through double doors stage right, exits. Gathering their things from the table, TERESA, JOE, JOHN R., CHARISSA, and DIANE exit through the audience.*

Blackout.

◆ ◆ ◆
SCENE V

“Visual Delight”

As in previous scenes with visitors, exhibition developers, TERESA, and SOPHIE, there are overlapping narratives. The ghosts can see each other but are unseen by everyone else. This scene opens over a Chopin Mazurka, and our first encounter is with American philosopher John DEWEY, who is pacing the Savonnerie carpet while he talks. He’s wearing his don’s robes over a proper nineteenth-century suit and tie.

TERESA enters carrying a brief case. As she sits down, she begins to unpack and set up audio-recording equipment, a tablet of paper, a pencil, and a plastic bottle of water. She is wearing a museum-y kind of “uniform”: short black skirt, white T-shirt, black cardigan, a long silk scarf of unusual color & design wrapped around her neck, black stockings, and black trendy shoes with a sensible low heel.

JOHN W., JEFFREY, and JOHN R. enter. JOHN W. is tall and lanky with tousled greying blond hair, though youthful with smiling, mischievous eyes behind wire-rimmed glasses. He’s wearing gray slacks, light blue oxford shirt, sleeves rolled up, a Brooks Brothers tie, and loafers. JEFFREY wheres a blue pin-striped dress shirt, yellow tie, khaki pants, and penny loafers. JOHN R. is dressed as in previous scene.

DEWEY

Every perception and every idea is a sense of the bearings, use, and cause, of a thing. We do not really know a chair or have an idea of it by inventoring and enumerating its various isolated qualities, but only by bringing these qualities into connection with something else—the purpose which makes it a chair and not a table; or its difference from the kind of chair we are accustomed to, or the “period” which it represents, and so on.

Two male/female couples enter room from audience. They stop and look around. They separate to look at different views of the room.

FEMALE VISITOR #2

Reading the label, then looking at the desk chair.

It’s for a man.
MALE VISITOR #2

Everybody else was basically living in mud huts.

JOHN W.

We wanted as much as possible settings that would honor and reflect their original use and purpose . . .

MALE VISITOR #3

Talking to his female companion and pointing at the desk chair.

This here is probably original.

JOHN W.

. . . and as much as we could signal to the viewers their relationships to each other when those existed.

MALE VISITOR #3

Pointing at the stool.

But this here isn’t.

JOHN W.

Then, with as much historical accuracy as possible try to make for groupings that would nevertheless give an idea of the placement and a signal of the purpose that the objects were put in. It’s very hard to find complete ensembles and that kind of general unity of aesthetic should be either retained if one is lucky enough to be able to retain it or imitate it if that’s what you have to do.

MALE VISITOR #2

Reading label.

It doesn’t say.
MALE VISITOR #3

*Pointing to pier glass above chimneypiece.*

You could put a big wide screen TV right there . . .

DEWEY

By common consent, the Parthenon is a great work of art. Yet it has aesthetic standing only as the work becomes an experience for a human being.

MALE VISITOR #3

. . . with surroundsound.

MALE VISITOR #2

*Standing near the desk chair commenting on its upholstery.*

That’s what Jim’s couch is going to look like in 350 years.

JOHN R.

Just look at people’s . . . you know, stand in the galleries and listen to what people say. That’s what I’ve done.

FEMALE VISITOR #3

*Finally responding to MALE VISITOR #2.*

Yeah, this is probably original.

TERESA

*Responds to JOHN R.*

Yeah, I’ve done that.
JOHN R.

It’s beautiful. And you know, you’ll hear, “oh I really like this stuff, I wouldn’t want to have it in my house . . . imagine dusting this” (laughs).

Two women enter and start looking around the room. They do not speak.

TERESA

Laughing.
Yeah . . . yeah . . .

FEMALE VISITOR #4

I would love to have this rug!

JOHN R.

But that’s all, I think, a positive response. People are seeing something that’s very unusual, an expression of western civilization that is very surprising to them.

CHARISSA and JEFFREY enter from the audience, and quietly join the meeting; some acknowledgement from others present. Two women exit.

TERESA

Yeah, I agree. I guess it’s my bias but I feel that the rooms . . . that there could be more, um, that more could be done, pedagogically, to change them for visitors so that they aren’t these static spaces.

JOHN R.

Yeah, I think that the decorative arts galleries, I think the Getty Museum, the new museum in general, it . . . the idea . . . this is my personal observation, obviously, I’m not speaking for the Museum or for the Trust when I say this, but it is in the tradition of museums where the objects speak for themselves, that people can have their own personal unmitigated experience with the objects.
TERESA

No interference of any kind from the outside, it’s an aesthetic response . . .

JOHN R.

Correct . . .

TERESA

. . . between the viewer and the object?

JOHN R.

. . . the object, that’s correct. The decorative arts galleries, I think that the curator’s, again my own personal observation not speaking for her, that she wanted to provide the richest experience in the sense that the visitor would see these very fine objects in a setting that heightened the aesthetic appreciation . . .

TERESA

. . . mm hm . . .

JOHN R.

. . . versus putting them on a pedestal in an otherwise blank room, kind of thing.

DEWEY

Many a person who protests against the museum conception of art, still shares the fallacy from which that conception springs. For the popular notion comes from a separation of art from the objects, and scenes of ordinary experience that many theorists and critics pride themselves upon holding and even elaborating.

ANDRÉ and ROBERT CARLHIAN enter through double door downstage stage right. Both men are trés chic, circa 1950. They move about the room, touching the furnishings and the carving on the panels.
A young girl enters through audience. Looking in the mirror, she fusses with her hair. Looks around room, then returns to mirror for more fussing. She leaves the room but returns moments later and makes faces at herself in the mirror, peering at her teeth.

TERESA

Giving the visitors a context?

JOHN R.

That’s right, but a rich a context and not a . . .

JEFFREY

Well, the galleries, I mean, I liked . . .

JOHN R.

. . . it was not supposed to be anything that was, “oh we didn’t want to do it fully so we just sort of . . . we had a cornice and nothing else.”

JEFFREY

I liked the concept of the galleries in Malibu, and taken to a greater extent here, which was to try and show these objects in a . . .

JOHN R.

It’s very complete right down to “oh we’ll do faux finish on the columns,” kind of thing, “we won’t just do a period architecture setting and then paint it white as if we didn’t really have faith in it.”

JEFFREY

. . . give a sense of the context in which they were originally made.
JOHN R.

It’s done very completely.

◆ ◆ ◆

SCENE VI

“Layers of Complexity”

A noisy group enters and moves back and forth.

YOUNG FEMALE VISITOR #1

Speaking to those in her group.

SSShhhhh. Let’s sit down, my feet hurt.

Noisy group exits without delay.

BRIAN enters, joining the group at the conference table. He’s dressed with flair and wears striking spectacles. He is carrying a large tablet of paper, a pen, and a paper cup of coffee, the aroma of which wafts toward the audience.

TERESA

In the case of the Régence Room, there are, um, few panels that are original, and in the current installation there are modern panels that fill up those gaps, so technically speaking the panels that remain do not make up a room whereas the Ledoux room does and the Vendôme room does. Am I making myself clear?

BRIAN

When people ask me my advice about the process that we have been through here, the first thing that I say is that the big mistake that we made was that we never sat down as a group . . . that group would include the director, the associate director, the curator, the conservator, the architect . . . and discussed how these objects were going to be
interpreted, what we felt that they meant, what role they played in the exhibition of the collection and how we were going to interpret them. We just flew right over all of those questions.

*Upstage a male, female, and young boy enter and read center label panel.*

**MALE VISITOR #4**

Pretty, huh?

*He exits and returns a moment later.*

When they’re hanging on the wall, they’re a sconce.

*Reading a label.*

Where’s the casket?

**BOY #1**

Do you think if you touch anything alarms would go off?

**MALE VISITOR #4**

Oh, I don’t know, it’s possible. I wouldn’t want to try.

*They move to exit, but BOY #1 stops to take digital picture of himself while looking in the mirror.*

**BRIAN**

We never had one conversation about it as a group until we were locked in this very heated argument about how we would iron out those questions. And at that time the clock was ticking. We had not done our homework, and it was a very difficult situation but we never had the foresight to realize that we needed to iron those things out before we started writing specifications and doing drawings. By the time we realized the importance of sorting those issues out, we had a tremendous amount of time pressure that we were working under.

*A group of visitors enter; two stop to read a label.*
FEMALE VISITOR #5

Looking up at the tapestry.

Oooh, that’s cool.

MALE VISITOR #4

Speaks while exiting room.

So, each of the rooms has walls, then, I mean they did then…

Natty guy strolls through downstage door, pauses to adjust his tie in mirror and then exits through same door.

TERESA

So, the people involved in making those decisions were . . . ?

JOHN W.

The curator proposing, the chief curator taking *de facto* leadership and supervision that grew and grew and grew during the course of the project, and myself.

BRIAN

We had a complete set of drawings from the architect which he was very wedded to, which the curator really liked, which you [the director] really liked, and so, we really had to iron those questions out almost retrospectively. You also have to bear in mind that the Régence Room was installed in the museum in Malibu so we never had the opportunity to study it.

TERESA

When you say study it, do you mean you’re really peering at the molding and carving, examining the front and back of the panels?

Enter MALE VISITOR #5 carrying LITTLE GIRL #2.
BRIAN

Looking at what was old and what was new. Because it was very, very complicated. When we finally did that, we learned that there, you know, were something like five generations of panels in our possession. Then there were two mirrors that we found on the market in San Francisco that we raced up and bought. The dealers who had them had known all along that they were part of a room that was on view in the Getty Museum, and they’d never even contacted the curator, and it was only years later that the associate conservator unearthed paperwork that demonstrated that those two mirrors for which we paid one hundred thousand dollars, practically on the spot, had been given to Bekins Moving & Storage Company by the museum in settlement for a bill for something like, you know, five hundred dollars because the curator couldn’t use them for the installation in the Villa when it opened.

MALE VISITOR #5

Wow, look at that!

LITTLE GIRL #2

*Looking up and pointing at the ceiling.*

What’s that?

MALE VISITOR #5

*Looking up.*

Don’t know. Could be a smoke detector.

BRIAN

*Not missing a beat.*

I mean the layers of complexity are intriguing. The time pressure was terrible because we had . . . you know, I blame myself for a lot of this. We had as a department . . . well, let me back up. We were exceedingly busy. The department was made up of four conservators, and the curators were acquiring at a tremendous pace. And here I’m talking about the period of greatest acquisition activity from say eighty-four to the stock market crash in eighty-seven. There were tremendous numbers of things being acquired, both panels and objects—sculpture and everything. We had a tremendous number of
treatments, and we really failed to realize the work that we would have to do on the paneling, and it was only when the architect had done his initial drawings of the galleries and it was time to write the specifications for all of it, and that including the wiring, and you know, the waterproofing of the walls, and everything. Part of that included the, uh, restoration of the paneling because it was a project of such complexity that from the beginning a decision had been made to fold that into, uh...basically it was part of the Getty Trust’s contract with Dinwiddie Construction Company. It was just like the earthmoving, and the sewage, the pouring of the contract, and everything, it was just, you know, a subsection of the work on the decorative arts galleries.

At the same time that a white-haired OLDER MALE #1 enters carrying a video-camera, so does DEWEY, carrying a book that he places on the chimneypiece. He takes a pocket watch from his vest pocket and fiddles with it while looking at the time on the inoperative mantel clock.

OLDER MALE #1

Pointing camera at things, he starts narrating . . .

This room is set up to look like a French castle around 1700 . . . beautiful furniture . . . this is a shot of the tapestry at the other end of the room . . . a room set up in the Regency style . . . aah it’s beautiful.

BRIAN

And so, after his plans had been accepted, the next stage was for him to produce a set of specifications for the work, that’s the way these projects are organized. All of them. And so, he turned to me at a meeting and said, “we’re going to need the specifications for the restoration of the panels from you, and we need it by such-and-such a date”, which might have been four months out. And, you know, at that time, there were four that ended up being installed . . . and there were . . . I think, three that were eliminated so this is seven quote-unquote rooms of panels.

FATHER #1 enters with his SON #1. They both wear audioguides around their necks.

FATHER #1

Pointing at the quills.

This is where somebody writes, right? That’s the way they used to write before pens . . .
see the feather?

SON #1

Where’s the ink?

FATHER #1

*Gesturing toward the inkwell.*

See the little cups? That’s where . . . . See the big rug?

*The boy looks down at the floor.*

FATHER #1

See the tapestry? See the ceiling? They used a lot of gold.

SON #1

*Pulling on his audioguide and walking toward the door.*

Let’s listen.

DEWEY

The Greeks acutely raised the question: How can we learn? For either we know already what we are after, or else we do not know. In neither case is learning possible; on the first alternative because we know already; on the second, because we do not know what to look for, nor if, by chance, we find it can we tell that it is what we were after. The dilemma makes no provision for *coming* to know, for learning; it assumes either complete knowledge or complete ignorance. Nevertheless the twilight zone of inquiry, of thinking, exists. The possibility of *hypothetical* conclusions, of *tentative* results, is that fact which the Greek dilemma overlooked.

*Three women have been standing in front of the tapestry.*

FEMALE #6

I see rectangles, circles, curved line, straight line . . .
FEMALE #8

... mm hmm ...

FEMALE #7

look at all the animals ... look at the birds.

DEWEY

_Picking up the thread of his discourse on learning._

The perplexities of the situation suggest certain ways out. We try these ways, and either push our way out, in which case we know we have found what we were looking for, or the situation gets darker and more confused—in which case, we know we are still ignorant. Tentative means trying out, feeling one’s way along provisionally. Taken by itself, the Greek argument is a nice piece of formal logic. But it is also true that as long as men kept a sharp disjunction between knowledge and ignorance, science made only slow and accidental advance. Systematic advance in invention and discovery began when men recognized that they could utilize doubt for purposes of inquiry, by forming conjectures to guide action in tentative explorations whose development would confirm, refute, or modify the guiding conjecture. While the Greeks made knowledge more than learning, modern science makes conserved knowledge only a means to learning, to discovery.

_Lights dim._

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SCENE VII

“Is it Fixed?”

_Two men enter downstage setting up the conference table and chairs. A medley of indistinct voices is heard from offstage as museum staff and consultants gather for another meeting._

_Four boisterous youths enter, and quickly exit, the Régence Room, three female, one male. Their exit crosses MOTHER and SON entrance._

_A MOTHER and SON enter and begin reading labels._
MOTHER #1

Some room, huh? You could play your violin in this room.

SON stands looking around.

Entering downstage, to join meeting in progress, GILLIAN, CHARISSA, JEFFREY, DIANE, THIERRY, JOHN W., HOWARD, MERRITT, DEBORAH, JOE, and JOHN R. GILLIAN is fitted in a one-of-a-kind outfit made in fabulously colored and textured silk and wool gabardine, reading glasses dangling around her neck; THIERRY projects French elegance; HOWARD is casual in his open-necked, long-sleeved blue denim shirt, brown corduroy pants, oxfords, and reading glasses hanging from his neck; MERRITT wears dark dress pants and a color-matched buttoned-up polo-necked cashmere sweater; DEBORAH is trim in a dark, tailored suit with knee-length skirt, light-colored blouse, and designer pumps with two-inch heels. The others are dressed as in previous scenes.

Lone young girl enters and walks toward the label stanchion. She leans forward, resting her head in her arms on right label panel, wearing audioguide and writing notes on paper using panel as a writing surface. A couple enters behind her.

FEMALE #9

Speaking to her male companion.

They don’t look like they’re rearranging this room too often . . .

TERESA

Do you think that the period room’s display is fixed? With the exception of, say, tapestries that . . .

All visitors make staggered exits through audience.

CHARISSA

You’re asking my personal opinion?
DIANE

Overall, the room to me seemed fixed.

CHARISSA

I am not going to speak for the museum, but, personally I would like to see changes. Some things are fixed. (Pause.) The poured concrete support walls definitely are fixed. In fact, I know in some cases they had to recess part of the concrete in order to get in those doors to the right of the mantelpiece. (Pause.) How fixed is the installation? I would hope that it isn’t permanently fixed because if the combined administration, curatorial, and conservation were to revisit this with an open mind I would engage a discussion in doing it differently. There was, even though I was only the supporting member of the department during the discussion of this installation, there was this sense of purity, to only install those panels known to be old, dating from seventeen twenty-five. And to only gild those elements which were adjoined to old panels. But there the purity ended. They reconfigured the panels to accommodate the architect’s symmetry, not of the room per se but of the decorative arts galleries. (Pause.) And the installation of the modern boiserie, I think, is harsh. (Pause.) I would like to play with the idea of re-introducing textiles. I admit that it would be one more modern insertion.

HOWARD

No. I don’t think the room is fixed. I think that someone coming along with an idea, I don’t know who’s, uh, I know John Walsh isn’t there anymore . . . I don’t know who’s running it now but I would hope they were open-minded enough to see this place as a living, you know, despite whatever historical documentation was there . . . when something new shows up then they have to have an open mind about being able to adjust it. We’re constantly learning.

A school group comprised of six girls, two boys and a teacher enter through audience. They walk through the room talking, looking around but not stopping. A few of the girls in the group pause to check themselves in the mirror as they pass by it. They exit through upstage doorway.

THIERRY

It’s not fixed but it has to be coherent, meaning that there are . . . it’s meant to, to serve, again, as backdrop, as a full object that comes from a specific period in decorative art history.
GILLIAN

*Matter-of-factly.*

Everything is fixed.

TERESA

All the galleries?

GILLIAN

Yes, because . . . the galleries were built for the collection. The collection’s static. I don’t have any in storage that I can take a thing off display and put something else in its place because I’m not acquiring anymore, which is a shame. I should be allowed to acquire more so that I can rotate things and make it more interesting. I’m adding little bits and pieces. I’m adding a clock. I’m adding the Meissen animals. I’ve bought some new tapestries, so there are things that appear that weren’t there before but basically, as far as the main objects are concerned they stay there. Except for the *bureau plât* in the Régence Room which I can . . . I’ve got three different *bureau plâts* I can have in there, and I can rotate them (*laughs*).

TERESA

. . . and the tapestry, too. Right?

GILLIAN

Yeah, the tapestry always gets . . . every two years the tapestries all get rotated for conservation purposes, and also because it’s nice to change. It’s the one thing we can change without too much of a hassle.

TERESA

Mm hm. Plus, I’ve also noticed that you have a couple of objects on loan. There’s the painting, and the candelabra. At least, during the holidays . . .

GILLIAN

. . . oh, yes, the painting’s on loan from Versailles because I sent them the Riesener *bureau plât*, it’s a horrible old dog, and you can have it, and they were so excited, and I got that . . . they said, you can choose a painting. They wouldn’t let me have any of the
paintings I chose because of course I wanted to have really good paintings, so I got that little . . . it’ll do, it looks quite nice, looks quite nice. All the loans you see in the galleries . . . everytime it says loan it is one man who’s been just . . . who is sending me all of this stuff, so the candelabra on the commode, and the wall lights on either side . . . those are the same man.

TERESA

Mm hm . . .

GILLIAN

And he also, if you go all through the galleries you can keep finding these things that he’s lent. Lots of clocks, and things like that. So, we don’t expect there to be, um, much serious changes going on.

TERESA

She wants the others’ opinions, too, so asks . . .

What do the rest of you think?

JOE

Certainly it’s not fixed. I don’t think any museum display is really fixed. It’s all temporary. It could be rearranged but there are a lot of issues like money and disrupting the gallery spaces. It’s a pretty major undertaking but something could be done.

DIANE

I think the question of a fixed space would be as to what purpose? Certainly some things have to get moved around for loan, conservation, or for, you know, light, and so on, but overall a sense to shift something, I think, wasn’t part of the concept, as far as I can see.

JEFFREY

Hesitates.

. . . and, well the display in general is pretty fixed.

Three women and two men enter through upstage door.
MALE VISITOR #5

To a female companion.

The best museum for period rooms is Brooklyn.

BRIAN

No. I don’t think any of these rooms is ever fixed. They change so much you cannot believe it. I would never say that. And I’ve got . . .

FEMALE VISITOR #10

Yeah, well, The Met is good, too.

The five visitors exit.

BRIAN

Continuing . . .

I’ve got designs on changing it. In fact, at one point in the discussions about how to install these rooms, the director said, “you know, you might be right but it might be for our successors to redo them.” And it could have gone that way because the discoveries that we made were so late in the process. I mean, one of the outcomes of this debate and of my success in convincing them to change them is that they had to pay the architect to produce a whole new set of drawings...at huge expense. And I give them tremendous credit because they never even mentioned that. They had to go to Harold Williams for the money, and I’ll bet you it was a whole lot of money.

TERESA

When I go into some of the other decorative arts galleries, they seem to be spaces that are generally fixed in relation to, say, other collections in the museum that rotate more often.

DEBORAH

I think that’s right. That’s absolutely right. No there wasn’t a lot of discussion about it. I believe it was assumed, particularly with the paneled rooms, that the installation would be more or less fixed and that even in the other galleries it would be more or less fixed. And there are two reasons for that. One, is that the collection, unlike the others, was
neither growing very rapidly, hence requiring us to rotate objects, nor is it a collection that by its very nature makes many loans, which together often signals a rotation in the installation. But I would say that the other reason is that the, then, curator had a very fixed view of the installation and I think that, to close that loop, it is something that I’ve been thinking about since the day we opened.

**TERESA**

Mm hm.

**DEBORAH**

And, I would be very interested in talking with the next curator about what the possibilities are for a more dynamic display. I don’t know that that would be a direction that we would take but I want to talk about it. And I would want someone in place who is more open to that.

**KAREN**

I would say that those rooms are considered fixed spaces, yeah. Not because anybody ever told me that. But those galleries haven’t changed much either.

**TERESA**

Right.

**KAREN**

Unless an object, like you said tapestries. I know that some tapestries were moved, but I think that those spaces were designed to pretty much stay as they were. Because I don’t think they were buying any decorative arts for quite a while. And, I know since we’ve been up on the hill, I recall the curator buying a few things . . . so . . . but if your collection is relatively fixed you would only be re-shifting things in a space.

**TERESA**

Right. But it also seems that there would be possibilities for playing around with certain spaces. Because, you know, you have certain objects in your collection and could make displays offering different relationships that have never been considered before.
KAREN

Absolutely you could do that. The spaces are beautiful. The curator’s efforts toward making those beautiful spaces . . . and the architect . . . they’re absolutely gorgeous spaces. But, I think just as you would look at an exhibition and bring a team together, again to think about, OK, here’s the exhibition material—let’s say it’s coming from someplace else—and . . . what do we want to emphasize? What is the big idea? What’s the focus? What will drive this space? And, if you had a really good team working together, I think perhaps some of the spaces including the period rooms might be re-done. But I can’t imagine that happening as things are now. It’s not to say there wasn’t a lot of time and effort put in to how those spaces would be arranged . . . I think there was. But education was really not involved with that.

MERRITT

The room is pretty static. Objects come in and out for photography. But another curator could change it . . .

JOHN R.

Right, right. I think that the ensemble is, by and large, fixed. Unless there was a big change in the emphasis on the collection that Gillian has already selected, her finest objects for display are in those fourteen rooms, I think it is, that’s the way it works out chronologically. Thierry’s work did not include the selection or arrangement of the objects on exhibit. Gillian reserved that to herself.

JOHN W.

Well, it is like all period rooms, um, an interpretation, and um, in this case severely affected by (pause) by the restrictions, by the necessities, let’s say, and by . . . no, no that’s not even true . . . it’s an interpretation that comes largely from the mind of the curator whose interpretation of the, the situation here—the contending forces, the contending desires—favors the function of gallery over architectural context . . . and original function, OK . . . and somebody else will feel differently. One thing you can be sure of is that somebody else will feel differently. The next person who comes in here whose really expert on French eighteenth furniture is going to re-think a lot of the curator’s decisions. That’s what happens.
TERESA

She hesitates.

OK.

Two young women enter the Régence Room and look around.

JOHN W.

And that person will make mistakes, too, but will be interpreting the whole time and will see these trade-offs in a different way because that’s all very time-bound, these decisions. The curator is a person of her time.

TERESA

Mm hm. Yes, I understand what you mean.

Black out.

◆ ◆ ◆

INTERMISSION

Musical change to the Tomasz Stanko Quartet’s, “Lontano, Part 2,” just several bars.

In Chapter One, I mentioned an encounter with Brian Considine that led me to pose an unscripted question to my other participants. During my conversation with him about defining what a period room is, Brian said that he thought the panels were art objects. So I asked my participants, do you think the panels are art objects? Bremer-David concurs with Considine that the panels are art objects. Weaver does also, and he gave the example of the seamless blending of eighteenth-century interior architectural design and furniture design, especially during the Rococo period. Godla’s opinion is that

footnote

I neglected to pose the question to Karen Giles. My only excuse is that I was carried away by our conversation, which of all my participants lasted the longest and focused on pedagogical issues more so than others.
The carving that was done on some of the paneling, at the Getty, is as fine a carving as you find in the various periods, and I most definitely think of them as art objects (personal communication, January 28, 2003).

Wilson claims the panels are art objects, but that they are treated differently. This is how she put it:

they’re not treated like the furniture. They’re happily re-painted and re-gilded. I mean, Brian is perfectly happy to re-gild paneling where he would not be happy to re-gild a chair. They’re made by a different Guild from the people who made . . . well, sometimes they are and sometimes they aren’t. I mean, you see, what is entertaining is you have a room—originally the chairs and the tables would be made by the same man who made the paneling. It would be all made to go together. But, you’re perfectly . . . you’re absolutely dead keen on not altering the surface of the chairs and the tables but the room that they were made for, oh, perfectly happy to slap on new paint and re-gild it. So they’re treated very differently but, of course, it’s an art object. It’s an accessioned object. It’s old. It’s designed. It’s made by craftsmen, and it does not have the same kind of aura as a piece of furniture (personal communication, March 5, 2003).

Brigham thinks the panels are art objects, but with the caveat that some are “more or less unique or aesthetically significant.” One of the consultants, Thierry Despont (personal communication, April 8, 2003), told me:

I consider them as historical artifacts. Clearly it depends on the extraordinary quality of the carving and the, the kind of, more or less, unity. I mean the Régence Room is a beautiful room. And it’s a coherent room. It is not a piece of the true cross. So, you’re dealing with different things. I mean, dealing with a restoration of a paneled room obviously can involve, as I’m sure you’re aware, numerous conservation reports and extreme care in selecting the firm that will be involved in its restoration and even the transport and the installation of the paneled room was obviously not given over to your regular cabinetmaker. But it’s quite a far cry from the handling of a Régence desk.

When I asked Walsh if he thought the panels were art objects, he laughed and said, “It’s a good question.” As you read his lengthy response below, you might agree
that his position suggests a bias long-held in the arts between art and craft, or in other
words, high art and low art.

I think all of our carved and gilded paneling is of such a high standard it
deserves to be treated with the care, documented and conserved the way
art objects are conserved. Does that make them art objects? No. We
could treat a coke bottle that way and it still wouldn’t be an art object. So
what are they? Well . . . they don’t have easy categories. They are not
independent works of art nor are they just décor. We prevent them from
being altered. We try to restore them as much as possible to their original
look. We put a lot of attention into how they were used, and we study
their various uses and misuses in times past, so, to an extent they’re like
art objects but they weren’t intended to have an independent life. They
were intended for much more . . . a combination of aesthetic and practical
purposes, and the eighteenth century, I think, had probably not anything
like the piety about their adaptation that we have.

We’ve tended to freeze them and to try to go back to one single state in
which they were originally, or soon after they were made. I think that
would have puzzled a lot of eighteenth-century, nineteenth-century people.
So we’re being purist. We’re being purist in another way . . . the more
naïve period room tends to strive for a kind of unification of type and size
and period. It tries to pretend that everything was of the same period in a
room that’s taken to be typical. Where, in fact, families lived then, the
way families live now, and had pieces that they inherited or that they
bought, that were old as well as pieces that were new. It’s true that a real
high-style room is likely to have started life as an ensemble but I think as
time goes things become much more of a mish-mash (personal
communication, March 5, 2003).

Sharing Walsh’s perspective on art versus craft is Robbins’ view that the
panels are “artistic” (personal communication, February 5, 2003).

There’s an artistic aspect, but art objects in the sense of a free expression .
. . fine arts expression . . . probably not. They’re more craft. They’re
done in a “tradition of.” You know, maybe the first paneled room was a
true work of art, but by the time you got years down the road people were
doing them because people wanted paneled rooms.

I pressed him by asking, “Do you think of the furnishings as works of
art?” After a little hesitation, Robbins surged ahead (personal communication,
February 5, 2003):

Gillian collects the finest examples of [furniture] and I think you’re either getting very close to works of art, or they are works of art because they are either from a designer or maker who was creating a style, or these are unique objects, there’s nothing like it. The level of creativity for many of the objects on display is much, much higher than for the paneling itself. But the paneling is . . . it’s certainly artistic. Whether they’re works of art, I think that could be discussed.

◆ ◆ ◆

SCENE VIII

“A Cool Chair”

Light change. Spot on conference table set with either a glass pitcher of water and glasses or plastic bottles of water and plastic glasses. The music for this change could be one of Chopin’s Waltzes or Mazurkas.

Music fades and JOHN W. and TERESA enter downstage right, both dressed as in earlier scenes. They are followed by HOWARD dressed in a NY suit and tie, THIERRY Paris chic, and JOHN R. in Ivy League attire.

Four older women enter downstage door and stand looking around.

HOWARD

. . . you know (clears throat), to, uh,

OLDER FEMALE VISITOR #2

Isn’t it pretty?

HOWARD

. . . you know, to decide on which rooms . . . to pick the objects to show how they would be mounted and all of that work, had to be very carefully done in mock-ups and drawings etcetera, to wind up with the, uh . . .
OLDER FEMALE VISITOR #3

To die for!

HOWARD

. . . final exhibition. And even the lighting was mocked-up. Everything was mocked-up to get approval of the curator and the director . . .

OLDER FEMALE VISITOR #4

Nodding her head at the bureau plât.

Wrap it up and I’ll take it!

SOPHIE enters through double doors, walks to the stool, and sits down on leather desk chair.

JOHN W.

. . . . try to extrapolate, anyway, guess, you might say . . . guess what new rooms might be added, and what new objects needed to be accommodated.

SOPHIE

Speaking to the audience.

Ah, I remember how they made my room there in Malibu . . . tapestries hung between panels I did not recognize, though I knew the four Beauvais tapestries, such romantic nonsense from Boucher’s Psyche series—but all the color looked drained away—very old-fashioned, just like these furnishings which I remember from that room, too.

HOWARD

. . . whenever you’re making a room like that you are, you know . . .
JOHN W.

... when we finally hired Richard Meier ... he couldn’t design the rooms that the curator had in mind.

HOWARD

I’d bow to the judgment of, uh, curator, architect, and director ... that was their primary responsibility. And, uh, I’m not expert enough to argue with the curator (laughs).

JOHN W.

OK, well, what did she have in mind then (laughs)? She laughingly said, I want my own Trianon, it would be a smash hit. . .

SOPHIE

Starts laughing.

Trianon? This place? What a joker!

JOHN W.

Continuing.

... if the curator’s wishes were going to be fulfilled . . .

SOPHIE

Whatever is he going on about?

JOHN W.

Casually continuing.

The curator believed so fervently in the idea that these pieces couldn’t be divorced from sympathetic contexts . . . needed scale, color, material, and relationships with both other
moveable objects and with a kind of interior architecture, call it décor, that they’d always had.

**SOPHIE**

Context? Yes, my room is now merely a backdrop, bungled, with all the wrong furniture, too, too many commodes. And that tapestry! It is so wrong!

*She stands up, turns away, then moves around and takes a seat in the green velvet chair with her back to the window, positioned downstage left. She frowns at the tapestry . . . and proceeds . . .*

I had luscious silk on that wall, matching the hangings on my bed below it.

*Shifting in the chair to gaze through the window, she continues . . .*

But the noises rising from the square outside were unbearably. Who could sleep with such commotion? I moved my bedroom to the back of the house and made the loveliest salon overlooking the square.

**JOHN DEWEY enters through double doors downstage right. He is reading a book. He walks slowly to the leather desk chair and sits down, crosses his legs and continues to read. He pauses a moment and places the book on the bureau plât while he retrieves a pair of eyeglasses from the compartment in the arm of the chair and puts them on his face, adjusting the stems around his ears. Picking up his book, he returns to reading while fingerling his moustache with his other hand.**

*A family group enters. MALE VISITOR #6 pushes an empty stroller and holds the hand of his toddler daughter. His wife pushes a stroller with another toddler girl.*

**MALE VISITOR #6**

*Whistles.*

Wheeeeew! Look at that desk chair.

*They stay a bit longer, then exit while crossing another group of visitors.*

**JOHN W.**

*Continuing.*
to treat them as specimens as though they were in a museum of natural history was to falsify them…falsify the experience…

DEWEY

Speaking as though to JOHN W..

Hm, yes, well…in common conception, the work of art is often identified with the building, book, painting, or statue in its existence apart from human experience.

The group of adult visitors have been milling around, looking up and down from the labels to the objects.

FEMALE VISITOR #11

This is a cool chair.

MALE VISITOR #6

Look at the legs.

FEMALE VISITOR #11

I could see living with this chair.

DEWEY

. . . the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience . . .

MALE VISITOR #6

See how they’re not on the four corners?

JOHN W.

. . . and to reduce them . . .
FEMALE VISITOR #11

It looks comfortable. It’s a nice chair.

JOHN W.

... and deny the public the kind of aesthetic experience, um ... 

Three Asian females enter, followed by a male with three females.

ASIAN FEMALE #1

Pointing at desk chair, where she doesn’t see DEWEY sitting.

I want to sit there.

MALE VISITOR #7

Reading labels and discussing with his companions.

Only men sat in these chairs.

DEWEY

... the result is not favorable to understanding.

JOHN W.

... as well as the associations with their original function ...

MALE VISITOR #7

That isn’t what I call a commode!

JOHN W.

... that you could have by adopting the conventions, some of them at least, of period rooms.
DEWEY

. . . the prestige they possess because of a long history of unquestioned admiration, creates conventions that get in the way of fresh insight.

MALE VISITOR #7

It’s got four legs just arranged differently.

ASIAN FEMALE #2

Talking to her companion about the number of chairs in the room.

Maybe they didn’t have a lot of company.

Black out.

(SCENE IX)

“Louis Quatorze Never Slept Here”

TERESA

Speaking to THIERRY.

What was your guiding philosophy for the display of the Régence Room apart from, um, what I understood you to say was the chronological concern and also you’ve said, um, it was the most complete room and so you wanted to convey that in the display as well?

THIERRY

It was not uh . . . the primary objective was . . . was not to do a historical restoration because you cannot reconstruct something ten thousand miles away from where it was originally intended, and it’s not the purpose of the Getty Museum to, uh . . . to show historically . . . you know, the joke is, Louis quatorze never slept here, or the Regent never slept here.
TERESA

Mm hm.

A lone adult male enters the Régence Room. He wears black, from his Italian designer eyeglasses to his swank jacket, pants, and shoes. His head is shaved. He stops in front of the mirror and photographs himself smiling.

Two Black Females enter. They are impressed with the desk chair.

BLACK FEMALE #1

Oh, wow!

They both step back, looking at the tapestry that would be hung on the fourth wall where audience now is.

Two Black Females exit through audience, crossing four entering visitors.

THIERRY

We felt that it was important that . . . that the room would be put back in a historically accurate position.

A stylish couple—MALE VISITOR #8 and FEMALE VISITOR #12—enter from audience, joining MALE VISITOR #7 and his friends still in the room from previous scene.

MALE VISITOR #8

Nice room, huh?

FEMALE VISITOR #12

Looking at herself in the mirror and flicking her long dark hair. She walks to his side by label panel. They exit.
Hmmm?

THIERRY

Now, that doesn’t mean that we created a historic room. I mean, the furniture in that room is not in any way, shape, or form laid out as an eighteenth-century room would have been displayed, you know.

Three visitors enter the room: two male and one female. They stop talking and halt near the tapestry.

MALE VISITOR #9

Talking to his male friend while he stands looking up at the tapestry.

Wouldn’t you get depressed to have that on your wall anywhere?

A little girl of six or seven enters with her mother, and they stand looking at the tapestry too.

LITTLE GIRL #2

Mom, look at that red stuff coming down . . .

THIERRY

Continuing, uninterrupted.

The intention was to say, we’re going to put back the paneling, the room in its original proportion, be very careful . . . use historical documents and to, to indeed make it as, uh, precise and accurate as possible.

MALE VISITOR #10

On his own wavelength . . . talking to quiet female companion as they all exit through downstage doorway, left.

. . . buying, shipping, caring for these things is incredible!
THIERRY

But that is still different from saying . . . say we’re going to restore a room in Versailles, then make every effort to, uh, get back its original furniture and put the furniture in the layout that corresponds to the way it was laid in the, the eighteenth- or seventeenth-century. That was not the intent.

Two couples and a group of three visitors enter.

DEWEY

When an art product once attains classic status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human conditions under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life experience.

MALE VISITOR #11

Would you like to come into my living room?

THIERRY

We always knew that, uh, people had to circulate. You have to, to satisfy the issue of circulation and security, and the museum collection was made of a series of objects but there was never one, uh, complete set of, of furniture—table, chairs, sofas, wall sconces—that had been in one room. So, it was still going to be a room to display objects.

Lights dim.

◆ ◆ ◆

SCENE X

“Taste”

CHARISSA

Interjecting . . .

The curator wanted the rooms to accommodate the objects, and she already knew what groupings of objects she wanted in certain spaces.
ANDRÉ CARLHIAN

_Responding as if in the meeting but speaking to his son._

So, the curator did use the boiserie to make up a room . . .

ROBERT CARLHIAN

_Mais oui._ But what is this . . .

_As he points to the modern replacement panels, MR. GETTY enters through double door downstage right._

MR. GETTY

This is a botched-up room. I wanted the panels to display my Boucher tapestries. What happened here? Whatever were they thinking?

ANDRÉ CARLHIAN

_Cher, Monsieur_ Getty. How lovely to see you!

MR. GETTY

_Shaking hands . . ._

Mr. Carlhian, the pleasure is mine.

_Light change. The three men stand together and talk in French._

TERESA

Do you think that the Régence Room is representative of Mr. Getty’s collecting taste?
JOHN W.

Oh, I . . . yeah, I think it probably does.

DEBORAH

I would say he was more knowledgeable in decorative arts than in other areas. I think he bought very well there. I think he had a particular taste for art objects. He himself liked historical interiors. So, from all those points of view, yes, I think that in a general way, it certainly represents his taste.

MR. GETTY

Speaking as if in response to Deborah, but she can neither see nor hear him.

To my way of thinking, a rug or carpet or a piece of furniture can be as beautiful, possess as much artistic merit, and reflect as much creative genius as a painting or a statue.

TERESA

I ask because when I go through the museum, with the exception of seeing his marble bust at the entryway, it seems that he’s somewhat absent. I don’t know if that makes any difference at all to the general public.

JOHN W.

I think that Getty’s taste is fading back into the realm of mystery. Most of what I know about Getty’s taste I know from the objects, and from what the curator has told me.

MR. GETTY

I firmly believe that beautiful paintings or sculptures should be displayed in surroundings of equal quality.

TERESA

Nervously.

I don’t know if you’ve done a poll to find out how many people read the Handbook to learn more about Mr. Getty the man . . . without Mr. Getty the Center wouldn’t be here . . . um . . . so . . .
MR. GETTY

Few men would dream of wearing a fifty-cent necktie with a $300 suit, yet all too many collectors are apparently content to have their first-rate paintings hang in a room filled with tenth-rate furniture that stands on a floor covered with a cheap machine-loomed carpet.

CHARISSA

Let me say that this is rather unique. This collection represents the taste of two people spanning seventy years.

JOHN W.

... um, I think he went for the rococo and the swanky on the whole. The big impressive showy thing; the things that he thought were really worth the money, things that were elaborately and beautifully made, and tended to be rather larger and more prepossessing than not.

CHARISSA

How many museums can say that?

JOHN W.

I’m not sure whether that was Getty or whether that was the curator because she got in there so early. I think she helped him establish his view of the desirable object, so a whole lot of that is still everywhere you look.

JEFFREY

... that carpet in there was one of the first things he bought ... at the Schiff sale. He bought the Cressent commode which is on the one end ...

JOHN W.

He wouldn’t have bought a microscope, I’d have imagined.

JEFFREY

... and, the Boulle bureau plat, which isn’t there but often is displayed, he bought, the Doiriot commode, yeah ...
TERESA

... he purchased many of the objects currently on display but I don’t, um, with the exception of the bust portrait of him, there’s very little about Mr. Getty, so that’s the thinking behind my question.

JEFFREY

OK. Yeah, that’s too bad because I like to talk about Mr. Getty, and, um, one of the nice things about being part of this department is the collection of decorative arts reflects the collecting of two collectors, really, which is Mr. Getty and the curator.

TERESA

Right, in and of itself a really interesting thing.

JEFFREY

Yeah, very interesting, and I always try to point that out whenever I’m taking people around our galleries . . .

JOHN W.

... but generally speaking, yeah, for sure, Getty’s faded a lot. It occurred to me in the planning stages of this place . . . no, when we were building this place, in fact we were . . . it must have been nineteen ninety-five or six when this building was going up, and there wasn’t any place, any memorial to Getty at all, on the Getty site. Nowhere. There’s a memorial to the people—the trustees and the people who made the project—sitting out there . . . looks like some kind of strange stone table with all kinds of names but, um, Getty’s only incidentally. So, I put that statue there, and I wrote that inscription.

TERESA

You did?
JOHN W.

. . . otherwise it would have been completely gone. That’s kind of strange to say that. But I think there has been not just negligence here, uh, it isn’t negligence—I think there’s been a wish to rise above what is conceived as Getty’s narrowness . . .

DEBORAH

But to your question of do the galleries or the installation of the paneled rooms maybe represent him, and he seems to be absent, I think that’s true. And, to me that’s a very interesting question because I think visitors very much want to know more about Getty. This is an area that I feel that it’s important to know what visitors want. But it isn’t always the right thing to do, to give them what they want because I think people are interested more in a personality than the other aspects of the material. And, I think people probably assume that he had a larger role in the current collection and installation than he actually did.

TERESA

So why not tell the visitors just that?

DEBORAH

There’s no question that without Mr. Getty there couldn’t be the Getty Museum. But the reality is that, for example, the paintings that we have on view, more than the majority I would say, everything, with the exception of a dozen paintings, were acquired after his death. He hated modern architecture, so it’s hard to personalize this museum the way that one could personalize the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

JOHN W.

. . . the legend of Getty’s not always very pleasant personality or very happy life, I think this is an institution that now has tried to redefine . . . had tried during the ‘80s and ‘90s to redefine itself as not just as a museum . . . but high-minded and devoted to things that Getty didn’t care about—scholarship, conservation, giving money away—all those things, and so to some extent, well, surely it’s no accident that there was no memorial planned for Getty . . .

MR. GETTY

Banal as it may sound in this glib and brittle age, the beauty that one finds in fine art is
one of the pitifully few real and lasting products of all human endeavor. That beauty endures even though nations and civilizations crumble; the work of art can be passed on from generation to generation and century to century, providing a historical continuity of true value.

Black out.

◆ ◆ ◆

SCENE XI

“A Little Too Far to the Disneyland-Side”

TERESA

Did your preliminary notions of the Régence Room display changing from its Malibu installation to here at Brentwood have anything to do with information learned during the de-installation of the Malibu room?

JOHN W.

Well, that came later.

TERESA

Later?

JOHN W.

Way later, yeah, way later. I’m still talking about . . . when we were writing the program and really didn’t know . . . only seen the Régence Room as installed, we were beginning to, I think, come clearer on the fact that you had quite some trade-offs to deal with. You could only gain the full spatial experience at the expense of reducing what you could display in the room and jeopardizing security. You could only gain intimacy with the objects in the room by jeopardizing security or else jeopardizing, um . . . putting barriers up or something. You could only achieve the historical accuracy by removing most things from the room and putting them back in, you know, imagining that they were in depot somewhere and then restored for purposes of entertaining or whatever. A point that I didn’t realize at this stage but only came up when the architect was on the job was that historical accuracy is only . . . aesthetic . . . original aesthetic impression of the rooms could only be had if you dealt with the light. In other words . . .
TERESA

... huh ...

JOHN W.

... if you ... what I mean is that the lighting in those rooms was ... surely window light. Supplemented when it was needed by candles brought by servants, and at night. The whole magic of those rooms both the gilding and the chandeliers with their dingle-dangles and stuff, and girandole and so forth were created by candlelight, so, why would you not try either ... you can’t use candlelight but why would you not try forms of lighting that mimic candlelight? They exist. Quite sophisticated, in fact. They’re used in the theatre all the time. Why not? Uh, well, you could do that but you might in the process offend, sort of, curatorial sensibilities. You might make the curator feel that she was going a little too far to the Disneyland-side of things.

DEWEY

The times when select and distinguished objects are closely connected with the products of usual vocations are the times when appreciation of the former is most rife and most keen. When, because of their remoteness, the objects acknowledged by the cultivated to be works of fine art seem anemic to the mass of people, aesthetic hunger is likely to seek the cheap and vulgar.

JOHN W.

And, then, finally this is a real ... this is really much to the point here, uh, there’s a kind of trade between direct experience, as much as possible undistracted direct experience and explanation. The use of the object for, or the room for, the pleasure of inspecting it free of any sorts of suggestions on the part of anybody. ...

TERESA

... mm hm ...

JOHN W.

... versus the opportunity that the room provides to allow people to enter the world of
values and judgments, the life you could say of the people who lived in these rooms or might have lived in these rooms, and the kind of...by extension something about the culture that supported all of this expensive way of life. So, you either...that’s a question of how much...how extensive and how prominent are the explanations? How important are they, really? As I say, our concerns...we kind of knew before we got the architect involved, and before we started getting down to cases and dealing with his designs, we knew that we were...this was not going to be easy. It’s not going to be simple. It’s not going to be straightforward. And, that we would probably be apart, that is the chief curator and I would probably not find ourselves on the same side of many of these issues with the curator. I think we could see that coming.

GILLIAN, reading glasses hanging around her neck and dressed fashionably casual enters downstage right and takes a seat at the table.

TERESA

Smiling and acknowledging GILLIAN, she asks...

What would you like the general public to know about the Régence Room?

GILLIAN

More or less what it says on the label. The fact is that it has...I would like them actually to go to the Web and to see how many people owned it...history of...and also, I don’t think it says anywhere that it’s now the Westminster Foreign Bank in the Place Vendôme73. The downstairs is the bank, and you can look up and see the windows of the original. And, it’s all denuded, of course, up there. I haven’t been up there, and I should have done; that should have been part of my research, go and measure the room but I think I had many other things to think about. I think maybe Brian did? Did he say he did?

TERESA

I don’t recall that he did.

73 Number 18 Place Vendôme is, in fact, now an exclusive Chanel Bijouterie for jewelry and watches. See Appendix T.
GILLIAN

No. We should have gone to measure the existing room to make sure it was right. And, that it has had so many people living in it throughout the times since it was sold up in the nineteen thirties to Duveen. Amazing ghosts must be . . . you know, if you think that people’s emotions are absorbed into the pores of the wood, you know? It’s just an amazing . . . what’s been going on in that room. You can say the same for all the rooms but, you know, that one being so early is really quite amazing. And, I think that people should be able to stand and think about things like that.

DEWEY

Interrupting as if he were sitting in the meeting . . .

Thought or reflection, as we have already seen, virtually if not explicitly, is the discernment of the relation between what we try to do and what happens in consequence. No experience having a meaning is possible without some element of thought.

Lights dim.

◆ ◆ ◆

Scene XII

“Sociology of the Moment”

HOWARD

Joins discussion about what museum administrators and consultants would like the general public to know about the Régence Room.

I think that . . . I would hope the room would arouse some interest in, you know, what motivated people at that time. When you look at people, read historical novels, you know, Adams . . . Jefferson’s hot stuff these days, and Ben Franklin’s always been hot stuff, or whatever, but there were some interesting characters who lived around that time and some interesting characters lived in France, so I would hope that it would be “what made these people like this,” “I don’t choose to live like this,” “what brought about this change”?
TERESA

Um, when you say “to live like this”. . .

HOWARD

yeah, that it’s a room, you take somebody to your your home, and home is somewhat of a statement of who you are.

DEWEY

*Continuing his train of thought, about thought and reflection.*

Thinking, in other words, is the intentional endeavor to discover specific connections between something which we do and the consequences which result, so that the two become continuous.

HOWARD

That’s what these rooms are, “what made you like that”? Those are the things that are always intriguing to me. And maybe that comes from my theatre background, who are these characters we are trying to portray? What is the message that we’re trying to give to the audience? What are these emotions? What stirs these people? What brings them to life in this drama? What makes them sunny in this comedy?

TERESA

Mm hm. These absent people . . .

HOWARD

Yes, because this is a depiction of a larger than life view of some human being . . .

TERESA

. . . yes . . .
HOWARD

. . . portrayed by whomever.

TERESA

Would you say that the objects are characters in this depiction?

HOWARD

No. The objects are the expression of the people who collected them. And that’s why I say these places are a statement of who lives there, or who lived there.

TERESA

And what of the persons that made the objects?

HOWARD

Well, the persons that made the objects . . . that’s another whole thing to get into, you know, it’s a work of art . . . why somebody will collect a Rauschenberg and somebody would rather have a Rembrandt and somebody might have both.

TERESA

Mm hm, mm hm . . .

HOWARD

The object is a separate item in terms of that. It’s OK to be a separate item if it’s just in the gallery of contemporary art, or you can go to all the galleries that are there . . . you can go to all the “vans”, you know, the van Dykes, the van Eycks . . . see all these museums and they are just this whole row of a body of work that’s separate from a room. Although I treat those rooms, those spaces, as rooms as well, but they are rooms of, um, trying to meet the cultural and social responsibility of the museum.

*Enter two females and a male.*
DEWEY

The starting point of any process of thinking is something going on, something which just as it stands is incomplete or unfulfilled. Its point, its meaning lies literally in what it is going to be, in how it is going to turn out. [At this moment], the world is filled with the clang of contending armies. For an active participant in the war, it is clear that the momentous thing is the issue, the future consequences, of this and that happening. He is identified, for the time at least, with the issue; his fate hangs upon the course things are taking.

FEMALE VISITOR #13

They recreated these things beautifully . . .

MALE VISITOR #12

Beautiful desk . . .

FEMALE VISITOR #14

Uh, it’s unreal . . .

DEWEY

Resumes . . .

But even for an onlooker in a neutral country, the significance of every move made, of every advance here and retreat there, lies in what it portends. To think upon the news as it comes to us is to attempt to see what is indicated as probable or possible regarding an outcome.

FEMALE VISITOR #13

. . . at Versailles . . .

MALE VISITOR #12

. . . money that was spent . . .

Dewey is referring to World War I, though his words are evocative of the war in Iraq today.
Incredible . . .

. . . the waste . . .

. . . no wonder heads were chopped off.

Summing up.

To fill our heads like a scrapbook, with this and that item as a finished and done-for thing, is not to think. It is to turn ourselves into a piece of registering apparatus. To consider the bearing of the occurrence upon what may be, but is not yet, is to think. Nor will the reflective experience be different, in kind, if we substitute distance in time for separation in space. Imagine the war done with, and a future historian giving an account of it. The episode is, by assumption, past. But he cannot give a thoughtful account of the war, save as he preserves the time sequence; the meaning of each occurrence, as he deals with it, lies in what was future for it, though not for the historian. To take it by itself as a complete existence is to take it unreflectively.

Well, how would you describe the Régence Room’s display?

You know, it is a room, and that is not a display. It is composition of the room in my eyes. You have to become very narrow-minded to look at that as a display . . . not look at the context of the time the people lived at. And, the social (clears throat) and the social make up, you know, the sociology of the moment which explains dress, customs, culture, etcetera. So, all of these things reflect that.
A male enters through the audience, making his way to the mirror. He turns to look at his reflection, then runs his fingers through his hair and walks out upstage right.

HOWARD

And if you had a really good teacher who would be caught up in, you know, if you’re not teaching about clothing, the costuming, the mores of the time, you’re losing the benefit of studying it. It becomes too narrow a piece, it becomes a piece of decoration and not a piece of humanity. Those people were alive and human. They chose to live like that.

Enter a young LATINO COUPLE. They stand in the doorway looking into the room. She steps in front of the mirror. Rummaging through her purse, she pulls out a brush and begins pulling it through her very long hair. From the doorway he takes a picture of her then moves to stand next to her, as she returns the brush to her purse.

LATINO MALE

He looks up towards the ceiling.

Pretty damn big.

They both exit.

Lights dim.

Scene XIII

“The Rich and Famous”

DIANE

Sitting at the table and writing on a notepad. She looks up with a smile when TERESA enters, and speaks.

I think decorative arts has some real challenges for visitors. On the one hand, it can seem for some, many visitors, like wallpaper. They could walk through it, walk by it really,
thinking that the main thing they are there to look at are paintings or, you know, things that are obviously sculpture, and never really take the time to notice how incredibly beautifully made an individual piece of furniture might be. And sometimes because of its dual nature as both an aesthetic piece and a functional piece . . . and, that on the other hand, it gives you a whole other opportunity for interpretation to think about how this reflects life in a more dynamic way, in some cases, than a painting would. This is stuff, that, at some level, people used. You know, truly, in the Getty’s collection these are luxury objects and so the level of use and variety of people using them is very limited. You’re not looking at it the same way you’d look at some other material culture, where you really are looking at everyday life, you know. We’re looking at luxury, absolutely high class life with these objects. But nonetheless, they are a clue as to the life and times of, in that case, the rich and famous as it were. And that gives you a whole other interpretation opportunity . . . to say something about other larger questions about a culture. I think those are very valuable, and decorative arts can give you another window into a time and place that we don’t see as easily in a painting. That’s a challenge because in an art museum you tend to do that less and there are biases to focus more on the aesthetic nature of something. So, looking at stylistic change . . . in a much more aesthetic way . . . to how that style changed and what were the visual influences on that . . . a challenge is how do you also bring in something about other cultural influences, or what this might say about life at that time. And, I guess, that paradox . . . I see that as a bit of a paradox, because there is really rich content . . . and yet people walk by the decorative arts. Almost never would general visitors pause in front of a piece of furniture or room paneling. They would walk through. That’s just what I’ve observed for years. Not just at the Getty but when I worked at Philadelphia as well. (Pause) And yet, once you did some little bit about, you know, asking visitors about themselves, their interests, to lead to questions like, “Do you want to look a little closer at this?” “Can anybody figure out how this might have been made?” “Can anybody figure out how this might have been used?” People would . . . we wouldn’t go anywhere else, I mean, people would be completely fascinated. So, I thought, “Wow, people are missing an incredible opportunity,” and I think, that’s the challenge there. You’ve got a really rich array of objects, a very different kind of material and once people get engaged they can be really engaged.

TERESA

Did you experience the challenge in interpreting the social historical aspects of the material culture in the context of an art museum? Social history is not generally discussed in an art museum . . .

DIANE

Early on, I very much saw a bias against taking a more material culture approach, and to
asking, “what can you tell by looking, examining materials . . . what does the number and variety of materials tell you?” However, I would say over time the interpretation that you see today incorporates much more of that than it did probably fifteen years ago. So, I think there has been an evolution and, you know, I feel like maybe a younger generation of scholars in decorative arts has been pursuing those kinds of questions. So it’s a richer array. As we all saw how fascinated people were with how things were made, that’s become a larger and larger entry point for visitors into understanding the decorative arts.

Blackout.

◆ ◆ ◆

SCENE XIV

“The Salon”

Paris, 1840. Summer Solstice. The scene opens to an evening musicale in SOPHIE’s salon. CHOPIN sits with his back to the audience, at the Pape à Paris piano, playing the closing bars of his Fantaisie Impromptu, Op. 66. The room is lit by candles placed in the fixtures around the room (chandelier, candelabrum, wall lights, and girandoles). Footmen are standing motionless at the two upstage doorways.

GEORGES SAND, FRANZ LISZT, and ÉUGÈNE DELACROIX are seated in chairs in front of the piano, among the several other fashionable guests, who are by turns dressed formally and bohemian, including a Legionnaire in flashy Zouave-style uniform. A beat after CHOPIN strikes the final chord, they politely applaud as he stands and gives them a grave bow, then walks around the piano to accept the praise of guests who have left their seats. Footmen move to adjust the open the windows, then begin to circulate, holding serving trays with flutes of champagne and canapés.

LISZT

Striding across the room, he calls out . . .

Sophie!

Along the way, he reaches with both hands toward one of the footmen and grabs a glass of champagne in one and a medallion-sized piece of bread topped with foie gras in the other.
SOPHIE

Cher Franz, thank you for coming. Frédéric was enchanting, n’est-ce-pas?

SAND

Interrupting.
Franz . . .

LISZT

Eh, oui (I am afraid so). He has bewitched all the women . . . bon soir Georges.

He kisses each of her cheeks.

SAND

Franz, what brings you here tonight? No musical conquests outside Paris?

SOPHIE

Aurore, please do not make trouble . . .

SAND

Sarcastically.

Baronne, I am quite sure I do not know what you mean.

LISZT

Frédéric is my friend. With all respect, I defer to him with my impromptus.

SAND

You mean steal ideas, do you not?
LISZT

Laughing.

My dear, you do have an imagination!

He pops the foie gras in his mouth and takes an exuberant drink of his champagne.

SAND

She makes a rude sound and turns her back on SOPHIE and LISZT and moves to join other guests.

DELACROIX greets CHOPIN, who is trying to peel himself from the fawning of female guests surrounding him at the piano.

DELACROIX

Mon ami, tu es superbe! Your playing and your compositions . . . magnificent!

CHOPIN

Ah, Éugène, merci beaucoup, you honor me. But you, tell me, how are you, my dear fellow, and what are you painting? Do you continue your Oriental theme?

DELACROIX

Fine, I am well but very occupied. Oui, I have many memories and sketches of admirable subjects from my month in Morocco. And Algiers, well, I sketched like mad the three days I had there! But no, I have put aside the Orient, now it is the decoration of the libraries in the Luxembourg and Bourbon Palaces that consumes me!

CHOPIN

I much admired Les Femmes d’Alger, and, I must say, I remain astonished that you were allowed entrance to the harem . . . the subject . . . color and light . . . stunning, quite stunning.

Enter staggered groups of museum visitors through audience.
FEMALE VISITOR #16

*To her female companion, in French . . .*

*Je préfère Bauhaus.*

MALE VISITOR #14

*To his female companion, whom he pushes in a wheelchair.*

Look at the fireplace.

*Visitors remain in room until Fadeout.*

SAND

Éugène, have you heard Pauline Garcia’s new songs?

DELACROIX

No. Tell me about them, my dear.

SAND

There is no other way to say . . . her appearance is a shining moment in the history of women’s art! Her genius is both accomplished and inspired, her . . . her progress of intelligence has never been so conclusively manifested in the feminine sex.

DELACROIX

*Smiling, amused.*

Indeed . . .

*He turns to resume conversation with CHOPIN as SAND continues . . .*
Ah, yes, her songs based on Frédéric’s mazurkas are clever, quite charming.

*The guests drift toward exits as the sounds of whinnying horses and coach drivers calling out, cracking whips, and creaking carriages drift through the open windows. CHOPIN and SAND are the last to leave saying farewells to SOPHIE.*

SOPHIE looks at the young women who have remained in the room. *She moves forward as the lights dim. The museum is closing. SECURITY OFFICER VALADEZ enters the room through audience. He sweeps through gallery to clear remaining visitors. Taking his walkie-talkie from its holster, VALADEZ clicks a button.*

**VALADEZ**

*With a grating sound from the walkie-talkie.*

S105 to Control. All clear.

**CONTROL ROOM**

Control to S105. Come on home.

*Fade out to the strains of the Tomasz Stanko Quartet’s, “Lontano, Part 3.”*

◆ ◆ ◆

**INTERPRETATION**

What I have attempted to do in the fourteen scenes of this ethnographic drama is to give insight into the lived experience of museum exhibition developers and museum visitors—the decision makers and recipients/audience of that process. My intention is that the subjectivity of these narratives will engage readers in “provocative, disruptive, fragmented, and emotionally charged” ways (Sparkes, 1996; p. 463). I caught a vision that captured my imagination and tried to embody it in *Requiem for a Room.* The
vignettes serve the original interview transcripts and my vision of them. In this sense, I have performed the same creative moves as the exhibition developers. My interest was to explore ethnographic drama and art museum education, to see what each could learn from the other. The Régence Room serves as a historical backdrop for the curator’s interpretation of how to set off “the gems” from her collection of Baroque objects. The ethnographic drama serves as a theoretical framework, a basis from which to explore how the Régence Room might be interpreted and to ask, why did the Museum display the room as it is?

I situated my engagement with the Régence Room in the context of its development process. Thematically it is complex, shifting in and out of discussions about semantics, interpretation, pedagogy, and philosophy. Some readers may have found the play compelling, still others, dull. Regardless, the development process was one of power and control; a well-fixed pattern, concealed like a tapestry’s warp and woof—generated by and intertwined with museum politics and media attention surrounding construction of the new Getty Center. I sought to evoke an opening—a re-direction—by gleaning the spirit of the Régence Room, to enliven the passive, isolated space—the graveyard—which I have argued it to be. I sought a behind-the-scenes perspective, and I needed a foil to assist me; therefore, putting ghosts in the play was intentional. But the ramifications were unclear until I compared the written work—much in the way a weaver checks the product of her labor against an initial working pattern—to Jacques Derrida’s (1930-2004) concept of hauntology. In Specters of Marx (1994), this French philosopher developed his concept—a linguistic play on ontology (the nature of being, or existence),
which was inspired by his re-reading Karl Marx’s (1818-1883) publication from 1848, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Derrida was struck by Marx’s radical openness to history, which led to his argument that what appears to be present is not totally definitive, as in a haunting. Hauntings “[are] not dated, [and] never dociley given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar . . . [haunting] does not come to, it does not happen to, it does not befall” (Derrida, 1994, p. 4). Metaphorically, in the context of The Régence Room, I understand this to correlate to “a certain moment of its history, [it] had begun to suffer from a certain evil, to let itself be inhabited in its inside, that is, haunted by a foreign guests” (p. 4). Moreover, the “guest is [not] any less a stranger for having always occupied the domesticity of” The Régence Room, “but there was no inside, there was nothing inside before it. The ghostly would displace itself like the movement of [the room’s] history” (p. 4). Haunting would mark the very existence of the Régence Room. “It would open the space and the relation to self of what is called by this name. The experience of the specter [the specter is to Marx’s ghost, as Hamlet’s father the King is to Hamlet’s ghost] . . . will have also thought, described, or diagnosed a certain dramaturgy of” the Régence Room, notably the play, which has “ghosts chained to ghosts” (p. 4-5).

The ghosts in the play are historical; they have an important pedagogical function. They highlight a need to keep the spirit of the Régence Room alive, especially since it has been decontextualized and recontextualized in a museum setting. We learn from history constantly, and that is what the ghosts represent—history and historical narration. Derrida’s theory substantiates that we can learn from ethnographic drama. The combined
fourteen scenes are a play on “being” and “identity.” The ghosts represent those kinds of cultural semiotic signs. The play itself is, essentially, a play on Jacques Derrida’s concept of hauntology.

Moreover, the Régence Room—its history—is a like specter. “Even when [the specter] is there,” Derrida states, “it is there without being there, you feel that the specter is looking, although through a helmet; it is watching, observing, staring at the spectators and the blind seers, but you do not see it seeing, it remains invulnerable beneath its visored armor. So one speaks of nothing else but in order to chase it way, to exclude it, to exorcise it” (p. 101). The salon (the Régence Room), then, is the ancien régime, is the cultural institution of the museum, is the curator’s vision, and is the educator’s threat. Unconsciously, the museum exorcised and conjured away the specter, taking pedagogy with it. Yet, if the museum were to re-evaluate its historical strategy to exhibition development, there are two entwined approaches, offered by Derrida’s theory, that could be implemented. First, “adjust reality to the ideal in the course of a necessarily infinite process” (p. 86), and second, ask far-reaching questions in a continuous effort “to problematize (move beyond, reformulate) specific ideals themselves” (deconstruction, a concept that established Derrida’s reputation, insists on questioning) (Coles, 1995, p. 740). He does caution, however, that without tending to the tension of these two approaches, there will be a return “to a sort of fatalist idealism or abstract and dogmatic eschatology in the face of the world’s evil” (p. 87). Granted, Derrida’s argument takes a worldview through a Marxist lens; however, his ethical concepts and theory of hauntology weave into the issues of representation associated with the Régence Room, as

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Deconstructionism’s fundamental claim is that texts have several meanings and interpretations.
well as institutional operations. According to Derrida, institutions could experience a kind of emancipation, “a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics” and not remain “abstract,” but make a promise “to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth” (p. 89). In other words, the past lives of the Getty Museum and the Régence Room are within the present. We become aware of ghosts—the past—and learn from them, but remain in the present to seek and practice the ideals that Derrida enumerates. And, as for museum educators in particular, it would not go amiss if they were to make an alliance with the threat of the Régence Room, because it could be that the period room is a pharma
kon, which in Greek means both remedy and poison (Derrida, 1981). In other words, there is much to be gained by tending to things we dislike or do not understand. But that discussion is for another time and place. Suffice it to say, we learn from things we dismiss.

As for the strength of this genre—ethnographic drama—it makes a place for the researcher’s experience. I was able to integrate mine with participants’ experiences. This makes it possible for readers to pinpoint the inception of my interpretations and to get a sense of how this kind of arts-based research is constructed. There are weaknesses, too. First of all, I am unable to know whether the representation of data as drama has evoked my readers’ sympathy or empathy. Did the distortion of time and historical fiction work against me in trying to make a statement about the condition of the Régence Room? Still, another shortcoming is whether or not this kind of research is durable (Mienczakowski, 1997). For some critics, this kind of work is unacceptable (Saks, 1996). They might say that the use of fiction and time distortion belongs in creative writing and
not in academic qualitative research. For example, as Howard Gardner stated:

I don’t understand how a novel can possibly ever be accepted as research. Essentially in a novel you can say what you want, and you are judged by how effectively you say it without any particular regard to the truth value. And it seems to me that essence of research is effort, however stumbling, to find out as carefully as you can what’s happening and then to report it accurately. Why would you possibly [make that sort of effort] in a novel where you can’t really tell whether its accurate or not? (Saks, 1996, p. 403)

Contrary to this point of view are three scholars whose careers have been rooted in changing a resistant mind-set regarding the practice of qualitative research. For over twenty years, Laurel Richardson, a retired sociologist from Ohio State University, has questioned and experimented with different ways of writing ethnographic texts. Her own writings have taken the form of poems, ethnographic dramas, and short stories (Richardson, 1993, 1997, 2000a, b, c). In 1981, art educator Elliot Eisner (2005) started writing about the differences between scientific and artistic approaches to qualitative research. He has promoted and supported arts-based research because it is his ambition “to develop an approach to the conduct of educational research that was rooted in the arts and that used art forms to reveal the features that mattered educationally” (p. 4). Eisner believes that universities are the places where such research ought to be encouraged and explored imaginatively. The importance of Eisner’s thinking comes from providing a logical process and he envisions that:

Regarding mind as a cultural achievement, knowing as a process that yields tentative resolutions, objectivity as an aspiration rather than a realization, the impact of forms of representation beyond the literal use of text, recognizing the power of form to inform, yet realizing that every form of representation both reveals and conceals, such ideas might broaden our perspective regarding what is worth teaching and learning and through a broadened perspective change the scope of the curriculum and
enrich the practices that teachers employ to promote student growth. (p. 21)

In providing a reasonable argument for arts-based research, Andrew Sparkes (2002) takes a third position. Sparkes, Professor of Health and Sport Sciences at Exeter University, in Devon, England, explains that “writing differently allows us to know and analyze differently, as well as to make our ‘findings’ available to more diverse audiences” (p. 211). For Sparkes, an essential feature of the autoethnographical method that he uses is that his work connects with readers. He underscores this stance with the following three points: 1) “[t]his kind of writing can inform, awaken, and disturb readers by illustrating their involvement in social processes about which they might not have been consciously aware,” 2) autoethnography “allow[s] another person’s world of experience to inspire critical reflection on your own,” and 3) “when an autoethnography strikes a cord in readers, it may change them, and the direction of change cannot be predicted” (p. 221).

Data, such as the examples in *Requiem for a Room*, are drawn from the research phase. They prompted certain perspectives in writing the various scenes. My challenge was to look at exhibition development and interpretation from new angles; and in this venture, I was aided by participants and visitors observations. Museum administrators and consultants gave their decorative arts/art history-informed, insider’s knowledge and experience of the period room, and visitors gave their differently informed, outsider’s knowledge and experience of the room. What this implies is that varying contexts change the purpose of what the room is and was meant to be and what it was intended to do. As the scenes play out, it becomes evident that some of the characters become aware of the opportunities for change, while others remain indifferent.
But the following question remains unanswered: Can period room experience and interpretation really change through ethnographic drama? I set out to overcome the popular conception of period rooms as passive, isolated spaces akin to inert stage sets. As a vehicle for art education, the potential effects of ethnographic drama suggest that, yes, the process of constructing and performing this kind of research could overcome traditional period room display and interpretation and change the way in which museum period rooms are perceived, experienced, and understood. Using a dramatic form requires a willingness to experiment, to dream, to risk, and even to fail; all elements of creative endeavors that art educators will recognize. If I’m lucky, this ethnographic drama will have changed my readers in some way. All any person or institution can do is try to do his/her/its best. Be open to the possibility of failure, but keep trying for success.
CHAPTER FIVE

Nothing endures but change. (Heraclitus)

Neither the past nor the present stays fixed in the face of . . . reflexivity. The “immense repository” of our past encounters may be rendered salient in different ways as we review them reflexively, or may be changed by reconceptualization. (Bruner, 1990/2002, pp. 109-110)

CONCLUSIONS:

TRANSFORMING PERIOD ROOM PEDAGOGY

This study was undertaken in order to investigate the interpretation of an art museum period room. The objective was to determine, through historical and contemporary evidence, how the Régence Room was developed and interpreted. The rationale for using an arts-based approach to explore the period room was to experiment with another mode of interpreting material culture and to investigate the origins, purposes, and evolution of a museum period room through the presentation of ethnographic drama. Arts-based research brought a new dimension to material culture interpretation. What I tried to show, in the contexts of art education and material culture, is that period room narratives exemplify and establish our identities. “The experiences . . . we gather from our informants are,” as Mienczakowski (1997) emphasizes, “urgent, real, and convincing” (p. 168).

I would like to revisit the questions that I posed in Chapter One, to shape the
content of this chapter and offer answers to them. First, how did the methodology of the exhibition development process of the Régence Room affect its intended interpretation? Linked to that is my second question: how do visitors respond to their Régence Room experience? I asked a few ancillary questions to delve further: 1) What pedagogical philosophies guided the process of developing the period room? 2) Did the exhibition developers think in terms of a story, and, if so, what is it and from whose point of view is it told? and 3) Who chose the artifacts that would tell the story?

**The First Question**

*Reviewing Requiem for a Room*

How did the methodology of the exhibition development process of the Régence Room affect its interpretation? I examined the methodology of the exhibition development process of the Régence Room, and its possible effect on interpreting the room, through ethnographic drama. There are certain qualities that influenced the play, such as the layered experience of the museum setting of the Régence Room within the decorative galleries within the Museum, on the Getty Center site.

Committed exhibition development interpretation has an impact on active visitor participation especially when it seeks to motivate visitors’ emotions and senses, not only their intellect (Black, 2005). Consider the metaphor of picturing yourself at the top of the hill near the museum, passing the various landmarks along the way and reflecting on the contrast between the external journey and the internal journey. The imaginary experience gives you a sense of the things passed along the way, the things seen, the fragrances and
odors smelled, the colors, brightness, and sounds—outside and inside. Imaginary and sensory experiences are drawn from memories of experiences. Compare these circumstances to the exhibition developers, who missed the potential for interpreting sensory elements along the way (Barone & Eisner, 1997), and contrast them to the differences between the outside space of Meier’s architecture and the inside space of the Despont-designed decorative arts galleries. These transitions beg for acknowledgment, but they were ignored by exhibition developers, presumably because they thought the differences would speak for themselves.

My own experience has shown that the decorative arts galleries overall receive little attention from the Education Department, but five times a day, six days a week, Meier’s architecture and Irwin’s garden are elucidated by trained docent-led tours for visitors. Why is there no comparable interpretation of the Museum’s period rooms or decorative arts galleries? The architecture and material culture of these installations are conspicuously unlike any other collections or galleries in the Museum. Few tours of period rooms and decorative arts galleries are offered, which I learned from random queries that I made at the Museum’s Information Desk. The Museum’s education department sponsors such programs as Collections Highlights Tours, Focus Tours (e.g., Renaissance, Baroque, Impressionism), and Masterpiece of the Week Tours each given once a day. The decorative arts are infrequently included in the line-up, and when they are, the encounters are brief. To the Museum’s credit are recent additions to its tour schedule: Point-of-View: Artist Talks and Curator’s Gallery Talks. In the former, a painter might discuss the history and practice of Renaissance painting; and in the latter,
for example, curator, Charissa Bremer-David will take a small group of visitors through the decorative arts collection to discuss select pieces of mechanical furniture, which she unlocks and opens to reveal hidden compartments. Talks like these are offered to the public on a limited basis. The Artist Talks average about once a month and the Curator’s Talks are given approximately two to six times a month, alternating representatives from each of the Museum’s collections: drawings, medieval manuscripts, paintings, photographs, and sculpture and decorative arts. The examples just given are to emphasize the fact that decorative arts is under-represented. I presume the variety of offerings are regulated by the curators granting permission for educators to speak about their (i.e. curators) collections. Is it possible that curators let artists talk more extemporaneously than educators, and that unpaid docents are not allowed to ever speak about the art, as opposed to the architecture and garden?

The fourteen scenes of Chapter Four’s ethnographic drama are based on the methodology of the exhibition development process, which I reached through the interview questions I asked each participant. The subject of the play is the Régence Room, and its theme is a layering of history—of contemplating it and asking questions about it. On one level, my ethnographic drama is, in essence, a “behind the scenes” narrative surrounding exhibition development and installation of the Régence Room, and, therefore, a revision of E. McClung Fleming’s call to museum workers back in 1972:

. . . it should become a top priority for us to create a factual record naming the author or authors of an installation, stating its intent, footnoting key decisions and judgments made, summarizing authorities or sources consulted, sketching briefly the history of the operation, utilizing photographs, elevations and inventories wherever possible. The resulting folder of material should be available to any visitor who requests it. (p. 42)
The ethnographic drama is “the resulting folder of material,” and making it available to the public would be the logical next step.

However, it is not the fourteen scenes themselves, but what they represent as an extended example of performing narratives in the period room, that suggest possibility. The layered, collage-like ethnographic drama was designed to ask questions about how the period room was represented and, though not exclusively, to answer ones about interpreting history. As it is now, the Régence Room is lifeless and spooky, in the sense that if a museum is a graveyard, then its collections are entombed (Harbison, 1977, p. 140). These characteristics inspired my inclusion of several ghosts in *Requiem for a Room*. Among them is the pedagogue, John Dewey. Expanding here on Chapter Four’s discussion of Derrida’s *hauntology*, Dewey’s spectral presence is significant because it suggests possibilities for the room, specifically for the Régence Room as a site for experience and experiencing art. In the play, Dewey is not only a player in the play, he is a philosopher from whom we have inherited the most articulate explanation of the experience of art, *Art as Experience* (1934/1980). In this seminal text, Dewey theorized the association of art and experience to learners. He asserted education as an experience.

Clearly, therefore, experience suggests something that is educational.

The Régence Room offers experiences. But what can the museum do to promote them, and, most difficult, how? I have offered one possibility, the ethnographic drama *Requiem for a Room*. It is made of narratives; and narrative, as per Roberts’ (1997) theory, is a function of pedagogy. One pedagogical function of the narrative of *Requiem for a Room* is based on certain *signifiers*, or signs. A simple definition of this semiotic
term from literary criticism is discrete units of meaning. For example, the Régence
Room points to many things, the most obvious among them the room itself, each of its
furnishings, the curator’s layout of the room, the room’s historical position, each
participant involved in its installation, visitors, and the content they bring to the room.
These signifiers each hold and convey meaning (Potts, 2003). Some museum art
educators work to understand how such signs function in the interpretation of works of
art. They do so to develop activities that enable visitors to mediate between objects and
their own impressions of what they see and experience. The process of fostering museum
programs is quite complex because each viewer uniquely sees through eyes whose focus
is influenced by a range of issues, such as cultural, social, and psychological. As you
might agree, the interpretive possibilities could cover a wide field. This argument is
underscored by Amalia Mesa-Bains (1992), practicing artist and Director of the
Department of Visual and Public Art at California State University, Monterey Bay, who
claims that,

> We have much to learn about the ways in which communication and
cultural style affect cognition, apprehension, and learning, all of which are
intertwined. Culture is a window on the world, and our processes of
receiving, distributing, and processing information must pass through that
window. (p. 96)

Is narrative a useful communicative device? What about these narratives—the
ethnographic drama—could be beneficial to art museum education? I have struggled
with how to resolve this question, and I have a few comments to make. First, actually
performing *Requiem for a Room* in the period room is an impossibility. I knew that much
of what I conceived in the ethnographic drama would never be feasible. People walking
around in the room, talking, eating, and drinking? Of course not. Museum security
would prohibit such activities in the room, except for talking—that is allowed! The
complexities of the ethnographic drama override practical application in the Régence
Room itself. Nevertheless, I needed to push the existing boundaries of educational
practice in museums in order to imagine and learn what might be possible. For example,
scenes could be adapted for performance in adjacent decorative arts galleries, similar to
the structure used at the Walters Art Gallery, which I elaborate below. And, as I
explained in Chapter Four’s introduction, ethnographic dramas have been performed at
professional conferences. There is performance potential for Requiem for a Room in such
venues as the National Art Education Association, the American Association of
Museums, the College Art Association, and the American Education Research
Association. Annual conferences sponsored by such organizations offer opportunities to
present and exchange ideas that can lead to deeper understanding, research, and
development.

I also can imagine technologies currently used in the computer gaming field that
lend themselves to museum use in gallery spaces like the Régence Room. One that I
mentioned previously is a Nintendo DS Lite. Narrative scenes could be adapted from one
form—written pages—and implemented into another—electronic pages. Holographs, in
concert with other media like music and sound effects or projected scenes from the play,
certainly could enliven the period room. Ultimately, I await computer technologies (i.e.
user-friendly digital effects software) that, in the near future, could filter into museum use
and potentially aid in interpreting the Getty Museum’s Régence Room for its visitors.76

76Until the Museum resolves problems with using wireless technology inside the galleries, other approaches
Visitors had an interesting range of comments that I overhead during my observations. Prominent among them were aesthetic responses such as, “isn’t this nice?” “it’s amazing, wow, it’s amazing!” “ooo, la, la!” “this is pretty, I love this room!” “that’s a nice looking desk,” “this is incredible,” “wow, this is neat,” “the whole room, isn’t it wonderful?” and “it’s just gorgeous in here.” Curiosity about objects led to one visitor asking, “what is this?” followed by her own answer: “it doesn’t say.” Another woman said to her companion, “it’s a ewer . . . I’ve been calling it a pitcher,” and one man asked, “is this American, or what?” Appreciation of craftsmanship caused a male visitor to respond, “whew, a lot of work went into that!” And a female visitor said to the group she was with, “that’s what Jim’s couch is going to look like in a few years” (regarding the leather desk chair). There were few comments related to evaluation and critique of the decorative art galleries, for example, “they have quite a collection,” and “there should be music.” It is important to note that the greatest number of visitors were attracted to four different items in the room: the desk chair, the tapestry, an object movement slip on one of the object labels, and the mirror between the two doorways. Some visitors were not sufficiently engaged by the objects or setting and treated the Regence Room as a dressing room or backdrop for a photo or for a conversation. Male and female visitors alike walked into the room and looked in the mirror. They fussed with their hair, adjusted their clothing, or made faces at themselves. Some even took photographs while looking into that do not require it would suffice.
the mirror, posing with either silly or reserved expressions. The strangest behavior I witnessed was one afternoon when two men stood in the room with their backs to the objects, and talked about things that, from what I understood, were unrelated to the period room. On all the other occasions, I noticed that visitors were interested and engaged on some level. What these comments suggest is that visitors are reading the messages and meanings set forth by the exhibition developers, who expected visitors to have aesthetic experiences to the exclusion of any others. Clearly visitors are curious. They are making associations and want to know more than the museum currently offers. I see this as the challenge of interpreting material culture in art education. But what is the next step?

Speaking to a group of museum directors at a meeting on the economy of art museums, John Walsh (1991) broached the subject of ideas:

. . . ideas are needed for the use of our collections. There was never a time when we needed to refocus so sharply on the quality and usefulness of the visitor’s experience and recognize that experience for what it is: our fundamental contribution to society. How to make that experience more inviting, more natural, more intelligible, more memorable—that subject is going to repay all the study we can put into it. (p. 30)

Under his leadership, the Getty Museum’s education department conducted regular visitor surveys. The institution also sponsored a national experimental study comprised of focus groups involving eleven museums across America (Insights, 1991). The purpose was to learn about visitors’ attitudes toward and expectations of their museums, in order to understand themselves better. But policies changed after Walsh retired. Personnel changed and surveys were perceived as interrupting the public’s experience with the art, thus their frequency and number diminished.
For visitors of the Régence Room, there is no casual context to viewing it. How might this influence the way the Museum interprets the space for them? The cultural dominance of the Getty Museum, and that of the museum practitioners responsible for the display, together have the opportunity to shape the beliefs and attitudes of their audience. The exhibition development formula, such as it was, used for the display of the Régence panels, adhered to a nineteenth-century aesthetic (as described in Chapter Two). It showed one perspective—fine art—following the interpretation of the Museum’s other permanent collections, namely chronologically and stylistically. Yet individual paintings labels sometimes offer more social-historical context. A chronological ordering and representation of the room is simplistic. Its methodology is “prejudiced to show only development, not decline” (Schlereth, 1978, p. 39). It is uninformed by recent museological literature that communicates change, particularly how museums operate and present themselves, and their collections, to the general public (Anderson, 2004; Einreinhofer, 1997; Hein, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, 1994/1999; Moore, 2000; Newhouse, 1998; Roberts, 1997; Silverman & O’Neill, 2004, Vergo, 1994). I believe this is an interpretive mistake, and the Régence Room its casualty. The museum institution and its workers are a major source of political, social, and economic agency, not just locally but globally. Does it matter if visitors are aware of this or not? What knowledge could be gained by asking visitors in the Régence Room: How does it make you feel to visit this place? What does it mean for you being in the Régence Room and the decorative arts galleries? What experiences did you most enjoy or hope to have while walking through and looking at the material culture in these galleries (Black, 2005)?
Could visitors’ answers to such questions assist educators in developing a sense of place for visitors in this room? Or assist them in establishing a connection to place, which creates any number of associations, among them identity and social experiences in the present (e.g., class difference and privilege)?

However, I am not alone in my dissatisfaction with the Régence Room’s installation and interpretation. The exhibition developers are not fully satisfied either. Surely, this was unintended, yet not one interviewee expressed delight with the final product. Conservators and curators who wanted historical accuracy were disappointed with the room’s re-installation as a *salon*. Directors and curators accepted the re-installation as a compromise. Architects were pleased with the results of the paneling installation while deferring to the curator about furnishings. Both the lighting designer and exhibition designer subsumed their opinions in favor of the curator’s and director’s. Giles, one of the two educators that I interviewed, spent some time teaching in the galleries; it was she who confessed to disliking the room for aesthetic reasons, because it did not stir her sensibilities. Although I wanted to understand why Giles’ colleagues responded to the Régence Room as they had, pursuing their comments was outside the purview of this study, which was focused on the participants actually involved in the exhibition development process.

**Ancillary Questions**

*What pedagogical philosophers guided the process of developing the period room?*

*Did the exhibition developers think in terms of a story, and, if so, what is it and from whose point of view is it told?*
Who chose the artifacts that would tell the story?

Powerful symbolic and visual suggestions—like those presented by the Régence Room—are basic to pictorial media like film and photography. That is why the background settings and objects in such films as *Que le fete commence* (DeBroca & Tavernier, 1975), *Ridicule* (Brillion & Leconte, 1996), *Beaumarchais l’insolent* (Gassot & Molinaro, 1996), *Jefferson in Paris* (Merchant & Ivory, 1995), and *Tout les matins du monde* (Livi & Corneau, 1991) add another level of communication about identity and social interaction in eighteenth-century lived experience. It is possible for such levels of communication to happen in the Régence Room. This room and its objects symbolize J. Paul Getty’s social and economic status. They also pinpoint this Oklahoma oilman’s membership in a kind of American millionaire’s club made of men—and a few women—who desired a particular cultural status that linked them to Europeans. One of the relevant reasons that J. Paul Getty collected eighteenth-century French furnishings in the first place was that they communicated to his peers that he was cultured and had aesthetic taste, in addition to the power bestowed on him by his substantial financial empire. Eventually, the collections of furniture and decorative arts gathered by these American elite—along with paintings, sculpture, and drawings—created museums, either of their own making (as with J. Paul Getty and Henry Francis DuPont) or by donations and bequests to long established institutions (like The Met). Is it plausible that due to these collectors material culture was catapulted from the terrestrial plateau (albeit fashionable and luxurious, consumer goods had typically been exhibited in history museums) to the celestial realm of art? Maybe not. The American art museums discussed in these pages
created and continue to perpetuate—under the guise of preserving cultural heritage—the Robber Baron mentality of collecting rare and valuable objects for the symbolic power connoted to their peers.

But the point I’m trying to make is that the Régence Room’s exhibition developers interpreted the space using nineteenth-century methods that were influenced by Lenoir’s chronological art-historical displays. Ultimately, the Régence Room’s interpretation was determined by John Walsh and Deborah Gribbon, who are paintings specialists, and Gillian Wilson, a decorative arts specialist who has an affinity for the Baroque. Their specializations, coupled with their professional status within the museum’s hierarchy, affected the educational content of the period room.

Examining Walsh’s philosophy affirms my concerns about the Régence Room’s installation: 1) it was guided by his method 2) his method is self-contradictory, 3) his method is an example of a standard museum approach, 4) his method is paintings biased, 6) his method completely ignores any role for educators, and 7) his method neglects an avowed interest in visitors. According to Walsh (2004), art historians “condition [visitors] to look for an interpretive framework” and reinforce a habit of comparing works of art to each other. In permanent exhibitions, visitors, who have been conditioned by special exhibitions to expect linear sequences, “are apt to be disoriented by a relatively unstructured, free-flowing installation, and feel inadequately prepared and impatient” (Walsh, 2004, p. 94). Museums should help visitors

Focus on individual objects for longer periods of time. Explore them in all their aspects and reward all kinds of genuine responses. Resist turning them simply into illustrations of history, or of ideas, or anything else. (p. 96)
It is a contradiction to say: explore objects in all their aspects, yet resist turning them into illustrations of history, ideas, or anything else. Is Walsh’s subtext favoring the modernist view that objects speak for themselves? I think so. But again, as stated above, Walsh is a paintings specialist—seventeenth-century Dutch—not a material culturist. His additional comments address museum collections and galleries.

Find ways to promote visits to the permanent galleries. Changing the featured single works from time to time. Develop some qualitative measures for visitors’ experience of the collection. Questionnaires and interviews with visitors can be tremendously revealing. Just how and why people have strong responses to works of art may be hard to know, but you can listen very profitably to their critiques of the galleries, the amenities, and the information you provide. Rethink the conventions of showing the permanent collection and consider showing even less. Consider removing lesser works and putting them on view in secondary spaces, a formula large museums have used for more than a century. Experiment with single works in a gallery or on a single wall given just to it, perhaps with supplementary material. (p. 97)

It seems to me that, clearly, Walsh is thinking about two-dimensional works on a wall, specifically paintings, which are more easily moved and switched than three-dimensional works. I base this on his example of two different installations at the Getty Museum of James Ensor’s “complex masterpiece,” Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889. The first installation, from 1997, is in a large gallery with numerous other paintings, and the second installation, from 2001, is in a smaller gallery with the painting offset by a few three-dimensional objects, specifically related to Symbolist art history. For Walsh, the 2001 installation is “much more success[ful],” though he did not expand (p. 97).

Museums ought to take approaches to works of art that are less exclusively historical, less a matter of showing causation, influence, and sequences.

Ensor’s subject matter was religion, politics, and art in the context of a Mardi Gras parade.
Museums should suppress the instinct to compare the work in front of the visitor with another one she can’t see. Museums should consider giving more interpretive voice to artists, conservators, historians, writers, and other people whose responses are vivid and imaginative and heartfelt—and which might inspire visitors to have more courage themselves. (p. 97)

Overall, this argument is for a nineteenth-century transcendent aesthetic experience (i.e. modernist), one that opposes causation, influence, and sequences—all elements of narrative and natural to human communication. The statements in the first and second sentences contradict each other. Walsh favors “pure” aesthetics and experience over knowledge and context, but he claims to do so with the objective of empowering visitors. I would argue that the professionals he lists would, to a person, utilize narratives drawn from their personal experiences and historical conditions that shaped their perspectives.

But applying Walsh’s aesthetic of genteel culture (Bushman, 1992; Rubin, 1993) onto the material culture of the Régence Room completely misses the symbolic undercurrents coursing through the narratives communicated by the objects. Galleries of material culture objects and galleries of paintings are more different than they are similar. Paintings and the galleries in which they hang suggest their original use: people stand in front of them looking either straight ahead—if a small or average-sized painting is hung at eye level—or upward, if a huge or over-sized painting is hung high on a wall. There are rare variations of this, such as a painting positioned on an easel or mounted on a pedestal, as the Getty Museum has done with Vittore Carpaccio’s two-sided painted panel, *Hunting on the Lagoon* (recto); *Letter Rack* (verso) (probably originally a window shutter or cabinet door). But decorative arts objects on pedestals or in vitrines are already
removed from their original function as chairs, desks, vases, teacups, etc. A period room installation attempts to show decorative arts objects in a context suggesting their original use: the writing set sits on a writing desk, the vases might hold flowers, the chandeliers have candles, the windows appear to have real light coming through them. So, the question is, is a period room installation more successful for this reason? And are paintings installations generally more appealing because the objects do what they used to do?

Paintings labels at the Getty are also written differently, with narratives not found in decorative arts object labels, as the following texts demonstrate. The first example is label text from an French painting:

The Country Dance
About 1760-62

Gabriel de Saint-Aubin
French, 1724-1780

Oil on canvas

Saint-Aubin is remembered primarily as a draftsman who was fascinated with the daily life of Paris. Here, however, he turned away from the city to celebrate country life. At least fifty meticulously observed figures are shown dancing, drinking, playing music, and enjoying the festivities. The novelty of the pastoral subject may have inspired Saint-Aubin to create his most complex composition.

Compare the paintings label text to the decorative arts label for the Régence Room and one of its objects:

The Régence Style

As the reign of Louis XIV progressed into the 1700s, taste slowly evolved away from the formal court style epitomized by the palace of Versailles, and large public halls finished in stone, marble, and costly fabrics gave
way to smaller rooms fitted with wood panels. When the King died in 1715, the court abandoned Versailles for private houses in Paris, for which architects and designers developed lighter lines, forms, and colors. The new style is called Régence because it coincided with the period when France was temporarily ruled by the regency of the duc d’Orléans while Louis XV was a minor (1715-1732).

The paintings label focuses on the painter: his biography and his oeuvre. It gives a description of the picture, it speculates about motivation and with words like “turned away” and “most complex.” In contrast, the decorative arts label focuses on style progression, cursory political/social context, and change of materials. In order for a visitor to get a general sense of the style, function, history, and origin of the period room—the paneling and the furnishings—he would have to read every single object tombstone.78 This is because such content is scattered across three different label panels. In the case of the three different commodes in the room, one tombstone describes the maker—Étienne Doirat (about 1675-1732)—and the inconsistency with which such craftsmen would stamp their work: Doirat was rare among his peers because he signed his pieces. Another commode tombstone defines the French term, briefly explains how such objects were used, and details their stylistic predecessors. The third commode tombstone describes the maker’s—Charles Cressant (1685-1768)—resistance to the guilds, which prevented him from making the gilt-bronze mounts for his carcasses, and the fines he received for violating guild rules. For these infractions he was fined.

Few visitors read every single label or, in the case of label panels, each tombstone. Many more visitors ignore labels. I learned this from my participant

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78Tombstone is a term used in graphic design to describe text that, when grouped, resembles cemetery tombstones.
observations. These few examples, in addition to my previous discussion about the differences between interpreting two- and three-dimensional objects, are tangible features highlighting the problems and differences between interpreting objects whose original purposes are to be looked at or to be used. Interpreting the subject matter of these varying objects leads to different experiences and knowledge acquisition. They require various interpretive approaches. The Getty Museum has taken up Walsh’s call for more interpretive voices, and these varied voices speak on the audioguide. Artists, conservators, historians, and writers have begun to give informal gallery talks, but they are one-way operations—animated labels, as it were.

In Chapter Two, I was critical of traditional museum didactics. I would like to balance my statements here. The Getty Museum has made strides in writing audioguide narratives spoken by the museum’s curators and conservators. In some instances, contemporary visual artists are employed to offer their perspective on artworks, as I explained above. Yet its labels have changed little. In 1996, educators at the Museum worked with designers and editors to interview curators “to find out what sorts of interpretation issues were important for them” (K. Giles, personal communication, February 11, 2003). The product of this process was the “Interpretive Guidelines,” which was influenced by established guidelines set forth in contemporary literature on museum label text and visitors’ attention spans. The Getty’s guidelines recommended the following procedure: 1) curator’s write the label copy, 2) educators comment on the copy with attention to visitors’ needs (e.g., font size for ease of reading, number of words, complexity of content), and 3) editors comment on grammar.
The Education Department used its “Interpretive Guidelines” to interpret the Régence Room for its visitors. But the room presents a fictional *mise-en-scène*, typical of a period room installation. That in and of itself is not problematic. What makes an interpretative experience tricky is the abiding fact that museums set limitations. For example, displays must accommodate security issues. The Getty Museum is required to follow Fire Department specifications for circulation as well as its own in-house security mandate to preserve the objects for future generations. This means that the Museum must guard the objects from visitors’ bumping into them—potentially damaging the objects—or from theft of smaller objects that are often displayed on tabletops. None of these issues can be addressed in skimpy label text.

Other museums that have experimented with label writing offer models that the Getty Museum might consider. Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi (2003), Director of Exhibitions and Programs for the Cultural and Visual Arts Resource, conducted a study involving five different art museums that allowed visitors to write labels.⁷⁹ “All the museums reported overwhelmingly positive responses by visitors to the museums’ invitations to *speak*” (p. 22). More recently, at the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology in Berkeley, California, exhibition labels are being designed “which tell the behind the scenes story of conservators, preparators, curators, and exhibition designers” (Lisa Bruemmer, email communication, November 27, 2006). But labels are unable to create memories, experiences, and unexplained phenomena. They can encapsulate them, but it is visceral and sensory phenomena that affect lived experiences.

⁷⁹The five museums where Nashashibi investigated label-writing practices were at the San Jose Museum of Art, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme, Connecticut, the Williams College Museum of Art in Williamstown, Massachusetts, and the Bronx Museum of Art.
Labels can convey narrative or story or something memorable, instead of bald, often disconnected facts like the three *commode* labels described above, and label themselves do not prohibit asking questions of visitors or offering speculations; it is museum convention that labels are factual and formatted. Revisiting the problem of period room pedagogy may suggest alternatives beyond tinkering with labels.

The Problem Revisited

Many years passed before Getty Museum educators were involved in the exhibition process of the Régence Room’s re-installation and re-interpretation. Not until labels were discussed were educators included. If educators had been involved from the beginning and throughout the exhibition process, would the Régence Room be presented differently? To me this is a crucial question, and I believe the answer is yes. The interpretive problem of the Régence Room, and why I consider it a pedagogical flop, is the fact that the exhibition developers did not advocate nor practice critical art pedagogy. If this approach to art/material culture interpretation were to have been stamped with the director’s imprimatur, chances are that the room’s interpretation would be different. But there are other concerns.

First, the material culture of this domestic interior is located in an art museum. By their very nature, art museums privilege visual experience surrounding fine art, such as drawings, paintings, and sculpture over other kinds of experiences as well as other kinds of art. Another issue is that “art museums have always featured displays of power: “great men, great wealth, or great deeds” (Dubin, 1999, p. 4; Smith, 2001), and have avoided
“unflattering, embarrassing, or dissonant viewpoints” (Dubin, 1999, p. 3). The Régence Room could fit comfortably into such paradigms with interesting stories to be told. My second concern is the human factor: the installation of the room was troubled by the ideological differences of its exhibition developers. When tied to human egos, what these ideological differences suggest is a catalyst for conflict that makes for great drama but becomes a hindrance to the creative process, which I attempted to convey in *Requiem for a Room*. The subject matter is similar to Albert Maysles’s film, *Concert of Wills: Making the Getty Center* (1997). The film’s action is the creative process involving the architects Richard Meier and Thierry Despont, Getty executives, Museum staff, and neighborhood residents. It shows the egos and the drama and the ideological differences, but it also demonstrates the ability of the participants to mediate their differences through collaboration and compromise without destroying the results of the project. So what can be done to address these concerns?

Perhaps gallery teachers’ perceptions of the room could be investigated through another research project focusing on their creative process. Evaluating the results might answer questions about interpreting the Régence Room and might explain why the room, as Karen Giles revealed, is disliked generally by educators. Does such a bias ultimately affect interaction with visitors? For example, if there were not a popular tapestry in the Régence Room would educators take students and the general public to see it? (I assume that the tapestry is easier to interpret because of its two-dimensionality; its similarity to a painting, presents a familiar way to “weave” narratives.) But would educators’ responses—meaning both their dislike of the room and their weak involvement in the room’s
interpretation—have differed greatly if the period room had been installed as a bedroom, with the never-before-exhibited Régence bed, no commodes, more chairs backed against the walls, and the walls in the bed area upholstered with fabric? I think it quite possible that the Régence bed in the context of the Régence Room might have affected educators’ responses to the room, if only because the Museum’s other two beds have proven to be favorites among its visitors. After all, material culture displays err on the side of how objects are best positioned for viewing, not on the side of how they would have been historically positioned.

What is the basis for the knowledge presented in the period room? Knowledge corresponds to context, whether it is historical, cultural, or social, but it does not correspond to some objective reality. The unification of these contexts is “the common assumption that knowledge is fundamentally interpretive” (p. 57). The theories that support this view are both literary and semiotic. It is educators—responsible for communicating knowledge—that are in the midst of this controversy about interpretation, because they work to reveal the construction of knowledge made in museums. Education is an act of empowerment, in the sense that museum educators, whose role is to advocate for visitors, argue for allowing other choices and different perspectives to connect with their diverse audience. Such educators are challenging a status quo, meaning conventional ways of “knowing and presenting objects” (Roberts, 1997, p. 55). So where does this leave us educators? What are the possibilities for period room pedagogy?
Pedagogical Implications

[M]useums are no longer object-based institutions in the traditional sense of the term—except insofar as objects serve as the conveyers of ulterior ideas and experiences. Rather, they are idea-, experience-, and narrative-based institutions—forums for the negotiation and the renegotiation of meaning. (Roberts, 1997, p. 147)

Museums are not books with two-dimensional linear texts that will carry you through a story. Museums are “three-dimensional experiences where every known means of communication should be used, from electronic and other devices to create visual illusions, to animation, color, lighting, sound, graphics, and the physical manipulation of space and traffic” (Miller, 1963; p. 188). In Chapter Two I express the viewpoint that creating successful narratives in a museum depends on how well the narratives connect to the cultures of visitors’ lives, emotions, and intellects. When visitors add points of view to unfamiliar museum narratives, modes of interpretation become obtainable, as Nashashibi’s (2003) label-writing study affirms. Her research demonstrates that constructed narratives are a form of meaning production and an active social process that focuses on particular forms of life in definite historical contexts. The value lies in the specificity of its objects and the power of those objects to participate in multiple discourses that are simultaneously historical, personal, political, and popular. The connection of the objects and discourses is purposeful and intentional, and is also often serendipitous.

What are some other possibilities for enlivening the Régence Room? Energy and unpredictability generally attract people’s attention and that of young people in particular.
Museum theatre could be an answer to listless verbal, aural, and physical museum education programming. The next two sections explore the use of museum theatre and avant garde investigations of the period room.

*Museum Theatre*

Exhibition development pedagogy and drama are creative acts with spectators and sets of arranged details and performed acts. Drama, with its need for action, allowed me to move around and through the issues surrounding the period room. Drama’s organized action, based on patterns of situations and incidents allowed me to enliven the room. The perception performed by museum spectators or audience through their action of feeling, thinking, and expressing. These phases are at work in *Requiem for a Room*, with a minor alteration which would involve you—the reader—as spectator. How could Chapter Four’s ethnographic drama adapt these principles to create museum theatre?

Museum theatre at its best can have an emotional impact that stops visitors from roaming. Actually, it should focus their roaming, giving them an idea why a particular subject or exhibition deserves their attention. A playwright learns how, as does an educator, to handle these action elements, which involve a pursuit of discipline, structure, and meaning. In one way or another, theatre uses all of these modes of communication.

In order to develop a discussion of contemporary museum theatre, it is necessary to move through time and zig-zag across continents, beginning in ancient Greece. Over twenty-five hundred years ago, Aristotle (384 B.C.-322 B.C) wrote *Poetics* (350 B.C.). What survives of that text today is mostly about tragedy. He describes the process of
performing tragedy as an imitation (*mimesis*) of real life. If we start here, with the thought of imitating real life, and speed ahead to the nineteenth century, we arrive in Sweden. There Artur Hazelius, as mentioned in Chapter Two, constructed the earliest known period room at the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm and experimented with a program of living history at Skansen. Here we have Aristotle’s theory of mimesis linked to Hazelius’s living history museum method, which in turn is connected to museum theatre today. The earliest living history performances in America date from the late 1920s, at John D. Rockefeller’s Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia and Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village in Michigan (Hughes, 1998; Association for Living History, Farm and Agriculture Museums, 2006). Drawing upon the intelligence of Aristotle and Hazelius, these historical sites contextualize moments from the past in an effort to bring history to life (Hughes, 1998).

Successful museum theatre programs are most often found in science and natural history museums, but there is one notable exception in American art museums: the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Walters received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (1986) and the Getty Grant Program (1989) with which two theatre pieces—living history performances—were produced to be performed in the museum’s Renaissance galleries: *Echoes from the Middle Ages* (October 1986 through July 1988) and *Of courts and courtship: Scenes from the Renaissance* (October 1990 through June 1991) (Stillman, 1990). The narratives of these plays were written with children in mind (Farmelo, 1992; Hughes, 1998; Landy, 80).
At the Walters Art Museum today, period dances and poetry readings are performed in the galleries. And at the time of this writing, the education department’s manager for adult programming is preparing a Greek drama to be performed in the Ancient Art galleries.

One way of tapping into visitors’ desire to visit museums today is through drama, a powerful form of interpretation with the potential to communicate to a wide range of visitors (Farmelo, 1992). In 2006, I attended a performance in one of the European paintings galleries at the Art Institute of Chicago. Actress, Barbara Robertson, in the role of Jane Avril, stood next to Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec’s painting *At the Moulin Rouge,* in which this historical character is depicted. She told us—museum visitors—about herself, the Moulin Rouge, and Lautrec. Her performance was part of the Art Institute’s program called “Voices.” Dead artists “speak” for themselves in this regular series. Living local and national actors read/perform scripts drawn from letters, journals, and other writings about the dead artists. Performances that take place in the Art Institute’s Fullerton Hall incorporate music and image projection onto a screen onstage. There is also a “gallery finder” who helps visitors locate related works in the Museum.

Critics of museum theatre cringe at both the thought of drama in museum galleries and at seeing stories enacted in them. They firmly believe that objects speak for themselves, a position connecting directly to a modernist paradigm when a museum’s few visitors had nothing more to go on than their aesthetic response. And then, pretty much all they expected was to either like or dislike what they saw—beauty ruled. But today’s visitors want more. They are from an era trained to ask questions, not to blindly
accept what they see as being beautiful or not. Anyone exposed to contemporary art of the twentieth and twenty-first century, could realize there is more to art than mere beauty. As Howard Brandston (personal communication, July 16, 2003) explained during his interview about the Régence Room, “a really good teacher” would get caught up in the clothing and “the mores of the time.” Without such discussions, “you’re losing the benefit of studying” the social history of the period room. An exclusively aesthetic approach would be “too narrow a piece . . . [it would be] a piece of decoration and not a piece of humanity.” I believe that by connecting contemporary human spectators with historical human actors who once occupied the room or created it or used the things in it, visitors could benefit from learning about the original experience of the room and the people involved with it.

Dublin’s children’s cultural center—called Ark—is thick with humanity. This Irish institution offers the kind of experience Brandston describes. A few years ago (2002), the center produced a play entitled Dublin 1742. John Banville, the author, wrote it for 9- to 14-year-olds. The play focused on the final week of rehearsals for the premiere of Baroque composer George Frederic Handel’s (1685-1759), Messiah. The production is reminiscent of Richard Rose’s staging of John Krizanc’s play Tamara during the 1980s, which had a single story, but there were no barriers between spectators and actors. Spectators could follow a character for their choice, to any one of the multiple simultaneously occurring scenes/events taking place on three separate floors and numerous rooms of Hollywood’s American Legion, where performances were held. In Dublin 1742, the play’s action is divided into various sets on different floors inside the
Ark, a multi-storied building. Children, parents, and teachers walk up a flight of stairs and stand around a small stage with a nearby dressing room. An actor portraying David Garrick (1717-1779), the English actor, playwright, theatre manager, and producer, is rehearsing a scene from Hamlet. Peg Woffington (1714?-1760), the actress who plays Garrick’s leading lady, sits emoting about “her famous roles and many admirers” (Fricker, 2002, p. 5), such as Polly Peachum in John Gay’s The Beggar’s Opera and Ophelia in Hamlet and Rosalind in As You Like It. As her scene ends, the audience is guided to another flight of stairs to witness “six more characters in six small, differently designed rooms” (p. 5). Handel is in his music room hunched over a score. Next door, Susannah Cibber, one of his favorite singers, looks at historical portraits. In yet another room, Jonathan Swift scratches away with his quill, writing Gulliver’s Travels. Visitors walk upstairs to still another floor in the Ark building to find Laetitia Pilkington seated at her tiny writing table lit by a candle.

[she is] a beautiful young woman in a wig and panniered skirt, [and] confides that she is not the type to gossip. She then proceeds to divulge all sorts of interesting details about the characters the audience has just met, aided by images projected on a wall (p. 5).

After Pilkington, the narrator of Dublin 1742, completes her monologue, the children, parents, and teachers move into the theatre, where the 70-minute play actually begins, with the characters to whom they were introduced, from the moment they entered the building.

The innovative interpretive methods at these institutions give me hope for the future of museum education. Future research directions could examine such productions as described above for the ways in which they integrate and interpret diverse
relationships among people, places and things—qualities shared by Andrea Fraser’s
*Museum Highlights* described below. Examples like these offer insight into alternative
interpretive approaches to the Régence Room. While I am well aware that unfettered
access to this period room is prohibitive, given the museum’s security concerns, selected
short scenes could be written and performed in an adjacent gallery, in the Museum’s
lecture hall, in the Getty Center’s Harold Williams Auditorium, or in fair weather, on the
Museum’s courtyard stage, where summer program events are regularly performed.

*Traditional to Avant Garde?*

Different approaches from museum theatre can be found in current research on
French furniture. Carolyn Sargentson, curator at the Victoria & Albert Museum, believes
that French furniture is a rich source of cultural history. She is a strong supporter of
incorporating social history and cultural history into discussions of objects.
Connoisseurship, the traditional museum curatorial approach, “is not the end all” to
interpreting such material culture, she says. Her research focuses on the “fear and
secrecy of social life of French citizens [as it was] played out in the domestic sphere of
locked mechanical furniture.” Sargentson claims that “secrecy is a game, it’s different
from privacy” (Sargentson, 2002).

At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, curators from the Costume Institute have
collaborated on exhibitions with curators from the decorative arts department. As
recently as May 2006, when the museum opened “AngloMania: Tradition and
Transgression in British Fashion,” decorative arts galleries served as backdrops for both
period and contemporary costume displays. Christopher Bailey, Hussein Chalayan, John Galliano, Alexander McQueen, and Vivienne Westwood were among the designers whose garments evoked their historic predecessors. The displays are provocative, strange, glamorous, and playful (Fig. 5.1).

In 2002, the Victoria & Albert Museum, in collaboration with the Poetry Book Society, commissioned five poets to write new works in response to, and in honor of, the museum’s opening of its re-designed British Galleries 1500-1900. Among the objects chosen as subject matter were a sixteenth-century spinet, an eighteenth-century compact mirror, and a twentieth-century necklace. The museum held poetry readings in the Norfolk House Music Room—a period room! Go to http://www.vam.ac.uk/activ_events/adult_resources/creative_writing/poems/index.html, to read, see, and/or listen to the poets.
reciting their works.

Furthermore, the museum regularly uses the Norfolk House Music Room as a site for performance because of its size and its original purpose (Fig. 5.2). Granted, this period room is large enough to hold a whole school group, but the purpose of this example is to demonstrate that the room is being used, not merely being looked at. Musical concerts are offered, literature readings are given in conjunction with temporary exhibitions (e.g., the Canterbury Tales read in relation to *Gothic: Art for England 1400-1547*), and very recently, in late October 2006, Giles Round\(^1\) made a neon sculpture that was placed in the Norfolk House Music Room as part of the Friday Late Twilight.

\(^1\)See the sculpture at http://www.re-title.com/artists/giles-round.asp
programming for adult audiences. The ideas are boundless. Clearly, some museums are crossing the border from traditional to avant-garde.

As I mentioned in a previous chapter, representations of domestic interiors are peerless for their pedagogical content and their possibilities for constructing social and psychological narratives. The collage photographs of contemporary multimedia artist Marnie Weber present examples of constructing narratives within the Régence Room itself (Joyce, Gerstler, & Steinke, 2005). Looking at the eighteenth-century material culture of the Régence Room through contemporary sensibilities, Weber connected the past to the present. Her recent Getty Series of collage photographs started with two

Fig. 5.3. Marnie Weber. The Forgotten, from the Getty series, 2001. Collage on photograph. (Régence Room, Malibu installation). Courtesy of the artist.
different Rococo beds in the Museum's collection followed by two different installations of the Régence Room as one of its subjects: one from Malibu, before it was de-installed, and the other from Brentwood, after it was re-installed. Through Weber’s eyes, the rooms become strange and fantastical places. Weber told me that her art work is about “trying to dissolve typical notions of beauty.” She was fascinated with the period rooms because of their dollhouse quality and because they “don’t address the dark side of nature at all.” For Weber, the rooms exemplify a very repressed world for women. Her collage photographs deconstruct this notion using animals as female alter egos or allegorical signifiers. In the Malibu installation (Fig. 5.3), the female dollhouse figures—seated on the stool, draped from the chandelier, and posed behind a monkey—are all trapped in this space (i.e., the Régence Room). The female in the mirror is actually outside, looking into the room of her making. The polar bear sprawled on the carpet is a masculine figure, and the sheep behind it symbolizes “going along with the crowd.” A fun-loving monkey squats on the desk chair, throughout the entire room fairies flutter on the tapestries, representing guardian angels who comfort the woman in the mirror. In the foreground near the polar bear, a crown brings to mind royalty and duty, obedience and isolation. At one time it belonged to the woman in the mirror, back when she was a princess (personal communication, November 9, 2006).
In the Brentwood installation, in the second image from Weber’s Getty Series (Fig. 5.4), moths decorate the modern white-painted panels obscuring their contrast with the gilded panels. Weber explained that they “are always a symbol of old and decay and forgotten things.” The stag resting atop the desk symbolizes freedom to Weber, but also vulnerability. This scene, as in the previous one, suggests a dollhouse. In this tableau, nude women sit or slump in various positions on the chairs and stool. Enormous life-sized mannequins peer in from outside the windows to observe the doll-like nude women. Weber put masks on the nude women as a unifying device that suggests they are not
individuals, but of a group. The rabbit on the fireplace mantel portrays a potential victim and on the commode below the mirror a sleeping possum signifies denial and being unconnected—“going to sleep when there’s trouble.” Weber’s use of pearls, which float near the ceiling and hover above the carpet, typifies two worlds, the physical and the emotional. The physical world exists underwater, and the emotional world lies in the human subconscious. The branches scattered on the parquetry floor surrounding the carpet echo the stag’s antlers, but in Weber’s mind they denote kindling or burning (personal communication, November 9, 2006).

Fostering yet another approach to interpreting museum collections is BRC Imagination Arts, whose controversial work is attracting attention. BRC, located in Burbank, California, is recognized for making immersive, experience-based attractions for museums. They claim today’s public is eager for experiences in museums rather than galleries with plexi glass cases of static objects. BRC’s research indicates that the general public wants drama, immersion, adventure, and involvement. Their prospectus describes it this way:

A collection of authentic objects may be a traditional curator’s focus, but with the exception of art galleries, an increasing number of guests are responding enthusiastically to artifacts, if they come with an adventure that tells a compelling and educational story.

BRC says that there should be no fear of objects or material culture being supplanted because they are simply being used to tell compelling stories. One journalist explained that BRC’s approach adopts techniques from amusement parks, Hollywood, and Broadway: their motto is “Scholarship meets Showmanship.” However, a vocal critic of one of their recent projects for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and
Museum claims that BRC dumbs down Lincoln’s life and that, by downplaying the President’s intellectual contributions, the exhibition demeans the man (Engle, 2006). Nevertheless, what BRC offers are displays that use the language and iconography of the twentieth-first century, “placing historical items and thoughts within their context, by engaging the whole of the museum visitor” (BRC Imagination Arts, n.d., n.p.). I imagine BRC could make an installation engaging all senses with motion, sound, touch, taste, and smell, for example, using *Requiem for a Room* as a springboard, perhaps showing Sophie floating through the room, or having actors perform scenes from plays written about historical characters, or creating an activity/prop about the mirror, ideally within the Régence Room, or outside it.

Perhaps the most compelling example I can give for the application of critical art pedagogy in museums is Andrea Fraser’s performance at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989: *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*. The performance—given five times in February 1989—is an institutional critique that satirizes the sociology of art museums. Fraser (1989) impersonated a volunteer docent, Jane Castelton, who guided visitors around the Museum. As the artist puts it, “while Jane is a fictional docent, I would like to consider her less as an individual *character* with autonomous traits than as a site of speech constructed within various relations constitutive of the museum” (p. 107). According to one critic, Fraser’s characterization of the volunteer docent “scrambled the discourses of the 19th-century art museum and the poor house, making what seemed to be an entirely unconscious and hilarious critique of the museum as an institution for the discipline and punishment of classes without taste” (Thornton, 2005/2006, p. 42). This
example differs in two ways from the others given above. First, Fraser used critical art pedagogy, and she did so from the perspective of her own personal, social, and political philosophies as a practicing artist, as “an evangelical convert” of Pierre Bourdieu’s theories about the hierarchies and conflicts of the art world (p. 42). As an individual, she would only have been constrained by her own decision-making process, but museums have internal bureaucracies. It is impossible to know how the Philadelphia Museum of Art might have responded if its educators were to have tried producing a program with the social and political undercurrent of Fraser’s. Educators might very well have had to answer to institutional oversight committees for content approval. Yet Fraser’s performance carries an essential element lacking in the Régence Room’s interpretation and in examples discussed in the two previous sections—critical art pedagogy.

The Régence Room’s Future

One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time. (André Gide)

The Régence Room and its objects are visual material evidence of aristocratic taste and fashion of eighteenth-century Paris. They represent J. Paul Getty’s collecting taste, but, even more so, that of Gillian Wilson, the curator. The objects are rare and luxurious examples of high style during the Régence. However, the museum’s representation and interpretation of the room is vague about cause and effect. Indeed, what were the social ramifications of this lifestyle up and down the social hierarchy? Although the museum’s decorative arts collecting focus is objects of the nobility, any...
discussion of those absent from the Régence Room scene remains a rich untapped resource from which to envision the historical past in relation to the present.

As I remarked in Chapter Four about Derrida’s *hauntology*, institutions could experience emancipation from malfunctioning practices of historic complacency. How? We have learned from Derrida (1994) that we need to promise “to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, [and] organization” (p. 89) by adjusting reality to the ideal and by asking far-reaching questions. The institutional reality of the Régence Room is the narrative history of both the space it creates and the objects it contains, and the ideal is how they are represented in a museum setting. As for far-reaching questions, they lead to new ways of thinking and new ways of representing the material culture of the room.

In an art museum, there are as many approaches to narrative as there are ideas, and the same claim is valid for interpreting works of art (Carrier, 2003), but first the museum field has to develop “an openness to experimentation” (Silverman & O’Neill, 2004, p. 43) and risk-taking (Wilk, 2002). Making choices to change is required for both, that is, for museums to change and broaden their approach to narrative. As John Dewey wrote, “experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it” (McDermott, 1981, p. 495). Only when we reflect upon changes made in us is the transformation significant. Indeed, one effect of such openness could be that museum administrators could identify imaginatively with their visitor to expand their perception and understanding of interpretation. As Danto (1981) puts it, “the limits of interpretation
are the limits of knowledge, much in the way that the limits of imagination are the limits of knowledge” (p. 127).

The Getty Museum’s exhibition development project for the Régence Room did not make allowances for new museology, a paradigm shift of the 1970s (Anderson, 2004; Hein, 2000; Vergo, 1989) widely felt by museum professionals. A dramatic change occurred in which exclusive care and attention of objects in museum collections altered to advocacy of museum visitors (Ross, 2004). Although the Getty Museum was not immune to this social evolution (Zeller, 1996), it remained conservative in implementing change either interdepartmentally or institutionally (Henry-Jugan, 2001). As Rowanne Henry-Jugan (2001) noted in her study of the J. Paul Getty Museum’s shift toward diversity in its hiring practices, there are “internal and external forces” that influence change not only institutionally but also historically (p. 217). During interview transcript analysis, it became clear that the exhibition development process was guided by clashing principles. Conflict and tension thwarted a creative process. Even though the meetings were described as “small regiment[s] that only the Getty could assemble” (Howard Brandston, personal communication, 2003, p. 12), it is unlikely that the number of persons involved in the process were the cause.

The exhibition developers had to negotiate and compromise their installation ideas. It is understandable that the period room interpretation had unfulfilled goals, objectives, and themes, given the fact that the group comprised numerous individuals with conflicting ideologies. However, this study shows that historically entrenched

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82 Evidenced by a number of museum publications around the mid-1980s, England was far ahead of America in promoting a new museology.
power relations between curators and art educators, and between art educators and other museum practitioners, remain an obstacle in creating dynamic period room interpretations or, for that matter, any exhibition. My research also indicates that visitors’ points of view were ignored. What questions do they have? What stories would they like to hear, or be told? What programs would pique their interest?

The Régence Room has been in its present configuration since the new museum in Brentwood opened to the public in 1997. Several of my participants expressed the viewpoint that the period room was not a fixed space. Three participants believe it is time to rethink the display, and two are willing to discuss what changes could be made. With recent institutional shifts and changes of staff in administration, curatorial and education, the next decade could surely bring new interpretive methods to this space.

Paramount to resolving dramatic tensions between curators and educators and museum administrators is to subvert rivalries, prejudices, and biases and to develop tolerance for ideological differences. As Silverman and O’Neill (2004) note, “releasing creativity and energy requires not so much intellect or insight as courage” (p. 43). Without the courage to change, museum practitioners will continue to keep their visitors in the position of outsider—ironically, the main group for whom such exhibitions are alleged to be made. I believe that by bringing narrative practices (Ham, 1993/1999, 2002, 2003; Ham & Weiler, 2003; Tilden, 1957/1977) to the creative process of exhibition development and interpretation of art museum period rooms, museum practice will move past the fear of taking risks and into the emancipatory, vital, and creative expressions of teaching and interpreting material culture.
Collections of objects like the Régence Room are important to museums. It is the objects that distinguish a museum from other cultural institutions. And it is the care and study of the collections that museum practice fosters. Museum educators have begun to own their place in museum practice. I am suggesting here that expansion is needed. It is clear that museums have been re-identifying themselves as educational institutions. As such, it only takes common sense to recognize that the participation of educators is crucial in developing exhibitions made for the public. Museum educators can enhance the interpretation of a display like the Régence Room because they are visitors’ advocates and naturally ask different questions than other practitioners involved in developing exhibitions. Educators could contribute another dimension to developing exhibitions of material culture by bringing their perspective to decorative arts research.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, Fleming (1972) asks a number of questions. All of them suggest a way of learning, but the last three offer possibilities for visitors to construct narratives. The three questions are: “1) How is it [a period room] to be presented to the public? 2) What theory of restoring the past [and] what assumptions about communication are being implemented? and 3) How much realism and lived-in atmosphere will be attempted?” (p. 48). Fleming differentiates these questions from those he asks in relation to a room’s woodwork and furnishings. Saving the best for last, in essence, he declares these three questions as “possibly the most important and least systematically discussed aspect of [a] room[’s] installation” (p. 48).

I believe that “[a] narrative view of education suggests that visitors’ experiences are shaped as much by who they are as by what museums are like” (Roberts, 1997, p. 303).
Another theory of narrative and education states that museums touch people’s lives and minds on a broader scale than is generally acknowledged. Museums communicate through their objects, which activate visitors’ memories, emotions, and interchange. How can museums shape their collections to “inspire visitors to discover and construct their own narratives” (p. 142)?

As previously stated in Chapter Two, objects of material culture are a greater interpretive challenge for educators and visitors alike. Another key is required to open a hidden compartment to reveal additional layers of embedded contexts. A combination of the social and democratic methods of art education and material culture are one possibility.

There is a significant difference between the experience of two- and three-dimensional objects. Two-dimensional objects in museums—flat art, such as paintings—maintain their original function, which is to hang on a wall to be looked at. Manuscripts, though three-dimensional, are displayed as if a two-dimensional object, behind glass and opened to a page determined by a theme chosen by a curator for an exhibition. Photographs and drawings are two-dimensional, but in their early uses did not include being hung on a wall. They were carefully stored in portfolios or envelopes to be taken out periodically and looked at while being held in a viewer’s hands. The primary action is looking.

However, with three-dimensional objects the primary action is using. And here is the problem of period room pedagogy. Chairs were meant to be sat in, lighting fixtures were meant to be lit with flaming candles, inkstands were meant to be filled with ink, and
blotters to blot it. The cunning compartments in the armpads of the Régence Room’s
desk chair were meant to be opened and to store things inside. This desk chair was
intended for use at a desk, which was designed to be written upon. The room’s doors
were designed to open and close, yet can do neither. Tapestries, although three-
dimensional objects, are displayed in museums as though they were two-dimensional
paintings. Their original uses as draft reducers and for other kinds of room insulation are
not conveyed in museum displays. How can an educator bring up issues of comfort when
neither she nor her visitors can use or experience the objects as they were originally?
How can visitors be expected to make emotional connections with three-dimensional
objects that were designed for use when they can only look at them? Something must be
added to an installation or exhibition in order to convey the other senses of using—
especially touch, sometimes hearing or smell. Merely looking at the Régence Room is a
compelling limitation to its experience. The visitors I observed tried to overcome this on
their own, without an educator’s or curator’s intervention. They talked about ownership:
one male adult commented: “Wouldn’t you get depressed having that [tapestry] on your
wall?” One female adult said to the boy standing next to her, “Some room, huh? You
could play your violin in this room.” Still other visitors wondered what it would be like
to use the objects, such as sitting in the chairs: “The chairs are so low; people must have
been shorter.” But adding something to the installation could have enriched the visitors’
resources for imagining the use of these objects.
Future Research Directions

The most interesting initiatives are very often in museum education, but educationalists are still all too often largely excluded from the exhibition process. (Moore, 1997, pp. 71-72)

A recurring theme of this dissertation is that objects of material culture are “often neglected or omitted from traditional studies in art history and art education” (Bolin, 1992/1993, p. 144). My project adds to this underdeveloped research area by questioning and analyzing the interpretation of an art museum period room. I have proposed that museum practitioners reflect on the learning styles shown by visitors, a process dependent on observations in the period room. With the guidance of Winterthur’s Wheel of Interpretation (see Appendix O), which is still used there and “has stood the test of time” (R. Krill, personal communication, October 2005), Getty educators could draw on and expand the knowledge that visitors bring to the room. Enhancing the Wheel are Ham’s (1999, 2002, 2003) and Ham & Weiler’s (2003) approach to interpretation presentations, specifically his five principles of developing a conceptual framework that can be practiced to research and prepare gallery tours. An interdisciplinary grounding in the various contexts of the Régence Room could make the Wheel’s non-linear method less intimidating for the educators.

Continued research in this area is needed. It can be directed in two ways. First, it would offer a comparative base from which to challenge this study’s findings by studying other exhibition development processes, especially for period rooms. Frequently in the development of museum exhibitions, educators are an afterthought (Dietz, Brotman, &
Wintemberg, 2000; Rice, 2000; Roberts, 1997). This suggests a second research direction, to track the balance of interdepartmental involvement in the creative process of exhibition design. Specifically, this approach could monitor whether art educators are being included early in the process and if their interpretive methods have become more meaningful, progressing beyond writing or editing label and text copy (Faron, 2003).

Structuring activities and developing questions emphasizing concepts based on looking and seeing are second nature to art museum educators, as I stated in Chapter Two (Ebitz, 2005). What about demonstrating and teaching the skills of making art? The Getty Museum offers studio art programming such as sketching in the galleries from original works of art, artist-at-work demonstrations (drawing, painting, and photographic techniques). Most programs require a fee ranging from approximately twenty to sixty-five dollars; fewer programs are free to the public, such as sketching in the galleries. The GettyGuide™ also offers videos detailing these processes. The museum’s programs might demystify the art process for its visitors and help them to overcome their intimidation of museums.

Throughout this work, I have stated that period room interpretation is problematic and challenging. It is, but that is one of the great things about it. Interpretation is more than showing what a domestic interior of the French Régence might have looked like. The display must have an intention. Asking questions is a good place to begin, a claim that is asserted by Underwood (1993), who affirms that

Once . . . questions have been formulated, the nature and extent of the research required can be determined, and a solid basis built for ethical decisions about the amount of authenticity which is being aimed at. (p. 380)
How do the objects answer questions about history, pedagogy, status (social & economic), interior design, domestic technology, family structures, health, and hygiene?

What have I learned from this project, and what can anyone learn from the engagement I suggest? If I have learned anything from my research it is this: the Régence Room is a fascinating, though troubled space; surprising, it presents a multi-layered perspective on representing historical domestic interiors in a museum. I learned that installing this period room was a tremendous feat of creativity involving complex and tedious networks of personal and professional views. Researching the room’s history led to new information that extended its provenance. That was exciting—how, I suppose, an archaeologist or detective must feel when discovering something previously buried or hidden. Examining the period room through writing an ethnographic drama uncovered imagined details and incidents that gave me another context from which to observe and ponder the room. I learned that my inexperience in managing and synthesizing great piles of files—both real and electronic—of research data caused unwelcome pressure, both intellectual and psychological. This is where a team of educators could make a big difference by dividing areas of research for exhibition development. Otherwise, a person could be overwhelmed into inaction by attempting to juggle in-depth research across numerous disciplines along with the day-to-day administering of museum work.

I learned that pedagogy is a process of engagement. It is an act of communication and an act of meaning in the present from things in the past, for the present. I learned that writing and telling stories are an inherently human method of making meaning. Family stories and shared memories, fictional stories and imaginative response attached
to material culture—whether the Régence Room or family heirlooms—such narratives help to make objects live in people’s minds and memories. Most significantly, I learned that art education, as practiced in museums, must help visitors of all kinds overcome doubts of their own knowledge and experience. I learned that I need more experience in assisting students and museum visitors to use their lived experience as a beginning for exploring period rooms, material culture, and art experiences generally. The problem remains to challenge accepted interpretations and to forge new tools in order to connect student/visitors’ worlds and the complex social, cultural, and political museum worlds. But this case study is evidence of “how the meanings of artifacts are not fixed, but may shift substantially over time and through space” (Knappett, 2005, p. 110). And that the sudden, intuitive perception I had as child walking through the U-505 and another epiphany decades later in the Getty Museum’s period room are rare experiences for anyone. Arthur C. Danto (1997) teaches us that such experiences “are unpredictable. They are contingent on some antecedent state of mind, and the same work will not affect different people in the same way or even the same person the same way on the different occasions” (p. 178). This changing, serendipitous condition is the ultimate predicament for museum educators who desire to help visitors connect in a significant way to the Museum’s period rooms.

If I have assisted readers in re-creating a vision of the possible worlds of exhibition development and pedagogical possibility for the Régence Room, and provoked them to think in new and different ways and enabled them to construct new meaning, then the purposes of art have been served (Barone & Eisner, 1997; p. 78). And, if readers
have grasped the concept and meaning of the Régence Room, then I have made the point that the room and its objects are worth more than their physical beauty. They are important for what they tell us about the past and how that knowledge affects us in the present.
REFERENCES


Harris, J. (1988, October 13). The room that never was. Country Life (CLXXXII) 41, 260.


The wealthy American Adam Verver (Nick Nolte) planned an American museum for his art collection that he had gathered in England and Italy during the early-20th century.

Scene I: Adam Verver (Nick Nolte) and his wife Charlotte (Uma Thurman).

Charlotte: I couldn’t bear to think of your collection or your treasures to be buried out there (i.e. American City).

Adam: You call it a burial to go to an American City?

Charlotte: For your treasures, yes, to be in a place where no one would, or could, appreciate them. It’s like burying them in a tomb.

Adam: A tomb? My museum a tomb? Tombs can be very beautiful. You’ve seen pictures of the Taj Majal; the tomb in India that an emperor built for his beloved queen?

Charlotte: Yes, after she was dead.

Adam: Of course, no one would dream of burying a queen while she was still alive.

Charlotte: It’s not as if they have any use for it. They want their street car, not your museum.

Adam: They may not want it, but they shall have it.

Scene II: Adam Verver and his daughter Maggie looking at a model of his museum.

Adam: Come here . . . look here. These stairs are too narrow, are they not?

Maggie: They seem somewhat narrow for the building.

Adam: Yes. I want to widen them so the people can sit and relax, converse, enjoy the sun. These too are narrow, all the stairs are too narrow.
Maggie: You should be in bed, my dear sir, not in here thinking about your museum.

Adam: I never stop thinking about it. I dream about it. It’s my work. What I’ve staked myself on.

Maggie: You see, that’s your greatness. Your great motive, while all I have is my own selfishness.

Scene III: Two guests in Adam Verver’s English country house as his art collection is being packed up for shipment to America.

Man: And all of this is leaving for America.

Woman: You ought to ask some questions in Parliament; make a cause célèbre. Don’t these things belong in British museums?

Man: Used to be only thieves and murderers were transported overseas.

Woman: Now it’s the portraits of our ancestors.
The Cheshire Cat

A little click sounded each time her fingertips pressed the silver buttons on the pay telephone. On the last push of the keypad, she pulled the coiled, serpent-like metal cord three feet around the corner. Then, while still holding onto the receiver, she extended her arm, giving her another three feet so she could look outside. She had to squint against the brilliant sky visible through the Getty library’s huge glass windows facing the Santa Monica Mountains and, at the edge of her vision, a slice of the Pacific Ocean, north towards Malibu. December in Los Angeles was gorgeous; it was her favorite season in southern California. In fact, she would have preferred being outdoors enjoying the weather but AT&T offered lousy cellular reception up on the hill above Brentwood. It really was a stunning day, not just because the weather was choice, but because she was stunned—as in stupefied—by thoughts of inadequacy, feeling a fraud and inept for the job of teaching art history to a bunch of undergrads who had greater acquaintance with teaching than she, who had none.

“Great,” saying to herself, “just great. A week before spring semester.” The telephone line was ringing.

“You can do this. Just tell him,” she mumbled and smiled at the security officer sitting at the desk across the way whose head had turned in her direction. Officer Aparacio must have heard Teresa talking to herself.

“One . . . two . . .” counting in her head, then—as minds will do when obsessed like hers had been during that insomnia-laden December—her thoughts returned to the
problem. She had to tell Brent, tell him she couldn’t do it. She had been stalling for weeks, prolonging the torture of having this conversation. It was just eleven days before the second semester of her first year in the doctoral program would begin.

“Three . . . four . . .” Continuing to count, Teresa saw in her mind’s eye that Brent reached across his desk over the piles of books and manuscripts to answer his old drab green touch-tone phone. Probably one of the first of its kind. Swiveling in his chair away from the wall his desk faced, he was poised to talk, looking out his picture window, the one with the amphora next to the ledge. The style of the pottery placed it in the 1960s—the kind of ethnic-inspired form and decoration indicative of that era. It was one of the features that gave his office a kind of perfunctoriness, as if an implicit meta-narrative governed the space: there are more important things to consider than creating an aesthetic work place. Outside Brent’s window it was snowing, a landscape of mounds and drifts hopeless in the grey afternoon light. All of State College was ice-cold like Teresa’s face and hands.

Still counting. “Eight, nine . . .” Holding her breath, about to retreat and hang up the receiver, she barely heard the click at the other end. His voice came across clearly:

“Brent Wilson.”

“Brent . . .” she paused. “Hi . . . it’s . . . it’s Teresa.” The words stuck in her dry mouth.

“Teresa, why, hello. What’s new in California?”
Irritated by his chipperness, she thought, “It’s true, you can hear a smile in a person’s voice.”

“Oh, we’re having great weather,” Teresa said in keeping with the polite and formal etiquette ingrained since she learned to talk. “The sun is blasting through the windows here at the Getty Research Institute.”

“Yes, well, that’s certainly better than the winter storm we’re having!” But his tone remained happy. Brent was, if nothing else, exceedingly cheerful.

“I hope it’s the last of the season,” she responds and plows ahead, “I’m not looking forward to shoveling snow after I get back there . . . anyway . . . Brent . . . I’ve been thinking . . . a lot . . . and . . .”

“Really, what about?” he asked benignly.

Impatient with the triviality of small talk, Teresa blurts, “I . . . . . I can’t do it!”

The words rush, “I’ve never taught before unless you count teaching six-year-olds ballet . . . but . . . but . . . even so . . . it’s hardly the same, and, and, Jane did all the teaching last semester . . . and I don’t know the first thing about teaching art history!” She stood like a block of ice, staring at her distorted reflection in the metal plate of the telephone box.

Fear propelling her, she said it again.

“I can’t do it. I don’t know what to do. I have absolutely no experience!” She had finally said it aloud, thinking that now life would get better. But she still felt pathetic.
“Is it this cold in the Arctic?” she wondered as her body began to shake and her molars to clatter. Taking an unsteady breath and blowing it out too quickly, she pressed the telephone receiver to her ear, trying to listen as Brent spoke. She heard sounds but she could not connect his words to make sentences. It was no use. She was beyond comprehending. She did hear, however, without any difficulty, her own inner voice repeating, “I can’t do it,” a perverse mantra whose consonants poked and taunted. And she saw Brent, imagining him in his signature black outfit dressed from neck to toe—stylishly in contrast to his neglected office—and, incongruously, his head topped with an almost convincing grey toupee. He stopped rocking in his chair and crossed one leg over the other, leaning forward to smooth the crease of his gabardine pants from his knee to his ankle. All the while, she saw his eyes sparkled behind the titanium frames and his mouth spread into a classic Cheshire cat grin as he spoke.

“It can’t be all that bad, can it?” Brent’s question nudged her.

It was as if she were in Wonderland and had drunk some foul potion. For the truth is, she can’t remember what he had said to her, only that whatever it was, she got on the airplane to Pennsylvania a week later. Whatever he said prevented her from dropping out of the art education program and from becoming a contributor to the crippling statistic of women who never finish their dissertations.
APPENDIX C
(1 of 3)

The U-505

Dead alewives floated in Lake Michigan in the hot sticky summer of 1965, probably due to environmental changes. I was in Chicago with my parents, three sisters, and two brothers. I was the third quiet one. My father was attending a medical convention, and the rest of us tagged along for a vacation. At the time I was pretty excited. I took my first airplane ride wearing a new pastel sundress, and about a week later had a crush on Oswaldito, the son of my father’s compatriots from Havana who had moved to Chicago after Castro’s communism made it impossible to remain in their homeland.

Among my clearest memories of that stifling season is a visit to the Museum of Science and Industry. From my point-of-view, just four feet tall, everything about the place looked gigantic—the building, the rooms, the displays. I had not seen anything like it in the small harbor town of San Pedro, California, where I lived. The place was so compelling, with lots of displays to see and some to touch, that I cannot remember if I even interacted with my siblings. Long hallways with tall doors led to expansive rooms filled with endless cases full of fascinating things. Around one corner was an incubator

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83 My recent interest in Chicago’s 1893 Columbian Exposition gives additional meaning to this childhood memory. See Erik Larson’s (2003) *The Devil in the White City: murder, magic, and madness at the fair that changed America.*

84 Years later I would associate these rooms at the Museum of Science and Industry with those of sixteenth-century *Kunstkammern.* “The space that contained the *Kunstkammer* was large with windows on both sides, and without any decoration. The objects articulated with the space. In the middle of the hall eighteen cupboards were placed back to back down the centre of the room. In front of them stood two transverse cupboards. The wall between the windows were covered with pictures from floor to ceiling. In the middle of the room there were various chests partly filled with portraits and used to store items that were being studied.” (Scheicher, 1985, quoted in Hooper-Greenhill, 1992).
and, in it, chicks in various stages of hatching; the most mature tiptoed and cheeped while their fluffy feathers dried out. Yet it was a German submarine—the U-505—that had the most profound effect on me. I was spellbound.

My recollection is that the boat stood in one of the museum’s huge rooms, but in fact it was outside with a connecting hallway similar to the jetway used to board airliners. Only recently has it been moved indoors (June 2005). It was a primal and seminal experience walking inside the cold metal interior of the U-505. The doors and passageways were low and narrow. The bulkheads were curved. I could smell what I later learned was a mixture of grease, oil, and diesel fuel. Reading was fairly new to me, so not being able to understand the words on instruments panels—written in German—did not seem unusual. I recall imagining what it might have been like to be a sailor on the U-505 because my brother Francisco (the sibling who “acted out”) boasted relentlessly about a German helmet he had at home, claiming he had stolen it from a dead soldier during the war. I recall the fascination and confusion of the submarine being a German warship: fascination because one of my grandfathers was German, confusion because to my immature perception, the Germans did very bad things in the war—How could good Germans like my grandfather also be bad Germans like those in the war? Questions about the concepts of right and wrong within a socio-political context had not occurred to me before entering this U-boat. At the time, I certainly did not understand them as such, but the seeds of critical consciousness were sown. Years of reflection

85 Sensory impressions, among the earliest children have, transcend the written word.
underscore the experience. In any case, the U-505 in Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry stimulated my inquisitiveness by tacitly posing questions and inspiring me to create stories in an attempt to make sense of what I saw in relation to what I knew at that young age.

Like historian Diane Korzenik (1992), I am “haunted by a feeling, a memory, an experience” (p. 265). From an early age, museums and the things in them have captured my imagination and inspired a detective’s curiosity. Memories of early art museum experiences, although intangible themselves, developed in response to tangible things. Thomas Schlereth explains the relationship of children’s experiences and artifacts:

The child’s world is a world we [adults] have lost. We try to regain it, in part, as parents and grandparents, as collectors and curators, but try as we may, it is gone as is all the past. And yet its artifacts remain, some in memory and some in museums. (1990/1992, p. 90)
Ten years following my Chicago adventure, I was living in Los Angeles, studying ballet with a Polish emigré formerly of the Paris Opéra and before that the one in Warsaw. I was immersed in ballet culture, its practice and performance. Stefan Wenta’s studio on Melrose Avenue was unlike any other in the city. He created an environment for dance and music that included a wall of books and framed photographs interspersed with many taped snapshots, masses of hanging plants watered with fish emulsion evoking the nearby Pacific Ocean, and a chirping parakeet housed in a cage among the cascading plants. On all the studio walls—except the one with rows of windows filtering the Southern California sunshine—hung posters of various productions of the Warsaw Opera and one advertising a Tijuana bullfight—a past time of Stefan’s during weekends relaxing in Rosarito Beach. Wenta Ballet was a center not only for local dancers but also for those working temporarily in Los Angeles for ballet, jazz, and musical theatre productions at the Music Center downtown or the Shubert Theater on the Westside.

Stefan’s beginner classes attracted performers from other disciplines, too, like his friend and compatriot Roman Polanski, Jane Seymour, Michelle Phillips, and Chris Jagger (Art Garfinkel even visited once, watching his girlfriend Laurie Bird take class).

To rest my body between morning and evening classes, I would drive south on Fairfax Avenue to Wilshire Boulevard and visit the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). These museum visits became a self-directed tradition begun as a high school
student under the tutelage of Gerald Brommer. My visits were guided by the experiences of art history field trips and drawing and painting classes taken during junior and senior years. I approached my time at LACMA systematically, taking one floor at a time and spending an average of three hours. I carried a black leather-bound sketchbook for making drawings and writing notes, a natural practice developed in ceramics, painting, drawing, and design classes. During one visit to a 1920s fashion exhibition, I sat cross-legged on the floor, filling the pages of my sketchbook with black ink drawings and meticulous diagrams. My descriptions were a synthesis of information taken from cryptic gallery labels and interpretations of what I saw.

These recurrent visits to LACMA lasted two years. I do not recall consciously studying the collection, I was just systematically cataloging my experiences and, by association, the objects. To me, the black sketchbook was a visual diary of my experiences at that time. What I do recall is that the museum - its space - had become familiar and comfortable. I learned about the architecture and where collections were exhibited inside. I knew where a favorite textile hung or a sculpture stood.
APPENDIX E
(1 of 2)

RÉGENCIE ROOM

PROVENANCE
(compiled by Charissa Bremer-David and Teresa Morales, July 7, 2004)

Accession no. 71.DH.118

Source: French & Company, Inc. [agent]
978 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Provenance:
Guillaume Cressart, Hôtel Cressart, installed in 1725 and 1726 in the chambre à coucher of 18 Place Vendôme, Paris.


Jean-Baptiste Duché (brother of Louis-Auguste), by 1743.

Elisabeth-Louis Duché (wife of Jacques Bertrand, marquis de Scépeaux et de Beaupreau), after 1743.

Elisabeth-Louise-Adélaide de Scépeaux (wife of the comte de La Tour d’Auvergne), 1769.

Jean-Louis Millon d’Ainval (or Milon d’Inval), 1774.

By inheritance to his wife, Antoinette Bureau Seraudey (Madame d’Inval), in an III (1794/5) and sold by her heirs, 1836.

Sophie Dawes (baronne de Feuchères), 1836. The chambre à coucher became the salon at this time. Sold by her heirs after her death in 1840.

La marquise de Las Marismas del Guadalquivir (Madame Alexandre Aguado), 1842.

Laurent-Louis Mouton (d. 1868), 1865. Sold by his heirs in
APPENDIX E
(2 of 2)

1870 but leased during the period 1868-1889 to the Cercle de l’Union artistique.

Constant Say (d. 1871), 1870, and by descent to his heir Henry Say.

Société Le Credit, 1891.

Alexandre Brémond de Verragande, 1896.

Victor Klotz, 1897.

Westminster Foreign Bank, Ltd., 1931.

*Boiseries* from the salon (the former *chambre à coucher*) purchased as stock number A720 by André Carlhian, Paris, 1932, and installed in the Avenue Kléber showroom.

*Boiseries* shipped to New York, 1939, and consigned to Duveen Brothers, where they were displayed in a gallery showroom at 720 Fifth Avenue from circa 1949 to circa 1958. At the time of Duveen Brothers’ move to 18 East 79th Street, the *boiseries* were placed in storage at the Morgan & Manhattan Warehouse, New York.


APPENDIX F
Livres débit, Carlhian Exportation, 1947

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Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California (930092)
Letter from Edward Fowles to André Carlhian, May 24, 1950

720 Fifth Avenue
New York 19, N.Y.

26 MAI 1950

Dear Mr. Carlhian:

Some time next month you will receive the visit of Mr. J. Paul Getty, a very wealthy oil man of California. He is a student and collector of French 18th century, and has arranged himself a small museum at Santa Monica.

When he came to see me the other day he told me that he thought of making a modern boiserie to place his tapestries. I recommended to him to buy an old boiserie. I showed him the Place Vendome boiserie which he rather liked but thought it would not be the size of his room which apparently is somewhere about 45 ft. x 30 ft. He also saw the Clodion Room which he very much admired.

I have given him your address for boiseries. I think it is very much in the air at the present time until we have some measurements and something to work upon, but I wish to impress upon you not to tell him that the boiseries I have here belong to you; otherwise you will spoil my end of the business. You may know the man because he has often visited France and speaks French perfectly. I knew him through Lacroix so it is quite possible that Lacroix will take him around to other dealers. He is a hard bargainer, so if you quote him
APPENDIX G
(2 of 2)
Letter from Edward Fowles to André Carlhian, May 24, 1950

720 Fifth Avenue
New York 19, N.Y.

Mr. André Carlhian

May 24, 1950

any prices you must leave a good margin.
All I want you to know chiefly is that the man
is very serious and can become a good client.
With kind regards, and hoping you are very well,
Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

E. Fowles

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APPENDIX H

(2 of 6)

APPENDIX H

(5 of 6)

APPENDIX I

Tableaux de Boiseries, no. 9

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Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California (930092)
APPENDIX J

(1 of 2)

**DÉSIGNATION**

UNE très belle BOISERIE, époque RÉGENCE, provenant de l'hôtel Herlaut en chêne sculpté, vieille dorure et vieille peinture blanche, comprenant :

- cadres de glace avec glace ancienne en 1 partie,
- portes à 2 vantaux avec dessus sans peinture ( dont 1 comme avec A 719 )
- dessus de porte à 2 vantaux sans peinture,
- panneaux sculptés à 3 motifs,
- parclose
- parois étroites,
- chambranles et dessus d'embrasure de fenêtre avec 4 volets doubles,
- coubassements de tapisserie,
- toute la corniche en platre.

Les peintures, qui étaient dans les dessus de portes étaient d'époque Napoléon III.

Les panneaux, qui remplaçaient les tapisseries, sont modernes en chêne avec sculpture en carton.

Les vantaux de la porte ( 8 ), face aux fenêtres, sont modernes.

Les coubassements de tapisseries sont faits dans du bois ancien avec la vieille peinture et dorure.

---

**Hauteur sous plafond**

" corniche 4 m 60

**Dimensions de la pièce à l'origine**

7 m 79 x 6 m 64

---

**DÉTAIL DES TRAVAUX À PRÉVOIR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No de commande</th>
<th>Finitions de dégagement</th>
<th>Décide le</th>
<th>Commencé le</th>
<th>Termine le</th>
<th>Délai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1460</td>
<td>100 21.33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23-35 1923</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1486</td>
<td>89 9,33</td>
<td>9,33</td>
<td>18-35 1923</td>
<td>18-35 1923</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1568</td>
<td>100 21.33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23-35 1923</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1254</td>
<td>586 13,13</td>
<td>13,13</td>
<td>18-35 1923</td>
<td>18-35 1923</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1396</td>
<td>150 4,13</td>
<td>4,13</td>
<td>18-35 1923</td>
<td>18-35 1923</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1354</td>
<td>860 21,33</td>
<td>21,33</td>
<td>18-35 1923</td>
<td>18-35 1923</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1384</td>
<td>150 4,13</td>
<td>4,13</td>
<td>18-35 1923</td>
<td>18-35 1923</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Digital image by Teresa Morales, 2007
APPENDIX K

Hangings for a Bed
(Lit à la duchesse)

Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California (79/DD.3.1-16)
APPENDIX L

Gobelins Tapestry
“Le Cheval Rayé”

Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California (92.DA.21)
APPENDIX M

Boulle Cabinet-on-Stand

Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California (77.DA.1)
### APPENDIX N

Three treatments of period room interpretation  
(Bloom, et al., 1991; pp. 24-39)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatments</th>
<th>Physical &amp; Structural Qualities</th>
<th>Exhibition Design</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Preserve or replicate original</td>
<td>Adherence to strict documentation:</td>
<td>According to original use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Lighting: original, often natural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Traffic: dictated by objects on display</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified</td>
<td>May be altered for educational intent</td>
<td>To fit broad educational scope</td>
<td>To suit interpretive goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Lighting: theatrical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Traffic: dictated by experiential value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deconstructive</td>
<td>Cohesiveness &amp; quality</td>
<td>Dearth of scholarship</td>
<td>Compatibility with modern needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Lack of originals</td>
<td></td>
<td>-De-accession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Quality of the whole</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Vignettes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Quality as isolated elements</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Alternate use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The wheel is an alternative to hierarchical models of thinking strategies. When interpreters and visitors use the language listed under a heading, they are demonstrating that thinking strategy. The goal for interpreters is to begin where visitors are and then move to other sections to help visitors strengthen their perception skills in all four areas.

**Description**

Count, recognize, define, label, list
What is it made of? What is it?

**Classification**

Compare, analyze, match, contrast
What style is it? What date is it?

**Association**

Imagine, remember, speculate
Do you have one? Who would use?

**Evaluation**

Choose, judge, select, decide, prefer
Which do you like best? Is it authentic?
APPENDIX P

Savonnerie Carpet

Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California (70.DC63)
Title of Project: The case of the Régence Room: Using narrative as a transformational resource for museum pedagogy.

Principal Investigator: Teresa I. Morales

Other Investigator(s): N/A

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research is to examine the significance of a museum period room.

2. **Procedures to be followed:**
   a) You will be asked to participate in two interviews and respond to questions posed.
   b) The audiotapes used for recording interviews will be stored in a locked file cabinet in Principal Investigator’s office that is located at her residence.
   c) If The J. Paul Getty Museum does not want to keep audiotapes and transcripts for its archive, and if each participant does not want their audiotape and transcript, then this material will be destroyed six months after dissertation has been successfully defended.
   d) The Principal Investigator only will have access to the tapes and transcripts.

3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

4. **Benefits:**
   a) This research might provide a better understanding of how museum period rooms are constructed, interpreted and understood.
   b) You might learn more about how material culture collections can be interpreted for museum visitors.

5. **Duration:** The two interviews will last one-hour each.

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Because of your unique knowledge you will need to be identified for this study thereby waiving anonymity.
7. **Right to Ask Questions:** You can ask questions about the research. Contact me at 818-563-6534 with any questions.

8. **Compensation:** You will receive no monetary compensation.

9. **Voluntary Participation:** You can end your participation at any time by telling me. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

I give permission for the audiotapes and transcripts made from the interview between Teresa I. Morales and myself to be given to the J. Paul Getty Museum for their permanent archives.  

☐ YES  ☐ NO

I choose to keep the audiotapes and transcript made from the interview between Teresa I. Morales and myself.  

☐ YES  ☐ NO

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

___________________________________________  Date

Participant Signature

The informed consent procedure has been followed.

___________________________________________  Date

Investigator Signature
APPENDIX R

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Can you please give me a brief biographical sketch of yourself?

2) How did you become involved in the construction/installation/display of the Régence Room? Can you please explain/describe your role?

3) Who was involved in making decisions about how the Régence Room is displayed?

4) Did this project have a guiding philosophy?

5) Did you have any pedagogical or ethical concerns when conceptualizing the room?

6) What decisions/issues/concerns led to the room’s current display (compared to previous display)?

7) How would you define the term “period room”?

8) How would you describe the room’s display? (e.g., historical, artistic/aesthetic)

9) Do you think the general public understands the significance of the room in relation to the decorative arts galleries? Was this a concern during any phase of the project?

10) What do you think about criticism that states museums present displays of single, grand narratives?

11) Is the room’s display fixed?

12) What would you like the general public to know about the Régence Room?

13) Would you like to see the room interpreted differently than it is? Please explain.

14) What would you like the general public to know about the room? The collection in general?

15) Is there anything you would like to add?
# OBSERVATIONS TEMPLATE

## Demographic Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Adult</th>
<th>Young Adult</th>
<th>Toddler</th>
<th>Infant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## Alone or in Group?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alone</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>2 to 5</th>
<th>Larger Group</th>
<th>With instructor?</th>
<th>With museum gallery teacher?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whispered, talked among themselves</th>
<th>Read labels</th>
<th>Wearing audio-guide</th>
<th>Interaction with security officer?</th>
<th>Other behaviors?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## Duration in room

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>15 secs</th>
<th>15 – 30 secs</th>
<th>30 secs</th>
<th>1 min</th>
<th>1+ min</th>
<th>Even longer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
APPENDIX T

Chanel Bijouterie, 18 Place Vendôme
October 2006

Digital image by Gael Gremaud, 2006
VITA

Teresa Inés Morales

EDUCATION
Ph.D., Art Education, The Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2007
M.A. (With Distinction), Art, California State University, Northridge, Spring 2000
B.A., Art History, University of California, Los Angeles, Fall 1992

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
Workshop Facilitator, California State University, Northridge, Fall 2006
Curator, The Getty Research Institute, Plaza display case, Summer 2004
Associate Collections Cataloger, The Getty Research Institute, 2003-2004
Workshop Facilitator, California State University, Northridge, Summer 2003
Research Assistant, The Huntington Art Collections, French Art Project, 2002
Adjunct Professor, California State University, Northridge, 2000-2001
Research Assistant, Curator Emeritus Royal Institute of British Architects’ Drawings Collection, 2000-2001, 2005
Research Assistant, Contemporary art photographer, 2001
Education Intern, Winterthur Museum & Country Estate, Spring 2000
Graduate Teaching Assistant, The Pennsylvania State University, 1998-2000
Gallery Teacher, Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Park, Summer Internship, 1997
Senior Collections Cataloger, The Getty Research Institute, 1996-1998
Collections Processor, The Getty Center for the History of Art and Humanities, 1995
Exhibitions & Public Programs Assistant, Oliver Art Center, Tecoah Bruce Gallery, California College of Arts and Crafts, 1994
Collections Processor, Photo Resource Collection, The Getty Center for the History of Art & Humanities, 1993

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES
Conference presenter, “Active pedagogy for museum practice: The case of the Régence Room,” The Pennsylvania State University, November 2005 (Graduate Research in Art Education)
Colloquium assistant, “Drawing from the past: Perspective on rare books and printed materials in the visual arts,” The Pennsylvania State University, Spring 1999
Graduate student committee for integrating the arts into general subjects secondary curriculum, The Pennsylvania State University, 1998
Selected delegate, Winter Institute, Winterthur Museum, 1997

AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS
Minority Scholars Award, The Pennsylvania State University, 1998-1999
Winter Institute Scholarship Fund, Winterthur Museum, 1997
Student Research Project, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992

GRANTS
Graduate Student Travel Fund, The Pennsylvania State University, 1999