Packaging curiosities:
Towards a grammar of three-dimensional space

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Doctor of Philosophy

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person where due reference is not made in the text.

Maree Kristen Stenglin MA (Applied Linguistics), BA, Dip. Ed.
ABSTRACT

Western museums are public institutions, open and accessible to all sectors of the population they serve. Increasingly, they are becoming more accountable to the governments that fund them, and criteria such as visitation figures are being used to assess their viability. In order to ensure their survival in the current climate of economic rationalism, museums need to maintain their audiences and attract an even broader demographic. To do this, they need to ensure that visitors feel comfortable, welcome and secure inside their spaces. They also need to give visitors clear entry points for engaging with and valuing the objects and knowledge on display in exhibitions.

This thesis maps a grammar of three-dimensional space with a strong focus on the interpersonal metafunction. Building on the social semiotic tools developed by Halliday (1978, 1985a), Halliday and Hasan (1976), Martin (1992) and Matthiessen (1995), it identifies two interpersonal resources for organising space: Binding and Bonding. Binding is the main focus of the thesis. It theorises the way people’s emotions can be affected by the organisation of three-dimensional space. Essentially, it explores the affectual disposition that exists between a person and the space that person occupies by focussing on how a space can be organised to make an occupant feel secure or insecure. Binding is complemented by Bonding. Bonding is concerned with the way the occupants of a space are positioned interpersonally to create solidarity. In cultural institutions like museums and galleries, Bonding is concerned with making visitors feel welcome and as though they belong, not just to the building and the physical environment, but to a community of like-minded people. Such feelings of belonging are also crucial to the long-term survival of the museum.

Finally, in order to present a metafunctionally diversified grammar of space, the thesis moves beyond interpersonal meanings. It concludes by exploring the ways textual and ideational meanings can be organised in three-dimensional space.
This thesis has brought together several strands of my professional life. These include my background as an English/History teacher working with secondary school students, and my teacher training in the progressivist pedagogy of process writing. It has also been influenced by my retraining, during my Masters in Applied Linguistics, in both Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the explicit pedagogy of genre writing. At this time, I also became familiar with the Teaching/Learning model first developed by Joan Rothery at North Sydney Demonstration School in 1985.

In addition, this thesis has drawn on my experiences as the Manager of Education Services at the Australian Museum from 1994 to 1999 and my role as Coordinator of Educational Programs at djamu Gallery from January 1999 to June 2000. In both positions I was involved in initiating, coordinating and overseeing the development of educational programs such as the writing and publishing of teaching materials for primary, junior secondary, senior secondary and adult NESB students. Both positions also involved the organisation and delivery of professional in-service development for teachers and teacher trainees as well as the coordination of teacher previews of exhibitions, and an annual Teachers’ Open Night which hosted approximately 800 teachers and their families.

Most importantly, this thesis has drawn on my involvement in the development of the Indigenous Australians exhibition at the Australian Museum from 1995 to 1997. My role in the exhibition was that of coordinating the development of key messages and interpretive strategies. The development of key messages involved determining the thematic orientations, or curatorial theses, that informed the organisation of the exhibition. This went ‘hand in hand’ with the challenge of designing interpretive strategies. Interpretation, in a museum context, is based on the premise that objects do not stand alone. Rather they are presented in conjunction with visual images, other objects, music, text panels, computer interactives, audiovisual materials and so forth. As all of these play a crucial role in realising meanings, this task involved making crucial decisions about which meanings should be realised in which mode.
No other professional experience, to date, has brought me such deep satisfaction alongside such tremendous frustration. The satisfaction was tied to the Museum’s decision to break with the anthropological display tradition of artefacts in glass cases and replace it with a commitment to confront contentious and controversial social justice issues. These included deaths in custody, incarceration, the stolen generations, land rights and reconciliation – issues that had not been discussed so openly in an Australian museum before. In fact, the social orientation of the exhibition was considered to be so groundbreaking that in 1997 the project team was awarded the Premier’s Inaugural Public Sector Award under the category ‘Significant Improvement to Delivery.’ Furthermore, the findings that emerged from the visitor research were also heartening. They showed, for example, that the exhibition had not only moved many visitors very deeply but also facilitated new levels of awareness of Indigenous disadvantage.

The frustration and disappointment that stemmed from my involvement in the Indigenous Australians exhibition, on the other hand, was the result of several factors. First, the fact that I, and most other members of the project team, were involved in the interpretive processes but excluded from input into the actual design of the exhibition. Second, I realised how disempowered I was, as a member of the project team, because I did not have a metalanguage for discussing design and neither did most of my colleagues. Both factors meant that our ability to participate in the meaning-making processes of exhibition development was significantly curtailed. The positive outcome of this experience was that it inspired me to undertake the research involved in this thesis, and in doing so, has opened up a whole new area of meaning-making for me.

Before closing, I would like to briefly recount the processes I was involved in during the research for this thesis. The work began at the Broadway Shopping Centre in Sydney and a newly opened bookstore, the Collins Superstore. Throughout 1999, using Michael O’Toole’s semiotic grid for architectural analysis, I analysed both the Centre and all of the spaces inside the Superstore. At the end of the year, a Binding scale (Figure 3.3) for analysing interpersonal meaning was developed. Early in the year 2000, the scale was applied to the analysis of
exhibition spaces inside approximately 20 museums on the east and west coasts of America as well as the Canadian Museum of Civilisation in Ottawa. In the process of application, the Binding scale was refined (Figure 3.4). Later in the same year, using the refined Binding scale, the phylogenesis of domestic architecture in Australia was charted. By the end of 2000, the Binding scale had been applied to the analysis of domestic, retail and institutional spaces. In the year 2001, the materialisation of Binding was investigated, while 2002 was spent exploring the other resource for analysing interpersonal meaning in space: Bonding. During 2003, the research was written up and preliminary explorations of the textual and ideational metafunctions were conducted in order to present a metafunctionally diversified grammar of three-dimensional space.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by a SPIRT grant from the Australian Research Council, with the Australian Museum as the industry partner. Thanks are due to the Australian Museum for their financial assistance with the project. Furthermore, three key people from the Australian Museum have provided me with crucial support. First, I am deeply grateful to the Head of the Indigenous Australians project team, Tim Sullivan, for his support, encouragement and ongoing interest in my work throughout the duration of the thesis. I am also indebted to the Museum’s former Director, Dr Des Griffin, whose commitment to constructivism and progressivism meant that he rarely, if ever, agreed with my views on education and learning. Despite this, Des whole-heartedly endorsed my request to undertake this research and without his institutional backing, this project could never have begun. Finally, a strong debt of gratitude is owed to Ms Carolyn MacLulich, the Museum’s former Head of Public Programs. Without her support, this thesis would never have been possible, and neither would the tradition of SFL inspired research into museology which she personally initiated and supported during her time at the Australian Museum.

An undertaking of this magnitude, however, can never be an entirely independent endeavour. It is always a joint construction drawing widely on the interpersonal and ideational support of a wide network of people. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor James Robert Martin, for his direction, guidance, patience and encouragement. I feel very privileged to have been given the opportunity of working so closely with such an incredibly inspirational thinker! It was great ‘making schnitzel’ with you!

I also wish to express my indebtedness to my friend and mentor of many years, Dr Joan Rothery, for her ongoing interest in my work. Not only has her enthusiasm for the museum and gallery world been inspirational but she also has generously shared her knowledge of architecture and visual arts with me, guided my exploration of the phylogenesis of domestic Australian architecture, which was unfortunately too large to include in this thesis. She has also commented extensively on the work presented in Chapter 3.
I would also like to thank all the members of the multimodal group, past and present, who have been involved in the ongoing exchange of meanings with me. They are: Chris Clereigh, Anne Cranny-Francis, Emilia Djonov, Talia Gill, Rick Iedema, Mary Macken-Horarik, Jim Martin, Clare Painter, Betty Pun, Louise Ravelli, David Rose, Joan Rothery and Len Unsworth. Of these, I would especially like to acknowledge the generosity of Chris Clereigh and Emilia Djonov. Chris, for always making the time to muse over a myriad of issues with me, and Emilia for her help, comments and support in fine-tuning the final draft.

Special thanks also go to Rhonda Black, my friend and copy editor, who met all her deadlines with consummate professionalism and whose eye for consistency has made the meanings so much clearer.

On a different but equally important note . . .

I would like to thank my family for their infinite generosity. My husband, Roland Stocker, has been unfailing in his support. He has listened to, reflected on and engaged with many issues. He has also transcribed many text panels, drawn many of the figures, assisted with formatting and printing the thesis, and supported me in every way possible for the past five years. This project would not have been possible without him. I would also like to thank both of my step-daughters, Sophie and Verena, who have engaged with Binding time and time again, and enthusiastically reported on any interesting spaces they had encountered in their own travels. Many thank to my parents, brother and sister-in-law, niece and nephew, who never tried to understand what I was doing but just believed in me. I am also deeply indebted to them for their generosity in forgiving me when I forgot to turn up for family celebrations because I was so deeply engrossed in my work! Many thanks go to my brother-in-law, Peter Stocker, who followed up on some very technical engineering/building questions with his colleagues, and my sister-in-law, Magi Grütter, who introduced me to her favourite museum, the villa ‘Am Römerholz’ in Winterthur. Together with her husband, Christian Grütter, she also accompanied me to the Swiss Expo 2002 at Murten, Biel, Yverdon and Neuchatel – and gave me a cutting-edge experience of architecture that I will never forget!
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