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Northern Ireland
Legal Quarterly
Vol. 76 No. 2 (2025) 247–276
Articles DOI: 10.53386/nilq.v76i2.1202

Fantasy legal exhibitions

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the potential of 'fantasy exhibition' as a novel, speculative and prefigurative, legal research method. What might legal scholars gain, and what might they lose, from asking what if, and then acting as if, they were to exhibit some aspect of their research? It draws on insights from a design-driven, experimental academic workshop, held across multiple locations in central London in 2023. We place the concept of fantasy exhibition in the context of wider trends in legal research and museum practices; detail the designerly methods that we deployed to prompt and facilitate our participant collaborators to engage in fantasy exhibition; present the prototype exhibitions that emerged from the project; and identify lessons learned along the way. We draw throughout upon insights from our participant collaborators.

Keywords: exhibition; curation; law and design; speculation; prefiguration; research impact.

As we reflect on those two days in early summer, what we remember is not so much the substance of our conversations (we don't need to, we can find this in our notes) but the feeling of the beginnings of imaginative community, a community that explores the opportunities of fantasy, that encourages asking 'what if …' or 'why not …?'[1]

I found during the workshop that being unseriously-serious is very productive for envisioning real possibilities. I find there is huge critical potential in that.[2]

1 Erika Rackley and Sharon Thompson, Refection Statement.
2 Renske Vos, Reflection Statement.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the potential of 'fantasy exhibition' as a novel, speculative and prefigurative, legal research method.[3] We use the term 'legal exhibition' to refer to attempts to curate legal phenomena in such a way as to make them available to others. By 'curate' we mean to systematically select and present artefacts. By 'legal phenomena' we mean broadly to refer to concepts, propositions, evidence, norms, and/or perspectives that relate to law. By 'available' we mean perceptible intellectually, and/or by any and all the senses – that is, legible, visible, tangible, audible, olfactible and/or taste-able. We use the concept of 'fantasy' to accentuate the speculative and prefigurative potential of exhibition as a research practice. To work speculatively with exhibition is to ask 'what if' we were (able) to use exhibition as a device to enhance legal research? To work prefiguratively with exhibition is to act 'as if' we were already using exhibition as a device to enhance legal research.[4]

We begin by placing fantasy exhibition in the context of wider trends in legal research and museum practices. We then set out the design-driven methods that we deployed throughout the project in order to prompt and facilitate our participant collaborators to engage productively in fantasy. Next we introduce the prototype exhibitions that emerged from the project. We end with a reflection on the lessons we learned along the way. We draw throughout upon insights from our participant collaborators.

LEGAL EXHIBITION

Some expertly curated exhibitions explicitly centre on law.[5] When they do not, lawyers will nevertheless tend to find law lurking among the artefacts and curatorial texts. This article focuses on why, how, and

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3 Some material is reproduced from Amanda Perry-Kessaris and Victoria Barnes 'Fantasy Legal Exhibitions Workshop' (*SLSA Blog* nd); and Amanda Perry-Kessaris 'Fantasy legal exhibitions' (*Approaching Law Blog* 25 September 2023). This event would not have been possible without funding from the Socio-Legal Studies Association and Kent Law School; the expertise and warmth of Susannah Coster, Archivist at the Postal Museum, and Barnaby Bryan, Archivist at Middle Temple; and the generous engagement of our participant collaborators Favour Bọrọkìní, Lilian Moncrieff, Fred Motson, Erika Rackley, Helen Rutherford, Almas Shaikh, Sharon Thompson, Renske Vos and Clare Williams. We are also grateful to Jenny Williams for her contributions and assistance; and to our anonymous reviewers for their useful suggestions.

4 Amanda Perry-Kessaris, *Doing Sociolegal Research in Design Mode* (Routledge 2021) 80–84.

5 For example, Anon, 'The Evolution of the Law Report' (Middle Temple Library 2024).

to what effect legal scholars might themselves engage in exhibition design as a research method.

The most obvious purpose of an exhibition is to make legal ideas available to 'publics' – that is, those who are (expertly or amateurishly) interested in a given legal phenomenon, as well as those who, in the words of pragmatist John Dewey, are 'affected by' its 'indirect consequences' to such an extent that those 'consequences ought to be systematically cared for'.[6] However, as Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel have demonstrated in a series of experiments in the early 2000s, it is also possible to use the device of exhibition to create publics: to draw attention to a phenomenon and, in so doing, to proactively gather around it those are affected by it.[7]

In recent years, legal scholars have increasingly reached for exhibition as a way of sharing insights and activating publics. One example is a collection of souvenirs, toys and other products that 'engage with international law', which was exhibited in the rare books section of a library.[8] Sometimes these exhibitions are part of a wider performance. For example, 'Four Legs Good', was 'a contemporary revival of the medieval animal trials which took place in Britain and throughout Europe, where animals who had been accused of committing crimes were brought to court, provided defence counsel and prosecuted in full hearings before a judge'. It included an exhibition of designed artefacts detailing the fictional history of the institution.[9] Sometimes exhibition and performance are intertwined, as in a 'show' in which undergraduates exhibited material representations – performances, artefacts – of their 'journey' through their undergraduate law degree programme, as a form of assessment and celebration.[10]

This rising interest in exhibition should be seen in the context of (at least) five wider trends in legal scholarship which point towards a desire to, as Margaret Davies puts it, 'unlimit our understandings of

6 John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, Melvin L Rogers (ed) (Swallow Press 1927) 69.

7 Peter Weibel and Bruno Latour, 'Experimenting with representation: iconoclash and making things public' in Sharon Macdonald and Paul Basu (eds), *Exhibition Experiments* (Blackwell 2007) 100–1. See further Amanda Perry-Kessaris, 'Living methods for living law: Eugen Ehrlich meets Bruno Latour via adversarial exhibition design' (5 May 2023) prepared for 'Colloque Ehrlich: L'actualité de la pensée d'Eugen Ehrlich pour les méthodes empiriques du droit', Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 22–23 September 2022.

8 Emily Crawford and Jacqueline Mowbray, 'At the vanishing point: encounters with the souvenirs, merchandise, and memorabilia of international law' (Sydney Law School 2023).

9 See Jack Tan, 'Four Legs Good'.

10 Stephen Bunbury and Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 'The law school degree show: law, materiality, decolonization and authentic assessment' (2023) 57(2) The Law Teacher 187–200.

law': to develop 'a more open, dynamic and responsive understanding of law' – one which sets aside the traditional jurisprudential obsessions with 'defining it, or finding its essence … or showing how it is different from non-law' and, instead, 'start[s] with the presumption that law is connected and relational' and, therefore, 'mobile, plural, and material'.[11] First, there is a sense that legal scholars must look 'beyond text' and begin to take account of the visual and material dimensions of all legal phenomena.[12] Second, attention is increasingly paid to the temporal dimensions of law – to the interplays between past, present, and future realities and imaginaries.[13] Third, law itself is increasingly conceptualised as a form of exhibition or performance. For example, Stacy Douglas has argued that constitutions, like museums, can be understood as 'curating' conceptions of actual and potential communities;[14] Julie Stone Peters has explored the roles of 'theatricality' and 'spectatorship' in law-making across different historical periods;[15] and Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos has argued that these days law is 'as image-conscious and volatile as media or politics, relying more and more on its ability to "show off" (rather than actually to prove through its actions) its relevance'.[16] To truly unlimit law requires that we be more open, less determinate, not only in our theories about law, but also around how we approach the process of theorisation, as well as around who is included in those processes.[17] So we see (fourth), a rising confidence that we can go beyond highlighting the visual and material dimensions of law. We can activate them. For example, Máiréad Enright and Tina Kinsella have shown how we can

11 Margaret Davies, *Law Unlimited* (Routledge 2017).

12 Zenon Bankowski, Maksymilian Del Mar and Paul Maharg (eds), *The Arts and the Legal Academy: Beyond Text in Legal Education* (Routledge 2012); Zenon Bankowski and Maksymilian Del Mar (eds), *The Moral Imagination and the Legal Life: Beyond Text in Legal Education* (Routledge 2016); Emily Allbon and Amanda Perry-Kessaris (eds), *Design in Legal Education* 1st edn (Routledge 2022).

13 Elen Stokes, 'Wanted: professors of foresight in environmental law!' (2019) 31 Journal of Environmental Law 175–186; Elen Stokes, 'Beyond evidence: anticipatory regimes in law' (2021) 43 Law and Policy 73–91.

14 Stacy Douglas, *Curating Community: Museums, Constitutionalism, and the Taming of the Political* (University of Michigan Press 2017).

15 Julie Stone Peters, *Law as Performance: Theatricality, Spectatorship, and the Making of Law in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Europe* (Oxford University Press 2022).

16 Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 'Law is a stage: from aesthetics to affective aestheses' in Emilios A Christodoulidis, Ruth Dukes and Marco Goldoni (eds), *Research Handbook on Critical Legal Theory* (Edward Elgar 2019) 201.

17 Amanda Perry-Kessaris, '"Unlimiting" legal conceptualisation in designerly ways' prepared for 'Edinburgh Centre for Legal Theory Seminar', 16 November 2023 (2 November 2023).

combine material culture with experiential methods, such as dance, to 'mak[e] law palpable'. In so doing we can open pathways to empathy and imagination, as distinct from mere 'reaction'.[18] Shaun McVeigh has gone further to suggest that an exhibition can actively 'reali[se] a jurisprudence'.[19] We return to this point in our conclusion. Relatedly (fifth), there is some interest in the idea that such openness can prompt and facilitate a widening of participation in legal theorisation. One example is the 'Pop-Up Museum of Legal Objects', a digital collection of legal commentaries about curated artefacts and statues on public display across the world. The collection emerged out of a series of collaborative events designed to attract and embrace a wide range of scholars, and in which experiential process such as tours, model-making, and lo-fi exhibition played a central role.[20]

At the same time, those working in cultural institutions are coming to understand exhibitions as a form of research.[21] 'Museums and exhibitions are increasingly being referred to as "laboratories" [and] "experiments" respectively' – that is, as institutions and events that do 'not simply mirror the world', but rather 'work as a particular way of … exploring the world', of 'construct[ing] new perspectives and ideas' and 'different ways of knowing'.[22] This characterisation of museums and exhibitions implies a move on the part of curators towards both 'intellectual experimentation' and 'social experimentation'.[23] Sharon McDonald and Paul Basu present this move as a kind of recovery. They 'trace the history of the museum back to the scientific theatres, where experiments were carried out in front of an audience' and 'suggest that the contemporary museum might profit from' once again centring 'experiment and process rather than finalised displays'.[24] The Fantasy Legal Exhibition project builds on and advances each of these trends.

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18 Máiréad Enright and Tina Kinsella, 'Legal aesthetics in the touching contract: memory, exposure and transformation' (2023) 19 Law, Culture and the Humanities 297–319, 318.

19 Shaun McVeigh, 'Jurisprudent of London: arts of association' (2016) 20 Law Text Culture 189–215, 199.

20 See the website Pop-Up Museum of Legal Objects; Amanda Perry-Kessaris, 'The Pop-up Museum of Legal Objects project: an experiment in "socio-legal design"' (2017) 68 Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly 225–244.

21 See Peter Bjerregaard (ed), *Exhibitions as Research: Experimental Methods in Museums* 1st edn (Routledge 2019); 'Beyond the Academy: Research as Exhibition' Symposium, Tate Britain. 10 May 2010 – audio recording.

22 Bjerregaard (n 21 above) 1–2. See further Sheetal Prajapati, 'Museum as Laboratory: Artists Experiment' (Museum of Modern Aart 2014) Martin Heller, Andrea Scholz and Agnes Wegner, *The Laboratory Concept: Museum Experiments in the Humboldt Lab Dahlem* (Nicolaische Verlagsbuchd 2015).

23 Bjerregaard (n 21 above) 4.

24 Ibid 4. Citing Sharon Macdonald and Paul Basu, 'Introduction' in Sharon Macdonald and Paul Basu (eds), *Exhibition Experiments* (Blackwell 2007) 1-24.

FANTASY LEGAL EXHIBITION

The Fantasy Legal Exhibition project methodology was guided by insights from a wider investigation into the potential of design-based methods to enhance all aspects of legal research – that is, not only dissemination, but also conceptualisation, data collection and analysis, reflection and evaluation; as well as the, rarely remarked upon, relational dimension of research.[25]

Design-based practices, such as architecture, social design, graphic design and system design, tend to be distinguished by five interconnected characteristics. First, designers tend to emphasise processes of experimentation, both in the relatively creative sense of generating and provisionally exploring a wide range of ideas; and in the relatively scientific sense of testing those ideas and then discarding, adapting, or retaining and pursuing them. Second, designers tend to make ideas visible and/or tangible in the here and now, so that they become more, or differently, available to those working with or encountering them. Third, designers generally try to centre the needs and wants of those who will use as well as those who may be indirectly affected by that which they design. In combination these ways can (fourth) generate 'structured-yet-free' enabling ecosystems within which we are prompted and facilitated to be simultaneously practical (how can we make things happen?), critical (what is wrong?), and imaginative (what could be?). Finally, they also enable collaboration.[26]

As noted above, we use the concept of 'fantasy' to accentuate the speculative and prefigurative potential of exhibition as a research practice. Speculation and prefiguration are deployed in a wide range of spheres, including science fiction and political activism. We pursued a specifically design-driven approach to speculation and prefiguration in the sense that project activities emphasised experimentation, making ideas visible and tangible, and centring users (both participant collaborators and exhibition visitors).

This designerly, structured-yet-free, approach was evident in the fact that we planned every aspect of the event well in advance, but also continuously adjusted to changing circumstances, to our evolving understanding of exhibition as a practice, as well as to the intellectual, physical, logistical, and psychological needs and wants of our participant collaborators. This approach was also evident in the primary device through which we generated this ecosystem: a series of 'briefs' circulated before, during, and after the core workshop. These were designed to generate a sense of structured freedom around

25 Amanda Perry-Kessaris, 'Legal design for practice, activism, policy, and research' (2019) 46 Journal of Law and Society 185–210; Perry-Kessaris (n 4 above).

26 Perry-Kessaris (n 4 above).

each element of the workshop; as well as a coherent narrative for the project as a whole. The following participant feedback is indicative of the success of this strategy: 'I found the [briefs] really useful as a way to start thinking about how I was going to interact with the exhibits that we visited. I didn't always agree that these were the questions we should be considering, but that was in itself a provocation that helped inspire fresh thinking.'[27]

We hypothesised that engaging in a (design-driven) process of fantasising about exhibition might enhance researchers' abilities to see exhibition as research: as a way of working out how to (practically) explain legal ideas, and their wider significance; (critically) unsettle dominant legal ideas; and (imaginatively) generate new legal ideas. We further hypothesised that it might enable legal researchers to experiment towards instantiating a (potentially impactful) actual exhibition, including by prompting and facilitating them to identify, and improve the balance of, associated risks and rewards. Finally, we hypothesised that engaging in (design-driven) fantasising about exhibition would prompt and facilitate collaboration between researchers, with associated benefits to research quality and to researcher relations.

The following sections set out the project activities in detail, supported by our photographs and notes, as well as participant responses to briefs, especially the Reflection Statements, written feedback to peers, prototype exhibition slides and transcripts, and presentation session discussion transcripts.

BEFORE THE WORKSHOP

The first pre-event brief took the form of an atypical call for participation. Applicants were invited to respond to three prompts which were designed to surface something of their experiences and ambitions around exhibition: describe how a particular exhibition or exhibited artefact has impacted upon how you think about law, or legal research; identify one legal concept, actor, event or relationship to which you could draw attention through a 'fantasy' exhibition; and describe one visitor that might come to your exhibition, and how they would differ from those who might read your scholarly publications. Participants from diverse career stages, ethnicities, dis/abilities, and institutions (although, notably, only one male) were selected on the basis of those responses.

Selected participants were then asked to complete a further pre-event brief, including a virtual tour of items in the British Museum

27 Fred Motson, Reflection Statement.

on the theme of 'the rule of law'; and engaging with a selection of literature ('sparks') on curation, visual and material culture, and law and design.[28]

DURING THE WORKSHOP

The core workshop was held across two days, in multiple central London locations, in July 2023. In each location, participants completed briefs and design prompts facilitated them to engage with artefacts, spaces, concepts, curatorial and archival practices, and/or experts. These locations were the British Museum, as an example of a museum of international repute showcasing rare artefacts and high culture; the Postal Museum, to showcase the historical records created through the course of a business that had a strong relationship with its workers and the trade union; Spa Fields Park and Playground, to represent an open space orientated towards fun and families; and, finally, Middle Temple, to present the more traditional materials that are associated most commonly with law, legal culture and the legal profession. After these visits, participants then shared and discussed their outcomes at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (IALS).

At the British Museum

We began at the always crowded British Museum, which 'opened its doors in 1759' as 'the first national museum to cover all fields of human knowledge', and which today holds at least 8 million objects, the status of some of which is hotly 'contested', representing '2 million years of history, across six continents' (Image 1).[29] Brief 1 invited participants to, among other things, choose one room, treat it as an 'exhibition', explore it spatially using mapping and photography, draw one artefact from the room, and consider to what the exhibition was drawing attention, as well as to what might be missing or erased, uncomfortable or unclear. Reflecting on the experience of 'throw[ing]

28 These 'sparks' were: Adrian George, *The Curator's Handbook: Museums, Commercial Galleries, Independent Spaces* illustrated edn (Thames & Hudson 2015) ch 7; Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating* (Farrar Straus & Giroux 2014) 22–35; Victoria Barnes and Lucy Newton, 'Corporate identity, company law and currency: a survey of community images on English bank notes' (2022) 17 Management and Organizational History 43–75; John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* 1st edn (Penguin Classics 2008) ch 5; Leonie Hannan and Sarah Longair, *History through Material Culture* (Manchester University Press 2017) ch 5; Sophie Woodward, *Material Methods: Researching and Thinking with Things* 1st edn (Sage 2019) ch 5; Perry-Kessaris (n 4 above) ch 1; Perry-Kessaris (n 20 above); Perry-Kessaris (n 7 above).

29 British Museum website.

ourselves into the cavernous exhibits of the British Museum', one participant remembered:

> feeling completely overwhelmed when I started around my (anxiously) chosen room (time, technology). However, I was soon amazed about the capacity of the tasks that were assigned to me (mapping, labelling, drawing artefacts) to bring calm and order to my thinking, amidst the encouragement that came from meeting other workshop participants in the rooms.[30]

Another observed that 'having time and space to explore one exhibit was a pleasure' and '[d]rawing the object meant that I had to concentrate'.[31]

At the Postal Museum

After lunch, on the first day, we visited the Postal Museum. This institution began life in 1969, was paused in the late 1990s, reappeared in its present form in 2004, and today holds 'over 60,000 objects and thousands of records detailing 500 years of postal history', including 'stories of innovation, engineering, design and social history' (Image 2).[32] Archivist Susannah Coster introduced us to the archival practices of the Postal Museum, then led a tour of the archive, and finally invited us to handle artefacts which participants had selected as part of pre-event Brief 0. Participants then completed Brief 2 which, among other things, invited them to caption an artefact for a lay visitor, for a legal practitioner, and for a legal academic; to reflect on what kinds of archives they are naturally drawn to; and to consider what might be the similarities and differences in the relationships between a curator and their exhibition versus a researcher and their publication. Several participants remarked on the power of the captioning exercises which 'encouraged [us] to explain our research concepts and exhibition ideas to (legally) informed but also unfamiliar audiences'. One found this to be 'a good entry point into thinking more deliberately and proactively about the notion of the research "audience," and then "visitor", a term that I came to love during the workshop. For me, it conveys distinct practicalities of building an exhibit', including publicising it; and then ensuring that it is 'something worth visiting', that audiences can actually 'move through' it, and can 'take their thoughts through a door' into the next room. These practical questions could be 'transformative' when deployed in relation to legal research.[33] Another reported that captioning:

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30 Lilian Moncrief, Refection Statement.
31 Helen Rutherford, Reflection Statement.
32 The Postal Museum website.
33 Lilian Moncrieff, Reflection Statement.

> has become a valuable tool that I now use regularly in my writing. It provides a starting point to reel somebody into my research (lay visitor caption); expand the research's contours (legal academic caption) and showcase the way in which my research can be used (legal practitioner caption). It is a great starting point to summarise my research in abstracts and introductions.[34]

At Spa Fields Park and Playground

We ended the second day at Spa Fields, a park which is today home to trees, shrubs, benches, children's play equipment, but which was previously the site of a burial ground, a bone house, and extreme social deprivation in the late 1700s; and of riots in 1816 (Image 3).[35] Here participants completed Brief 3, which invited them to, among other things, consider how they might adapt a particular piece of play equipment to form an interactive or experiential component in their Fantasy Legal Exhibition; and reflect upon the differences and similarities between 'looking at' and 'interacting with', as well as between 'playing' and 'teaching–learning'. One participant was 'surprised by how generative it could be to spend time in a physical location and imagine siting and narrating my research in and around that setting', and used that setting as the inspiration for her exhibition concept and layout.[36] Another observed that, by 'mapping exhibits in the British Museum' and 'paying attention to the layout of the Spa Fields playground, I [have become] more aware about what is shown, where it is shown, and why it is shown in that place'; and have a better 'understanding [of] my research's relationship to the society in which it exists'. She said that she is now 'constantly aware of' the question:

> what space am I working in? Is it a constitutional law space? Is it a theory space? And what does that mean in terms of the information that I'm putting forward? I don't know if that translates into good research, but it translates into good thinking.[37]

A third participant found that Spa Fields 'allowed me to engage my habit of testing legal concepts and ideas in new contexts (looking at play equipment instead of [the usual] sword and scales)'; and it 'made me think about adequately controlling or detailing [conceptual] abstractions for an exhibition, to clearly communicate research ideas (if playfully allowing for more than one interpretation)'.[38] Similarly,

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34 Almas Shaikh, Reflection Statement.

35 Spa Fields Playground website; 'A Brief History of the Bone House & Graveyard (Spa Fields Park)' (Plaque nd); the Spa; 'The Spa Fields Burial Ground' (Cove nd).

36 Clare Williams, Refection Statement and Presentation Session Transcript.

37 Almas Shaikh, Reflection Statement and Presentation Session Transcript.

38 Lilian Moncrief, Reflection Statement.

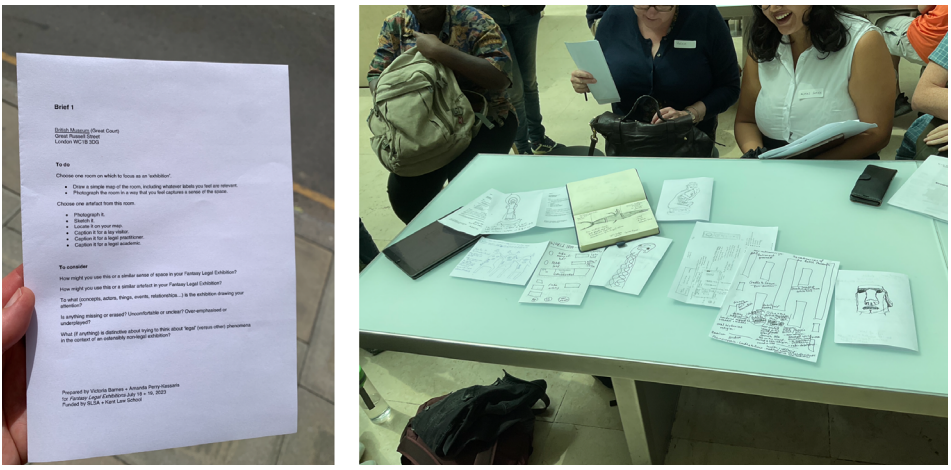


Image 1: Brief 1 instructions printed on right side of A4 sheet, folded to form a 'notebook' (left), and sharing Brief 1 outcomes in the Great Court (right) at the British Museum © Amanda Perry-Kessaris 2023.



Image 2: Touring the archive with archivist Susannah Coster (left) and handling artefacts for Brief 2 (right) at the Postal Museum © Amanda Perry-Kessaris 2023.

another participant 'concluded that it is vital to involve the audience' in the exhibition, 'not merely [to] present an exhibition as a "finished product"'; and the trip to Spa Fields 'underscored' the fact that '[a]n element of play encourages learning (almost) by accident'.[39]

39 Helen Rutherford, Reflection Statement.



Image 3: Sky, trees, play (left) and sharing Brief 3 outcomes (right) at Spa Fields Park and Playground © Amanda Perry-Kessaris 2023.

At the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple

The second day of the Workshop began with a tour of the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple (Image 4). One of four Inns of Court, which is entitled to call its members to the Bar of England and Wales, Middle Temple has 'provide[d] support, education and accommodation to barristers at every stage of their careers' since 1608; and, more broadly, has acted as 'an important hub for socialising and networking, the setting for feasts and duels, politics and literature, courtly spectacle and academic discourse since the mid 14th Century'.[40] Archivist Barnaby Bryan led us through the main Hall and Bench Apartments – rooms that are used by members, for events, and as film locations. We then moved on to the Archive, which is 'responsible for … acquir[ing], preserv[ing] and mak[ing] available' the digital and physical 'records and archives created by the Inn', in order 'to provide members … with a direct and tangible connection with and understanding of the rich and diverse history, heritage and culture of their Inn of Court'.[41] Our tour of the Archive included the environmentally controlled Repository and Conservation Studio areas. There Conservator Siobhán Prendergast introduced us to some of the technical strategies and pragmatic considerations that shape archival and curatorial practices of Middle Temple, where the collection forms part of the fabric of everyday life, and is very much in use.[42] We ended in the library, where librarian Renae Satterley guided us through a special exhibition on 'Islam,

40 See the Middle Temple website.
41 'Archive – Information & Access' (Middle Temple nd).
42 'Conservation at the Inn' (Middle Temple nd).



Image 4: Touring the Bench Apartments (left) and Conservation Studio (right) at Middle Temple © Amanda Perry-Kessaris 2023.

Astronomy and Arabic Print'.[43] Here participants completed Brief 4, which invited them to reflect on the similarities and differences between the various exhibition spaces we had encountered, and their anticipated audiences; as well as between tours and free explorations of exhibitions spaces.

Middle Temple was the last of the formal collections that we visited, so this is an opportune moment to note that, reflecting back after the workshop, several participants compared the expert practices evident in the various archival and curatorial settings. For example, the British Museum was generally experienced as 'formal', 'overwhelming and unimaginative'; whilst Middle Temple was perceived as 'freer', 'very cool, and unexpectedly welcoming'.[44] For some these contrasting practices prompted thoughts around accessibility and communication in relation to cultural heritage and, by extension, to law.[45] Others were moved to consider themes of care, value, and change, in relation to exhibition and to law. For example, one participant observed that whilst '[t]he Postal Museum archives might not seem the most valuable documents in monetary terms', they were 'very carefully preserved'; and, by contrast, the priceless artefacts in Middle Temple had been subjected to gravy spills, and the team didn't seem concerned about the prospect of a 150kg [powered wheelchair] barrelling around the place', which is 'very rare'.[46] For a second participant '[t]he absence of curators at the British Museum … seemed to give off an uncaring air about the artefacts'; whilst the relative 'protectiveness of the Postal

43 'Islam, Astronomy, and Arabic Print: A Collection Showcase at Middle Temple Library' (Middle Temple nd).

44 Clare Williams, Reflection Statement; Helen Rutherford, Reflection Statement.

45 Lilian Moncrief, Reflection Statement; Helen Rutherford, Reflection Statement.

46 Clare Williams, Reflection Statement.

Museum's archivists was a jarring, yet familiar, contrast' which 'closely mirror[ed] traditional attitudes of lawyers towards the institution of the law and legal practice'. For her, the Middle Temple 'seemed to be … in-between – the library … reminded me of a luxurious hotel lobby … But the curator [and archivists] … seemed to care in a personal, un-detached way.' This led her to wonder whether:

> [p]erhaps there is something to learn from archivists and curators about how law should be presented. Not as an icon to be frozen away and fiercely guarded but not common and open to multiple, conflicting interpretations either. Maybe we can learn from the curators and archivists at Middle Temple. How to preserve legal culture whilst remaining welcoming of change.[47]

At the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies

The final afternoon of the workshop was spent in a spacious, quiet room at IALS – a research institute established by the University of London in 1947 which holds one of the world's leading collections of British, foreign and international legal texts, ranging from sixteenth-century printed treatises to contemporary electronic resources.[48] Here participants completed Brief 5, a series of tasks designed to focus attention on some key curatorial themes which we had formally introduced via the Brief 0 'sparks'.

First, we focused on the theme of 'collecting'. Participants were invited to identify an object that it would be desirable, but impossible, to include in their Fantasy Legal Exhibition – because, for example, it never existed, or no longer exists; and then to make a clay model of it to exhibit alongside those of other participants (Images 5 and 6). One participant remarked 'While I found modelling frustrating due to my own complete lack of artistic ability, the physicality of it was really interesting.'[49]

Our attention then shifted to the theme of 'visiting'. Participants were invited to generate 'personas' to capture one intended and one unintended type of visitor to their Fantasy Legal Exhibition; and to identify their interests and standpoints, hopes and fears (generally, and in relation to the proposed exhibition). One participant found this difficult because 'I (perhaps naively) think that my exhibition is for everyone, the more unintended the better.'[50]

Next, we focused on 'narrative'. Participants were invited to map the anticipated journey, and accompanying sensations, emotions, and insights, to be experienced by visitors before, during and after a visit

47 Favour Bọrọkìní, Reflection Statement.
48 IALS website.
49 Fred Motson, Reflection Statement.
50 Almas Shaikh, Reflection Statement.



Image 5: Making fantasy legal objects at IALS © Amanda Perry-Kessaris 2023.



Image 6: Exhibiting fantasy legal objects by (a) Favour Bọ̀rọ̀kìní, (b) Lilian Moncrieff, (c) Fred Motson, (d) Almas Shaikh, (e) Helen Rutherford, (f) Erika Rackley and Sharon Thompson, (g) Renske Vos, and (h) Clare Williams at IALS © Amanda Perry-Kessaris 2023.



Image 7: Mapping exhibition narratives by (a) Sharon Thompson and Erika Rackley, (b) Fred Motson, (c) Renske Vos, (d) Lilian Moncrieff, (e) Favour Bọ̀rọ̀kìní, (f) Almas Shaikh, (g) Helen Rutherford, and (h) Clare Williams at IALS © Amanda Perry-Kessaris 2023.

to their Fantasy Legal Exhibition (Image 7). One participant observed that it 'was particularly inspiring to hear everyone's ideas evolve over the two days, from something unformed into something that you could imagine walking around'.[51] For another participant this exercise generated an overarching concept and title for their exhibition.[52]

Finally, we considered the theme of 'promotion'. Participants were invited to capture the focus and spirit of their own Fantasy Legal Exhibition in a single phrase or sentence; and then to do the same in relation to the exhibition of another participant, and to gift it to them. For one participant this exercise produced the title of their exhibition.[53]

One participant observed that this set of tasks was 'enabling and constructive. It forced me to make "impossible" suggestions that could still be produced by hand, or indicated on a map, and visited by members of the public (at least)'.[54]

IALS was the last location that we visited together, so this is an opportune moment to consider two sets of general insights about the

51 Clare Williams, Refection Statement.
52 Fred Motson, Prototype Exhibition Transcript.
53 Helen Rutherford, Presentation Session Transcript.
54 Lilian Moncrieff, Refection Statement.

core workshop. The first is an experiential overview of the two days offered by one pair of participants. They noted the distance we had travelled during the workshop (over 30 kilometres) and that each site 'offered something different'; that '[w]hile some venues were quiet and understated, others were large and showy'; that 'in some places we felt slightly awkward and (sometimes literally) "in the way", our presence and conversation unintentionally forcing others to change direction', elsewhere 'our conversations took place away from public view'; that whilst sometimes the 'newness of place and activities inspired' or 'unsettled', sometimes the 'familiarity of subject matter or location' generated 'a feeling of warmth and relaxation'; but that '[u]niting each site ... was a sense of place and connection, of networks that were global, historical, current, chosen, imposed, institutional, personal'.[55] Second, two participants emphasised how the core workshop activities helped them to think beyond the question of what information they wished to communicate, to focus on anticipating and shaping the experience of their potential audience. One participant found themselves 'trying to make sense of my own, and the group's, affective response to each of the archives/exhibitions and understand why, and then work out how I can integrate elements of best practice that we experienced into my own exhibition'.[56] Another participant 'was struck by conversations (often sparked by the initial prompts) about engaging visitors in different ways, including engaging different senses'. For example, '[a]t the British Museum, I was particularly taken with a room (mainly relating to the Sutton Hoo Anglo-Saxon hoard) which had four different entry points', so 'that visitors could come to the exhibits from different directions, having taken a different (literal and figurative) journey'. Whereas for a visitor 'coming from a room on Roman Europe, this was "the future"', for one 'coming from late medieval Europe, this was "the past"', and for one 'coming from a completely different culture (from memory, the Arabian peninsula in that era)'. Then at the Postal Museum and Middle Temple, this participant noted 'the importance of touching and walking through history – seeing (and handling) original archive documents, or walking through rooms that had been used for centuries'. And in Spa Fields, 'the venue I was expecting to be least relevant', but which 'actually taught me the most' – he 'noticed a sign board explaining the (macabre) history of the area as a burial ground where bones were burned, and this immediately gave me a sense of place that I wanted my own exhibit to promote' and 'made me seriously consider [including] an outdoor element' in his exhibition.[57]

55 Erika Rackley and Sharon Thompson, Reflection Statement.
56 Clare Williams, Reflection Statement.
57 Fred Motson, Reflection Statement.

After

Participants completed four additional briefs in the six months following the workshop.

First, they produced a reflection statement detailing insights gained, enjoyments had, and agonies sustained, during the workshop.

Second, participants produced an initial 'prototype' of their Fantasy Legal Exhibition in the form of five slides plus accompanying narration notes. Here, they were encouraged to consider the aim, intended audience and location of their exhibition, and with whom they might want/need to collaborate to make it happen. Third, participants provided written feedback on the prototype of a peer. That feedback addressed, for example, the clarity and scope of the exhibition concept, typography and images, physical and narrative flow, ethical challenges around the involvement of vulnerable collaborators and sensitive subject matter, and practical challenges of making an actual exhibition happen. Outcomes from each of these tasks were shared with all participants. Finally, participants pre-recorded a five-minute video introducing a refined prototype of their Fantasy Legal Exhibition. Here, they were encouraged to incorporate a sense of what visitors to their exhibition might experience, learn, interact with, feedback on and why and to whom their exhibition might matter. We asked for pre-recorded presentations in an attempt to get participants to focus on quality and to give them an opportunity to be a visitor at their own exhibition. The videos were watched and discussed at a private online session held six months after the workshop, and are now available online via the project website.[58] This iterative process proved effective. One participant observed that 'the whole process of doing it once, having a second pair of eyes on it [via peer feedback], and then having to go back and rethink it a few weeks later was really helpful – to just revisit the process and realize that my thoughts have evolved a bit'.[59] One participant reported that:

> it allowed me to go back and think about what exactly would the process of that exhibition look like? How can I think about the vulnerabilities [of contributors and visitors]? I even added a new room to my exhibition which wasn't there in my first presentation.[60]

The following sections introduce each of these prototype exhibitions and highlight the ways in which they, and their proponent's relationship with legal research, have been influenced by the project activities.

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58 Fantasy Legal Exhibitions website.

59 Clare Williams, Presentation Session Transcript.

60 Almas Shaikh, Presentation Session Transcript.

EXHIBITION PROTOTYPES

'Law Round About', by Fred Motson, explores the geography of the common law. It does this though an interactive digital map, which links legal cases to specific geographical locations; as well as 'concise', 'jargon-free', 'accessible' summaries of the cases and photographs of the location in question. In so doing it aims to encourage visitors to come at law from wherever they happen to be; and so to contribute to making law more 'open to people, places, and ideas'.[61] During the presentation session discussion, Motson remarked:

> I'm still sort of torn between the tension of very curated, specific exhibition, and a digital artefact that perhaps the whole advantage of is that it is quite unlimited … I think probably the fantasy would be that in an ideal world, it would start as something reasonably curated, in terms of getting a certain amount of information on there, and for people to interact with. But then the idea would be to inspire people to go on to write the map themselves, so that eventually it became something made up by the users, rather than by me or the organizer.[62]

'The Corporation in Society', by Lilian Moncrieff, explores (dis)connections between, on the one hand, how corporations are governed; and, on the other hand, their impact on the wider world. It does this by, first, explaining the evolution of the corporation as a legal construct, an economic device, a governance structure, and a social actor; second, exposing how contemporary corporate law tends to emphasise corporations' responsibility to report their impact on, for example, shareholder value or sustainability; and then redirecting attention towards the nature of those impacts by enabling visitors to 'handle' and 'interact' with material representations of the, sometimes 'ruin[ous]', results. In so doing it aims to create a 'dialogue' which might 'unsettle' orthodox understandings of the role of corporations in society, and prompt consideration of how they might meaningfully be held responsible for their impacts.[63] During the presentation session discussion, Moncrieff remarked:

> I guess what I really like about the exhibition space in this context is that it allows us to do something that we wouldn't be able to do in the real world. Because it doesn't make sense to say a company shouldn't do anything for the sustainability or responsibility reports. That's a proposition that you could never really make in real life. But in the exhibition space we can play with the idea that we need to kind of turn things upside down in order to carry out rezoning, and to rethink the

61 Fred Motson, Prototype Exhibition Transcript.
62 Ibid.
63 Lilian Moncrieff, Prototype Exhibition Transcript.

> problem in a way that the real world in public policy circles makes more difficult.[64]

'Whose Death Is It Anyway?', by Helen Rutherford, explores the nineteenth-century Coroner's Court as 'an important piece of the legal jigsaw required to understand fully Victorian justice and administration'; as well as the scholarly and public value of records produced by, and in response to, the court. It does so through displays of items relating to various causes of death, and sources detailing the deaths of named individuals, such as court reports, letters, and newspapers; interactive holograms of key figures, such as coroners and witnesses; and an opportunity to act as a member of the coroner's jury, engaging with evidence around the death of a named person, and deciding on the cause of death. In these ways, the exhibition aims to activate the potential of the written records generated in and around the court, as a resource through which to enhance understanding of the role of the court and to 'co-create community memory' – a memory which includes working-class people, of whom written records are often only to be found in inquest reports.[65] During the presentation session, when asked how the holograms would be programmed, Rutherford replied:

> I have absolutely no idea [but] if Abba can appear on stage in London, I think my coroner could appear and interact in that sort of way. If it wasn't a fantasy, I think you could have actors doing that role with a script. Money no object, the Abba experience in the coroner's court – I think is what I'm going for.

Later, she returned to the theme of fantasy, remarking 'in my fantasy we could put together some stories of [local people], to put them back on the map, and find a little bit more about them'.[66]

'Deconstructing Disability', by Clare Williams, explores the socio-material intersections between ability, work, and value across time. It does this by centring the history of assistive technologies (such as wheelchairs, eyeglasses, hearing aids and prostheses) and by encouraging visitors to engage intensively with examples of those technologies. In so doing it aims to encourage visitors to take up the work of 'destigmatizing' adaptive technologies, and 'rethinking what it means to be human, to be a worker, and to live a good life; as well as to prompt them to speculate about the future'. For example: 'If implants and body modification can enhance ordinary, everyday physical functions, might those who choose to remain unmodified become the

64 Ibid.
65 Helen Rutherford, Prototype Exhibition Transcript.
66 Ibid.

new disabled?'[67] During the presentation session discussion, Williams remarked:

> Representing the links between technology as an enablement for labour market integration for those with physical differences is fairly doable, in a kind of more abstract sense of having explanations, or written explanations, or videos or that sort of thing. But how to make it tangible or experiential, or embodied within the exhibition? That's still something I'm trying to figure out.[68]

'Feminist Constellations', by Erika Rackley and Sharon Thompson, explores 'the concept of feminist legal change'. It is aimed directly at school children aged seven to eleven and, 'taking the title of the Stars in the Sky leaflet produced by the Women of Greenham Common as its inspiration and anchor', it focuses their attention on 'networks, rather than an individual woman or star'. It does this through the device of a series of virtual 'feminist meeting spaces' from the past, such as the offices of Southall Black Sisters 'as they worked … to secure justice for Kiranjit Ahluwalia' in 1989; in these spaces, visitors can 'eavesdrop' 'on the women's conversations, look over their shoulders at their notebooks, campaign leaflets and banners, and read their letters and emails' and 'become immersed in their world'. Visitors will co-design elements of the exhibition, including by creating the digital avatar through which they 'navigate the exhibition', and 'adapt[ing' along the way to connect with, for example, the historical period addressed in each room'. In these ways, the exhibition aims to 'brin[g] … to the fore' both 'often overlooked and orthodox narratives' about the development of law', whist 'creating new opportunities for dialogue between exhibition and community'.[69] During the presentation session, Thompson remarked that an 'underlying subversive element' or 'activism' is also present across the other prototype exhibitions, each of which could be seen as 'reframing how we talk and think about law';[70] and Rackley agreed, adding that there are 'synergies across' the exhibitions because:

> we're [all] doing this for a reason … it's something that's important to us, that we think people should know about, because we then want people to do something with it … [T]hat's part of what exhibitions are for. That's why you have an exhibition.[71]

'Digital Self (Re)Presentation through Avatars', by Favour Bọ̀rọ̀kìní, explores relationships between digital avatars, identity, freedom, performance, and privacy. It is part of a wider investigation into

67 Clare Williams, Prototype Exhibition Transcript.
68 Ibid.
69 Erika Rackley and Sharon Thompson, Prototype Exhibition Transcript.
70 Sharon Thompson, Presentation Session Transcript
71 Erika Rackley, Presentation Session Transcript.

'afrofeminist ethics concerns around the design and use of avatars', which reinterprets avatars as 'masks', and law as performance and which draws on participatory research activities with 50 African women living in the United Kingdom. The exhibition advances that research agenda by displaying some of the avatars generated by participants, supported by the participants' own 'descriptions of the avatar and how it represents them'; as well as by offering visitors the opportunity to engage with those participants, who are present in the room, wearing physical versions of their avatar masks. In so doing the exhibition aims to encourage visitors to consider the possibilities that 'masking and performance can be liberatory', 'empowering', and entertaining', they 'can bring people together', and 'can be a way of establishing or enjoying one's own privacy'.[72] Responding to Bọ̀rọ̀kìní's prototype during the presentation session, one participant observed 'in my research I'm grappling with how fluid the life is, versus how rigid law is'. This exhibition gets at that issue though the comments from the participants such as 'I don't know who I am, and my avatar also keeps changing', and it raises the question 'can we even expect – the law to understand that?'[73]

'Who Do You Think You Are?', by Almas Shaikh, explores the structural and individual dimensions for everyday identify, with a particular emphasis on intersectionality – that is, the idea that identify is multidimensional and dynamic. The exhibition does this by first displaying collections of objects that specific individuals carry with them every day, and encouraging visitors to conjure an impression of the identify of their owner; then revealing the actual identify of the owner through the device of a photographic portrait; then inviting visitors to reflect on any biases that they might have discovered in the process. In these ways, the exhibition aims to encourage public engagement with the idea that our 'perceived identity' is often 'at odds with' our 'group membership'.[74] During the presentation session discussion, Shaikh observed:

> I want this to be a dynamic, evolving exhibition, because intersectionality is also dynamic and evolving and taken from its social context. That is something that I have become really, really aware of.[75]

'Legal Sightseeing', by Renske Vos, is part of a wider project exploring the 'eventization, or even touristification, of international law' – that is, publics increasingly 'encounter' international law through 'spectacular, yet trivial' events, such as photography exhibitions, institutional tours,

72 Favour Bọ̀rọ̀kìní, Prototype Exhibition Transcript.
73 Almas Shaikh, Presentation Session Transcript.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.

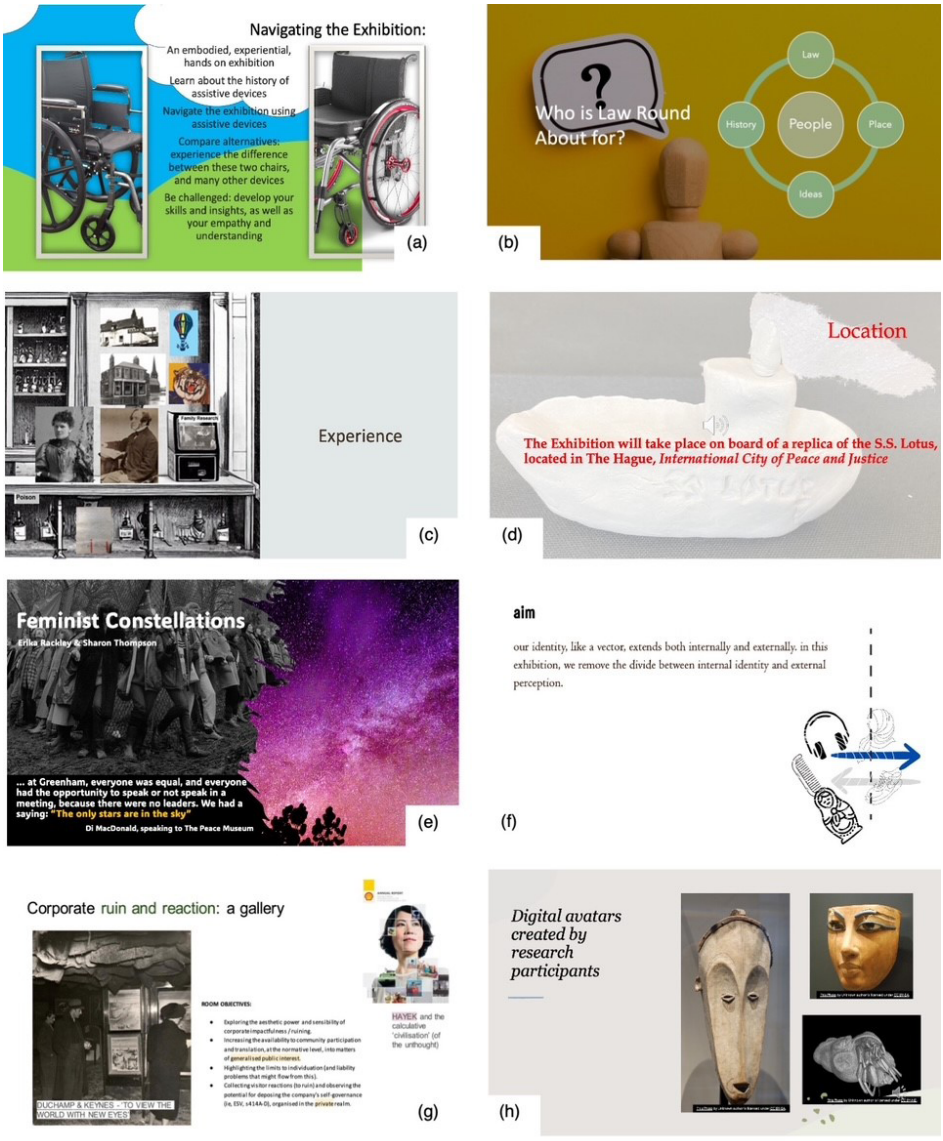


Image 8: Extracts from exhibition prototypes by (a) Clare Williams, (b) Fred Motson, (c) Helen Rutherford, (d) Renske Vos, (e) Sharon Thompson and Erika Rackley, (f) Almas Shaikh, (g) Lilian Moncrieff, and Favour Bọ̀rọ̀kìní © Amanda Perry-Kessaris 2023.

and documentary film festivals. The exhibition advances that research agenda through displays of project photographs capturing public encounters with international law, and commissioned legal artworks responding to that theme; through interactive devices, such as a virtual reality game; as well as though the subversive inclusion of an ice cream stand and selfie opportunities; and by gathering visitor responses to the exhibition. In so doing it aims to create an original public encounter with international law which will not only encourage critical thinking among visitors around international law and its eventization, but also 'generate new insights on that theme to be fed forward into future research'. In her Reflection Statement, Vos observed:

> I massively appreciate the invitation … to think boundlessly about presenting research. The format made me [once again] foreground the concept over perceived limitations … I found that this mode helped me push boundaries. Concretely, I noticed this for example with regards to scale … I ended by pitching for a life-size replica of the SS Lotus as an international legal tourist attraction in itself. At the same time, fleshing out all that I would want to do in an exhibition when given all chances, made the design-choices involved much more apparent to me.[76]

LESSONS FROM AND FOR FANTASY LEGAL EXHIBITION

We hypothesised that engaging in our (design-driven) process, with its emphasis on speculative and prefigurative experimentation, visuality and materiality, might help researchers to see exhibition as research. The above-mentioned feedback and prototype exhibitions suggest that it did. Participants reported an enhanced appreciation for the capacity of exhibition to be not only 'a method of accessing the actual research output', but 'a fundamental part of the project in and of itself',[77] part of the 'longer methodological process of crafting and reflection on the [who, what, when, where, why and how] of the research';[78] as well as 'for how to use (fantasy) curation as method of socio-legal research, both in terms of dissemination and in terms of data collection'.[79] One participant found that the project shed light not only on 'what exhibiting my research demands' but also on what it might take to generate scholarly and wider social impact more generally.[80] We did not anticipate that participants might also adjust their research

76 Renske Vos, Reflection Statement.
77 Fred Motson, Reflection Statement.
78 Clare Williams, Reflection Statement.
79 Renske Vos, Reflection Statement.
80 Almas Shaikh, Reflection Statement.

methods more generally as a consequence of their engagement with the project. Some indicated that they intended to begin to build archival and museum-based components into their future research[81] and to approach such materials in new ways, by, for example, 'employing mixed methods of recording (drawing, photo, mapping, labelling)'; to take a designerly approach to research by, for example, 'assess[ing] the process and not the product'[82] and by '[w]riting briefs' and 'moving through different tasks as a means of managing uncertainty'.[83] One participant now includes 'simple graphics' in most of her written outputs. She intends these graphics to 'act as a caption for a lay visitor drawing them in', which the ensuing 'paragraphs explain the theory behind it (for legal academic) and show its usage in everyday life (for legal practitioner)'.[84] The implication is that any research output can be approached as if it were an exhibition.

We hypothesised that our process might enable legal researchers to work speculatively and prefiguratively towards instantiating an actual (potentially impactful) exhibition; including by prompting and facilitating them to identify, and improve the balance of, associated risks and rewards. Feedback suggests that it did. All participants indicated a commitment to continue to explore exhibition as a research practice. Some participants reported an increased awareness around the 'steps and stakes'[85] involved in curation. For example, one participant remarked:

> I was fascinated in the pre-reading to realise the sheer range of relevant factors that could be considered – one detail that stood out was a detailed discussion of what colour walls should be in an exhibition space. [86]

For another, 'the reading and workshop confirmed that, as with many things in life, experts exist for a reason, and that putting on an exhibition in real life is no small undertaking'.[87] Another explained:

> [W]hen I applied for the workshop, it was very much a mind worm. I hadn't developed the idea it was something like a fun to do activity at that point of time. Instead of an abstract, I could think about the fantasy exhibition. But the more I think about it and the more I'm being pushed to think about, how will you present it, who will you present it to? Who will you collaborate it with? It's becoming less of a fantasy, and I can really see myself in a few years actually trying to present it, which is

81 Clare Williams, Reflection Statement.
82 Helen Rutherford, Reflection Statement.
83 Lilian Moncrieff, Reflection Statement.
84 Almas Shaikh, Personal Communication 19 June, 2025.
85 Renske Vos, Reflection Statement.
86 Fred Motson, Reflection Statement.
87 Clare Williams, Reflection Statement.

> such a great way to think about research – to start from an abstract idea to actually making it possible. That has been an incredible journey.[88]

During the course of the project we identified two risks associated with fantasy exhibition. First, was the risk that a fantasy exhibition might repeat or reinforce the errors of real exhibitions, or other academic events. For example, it is a near certainty that in the course of this event we have come into contact with artefacts that were not, for whatever reason, freely given up by their rightful owners.[89] The very notion of exhibition as research emerged as a kind of 'critique of the critique of the museum' – that is, as an optimistic and productive response to a period of self-estrangement in the late twentieth century, in which museums were criticised for being excessively exclusive, appropriating, and opaque.[90] Such critiques remain valid in relation to many museums, and to them have been added new critiques around the ethics of collection and display. Debates about what museums ought to be for, and how they ought to be, are now commonplace; and it is widely accepted that museums are always normative and, therefore, political spaces.[91] However, this fact presents not only risks but also opportunities. We noted above Shaun McVeigh's observation that an exhibition can actively 'reali[se] a jurisprudence', which he made in response to an exhibition at the Australian National Museum, 'Encounters: Revealing Stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Objects from the British Museum'. He writes:

> The stories told in the exhibition set the artefacts back into relation with the people from whom and places from where they were removed. The story of jurisprudence related here is one of repatriation and the return of objects to their proper law and jurisdiction. This is not so much a matter of giving objects a context but of bringing law to life or life back to law.[92]

The second risk that we noticed relates to the loss of structure associated with dematerialisation, which is in turn associated with fantasising. Sometimes it is the 'limitations' of museums – the composition and 'concrete quality' of their collections – that promotes

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88 Almas Shaikh, Presentation Session Transcript.

89 See, for example, Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (Pluto Press 2020); Sarah Keenan, 'Keeping the Gweagal Shield: property and truth in matters of post-colonial redistribution' (2023) 3 Legalities 136–163; Alexander Herman, *The Parthenon Marbles Dispute: Heritage, Law, Politics* (Hart 2023).

90 Bjerregaard (n 21 above) 3.

91 See, for example, 'Designing democracy exhibitions: Bonn and Dresden 2024–2025' (*Democracy Next* 2023); see Art not Oil Coalition website.

92 McVeigh (n 19 above) 199.

critique and imagination.[93] By bringing objects into a shared material space through exhibitions we can 'sustain a degree of complexity' and openness, making a variety of concepts 'present at the same time' without necessarily implying that they are 'causally related'.[94] However, as Ulrich Rauff has put it, exhibitions often 'bring up problems' and 'ask questions' precisely because they consist of 'material objects put together in juxtaposition or in any other spatial order'. Because the objects themselves are present, and have not 'been reduced to mere descriptions', they 'still possess their full expressiveness, their aesthetic power'.[95] That power was somewhat constrained by the fact that we stopped short of turning digital fantasy into reality.

We hypothesised that our process would generate pathways to collaboration. Feedback suggests that it did. For several participants, the moments of group discussion were especially 'useful'. One participant suggested that these moments offered opportunities for comparative self-reflection 'which can be applied to all learning scenarios' and offered the following example:

> [two other participants indicated that] they were off to look for evidence of women in the British Museum exhibits, at which point I realised that I'd only been looking for the history of disability tangentially because I hadn't expected to find direct evidence or exhibits. I've since reoriented my approach and thinking to search directly first.[96]

For another, the workshop as a whole 'underlined the importance, and pleasure, of collaborating with other people and exchanging ideas in unfamiliar ways (to me)'.[97] Indeed, one participant 'would have liked more opportunity to directly discuss some of the prompts – time was tight'.[98]

It should be noted that an experimental attitude is necessary but not sufficient to support collaboration. Trust is also required. The uncertainty associated with experimentation and play can be stressful, especially in professional contexts. It needs to be carefully managed.[99] For example, one participant observed that: '[w]hen teaching I am

93 Bjerregaard (n 21 above) 6.

94 Ibid 9.

95 Ulrich Raulff, 'Old answers, new questions: what do exhibitions really generate?' in Susanne Lehmann-Brauns, Christian Sichau and Helmuth Trischler (eds), *The Exhibition as Product and Generator of Scholarship* (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science 2010) 70.

96 Clare Williams, Reflection Statement.

97 Helen Rutherford, Reflection Statement.

98 Fred Motson, Reflection Statement.

99 Jarg Bergold and Stefan Thomas, 'Participatory research methods: a methodological approach in motion' (2012) 13(1) Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research 4.

used to setting the agenda and, to some extent, directing the narrative. When researching I set the parameters. This was different.' However, she went on to note that in this workshop, '[t]here was no pressure to perform or produce. Discussion, in an inclusive and encouraging space, was supportive and thought-provoking.'[100]

We did not anticipate the extent to which the project would change or validate participants' understandings of what might count as academic practice, or what it might mean to be a researcher or a scholar. All participants commented favourably on the unusual format of the workshop, describing it as 'eye-opening',[101] 'different from any academic event I have taken part in'.[102] Some reported a new sense of possibility around what it might mean to run an academic event. One participant came to see that:

> a 'serious' academic event does not need to involve sitting in a stuffy conference room watching endless powerpoints! I was really inspired by that and ... want to keep this in my own work, both in terms of looking for similar opportunities for more enriching events to attend, and in maybe trying to make the events I organize myself a little 'freer'.[103]

More generally, there was a new willingness and ability to embrace experimentation, 'to think about how to use my research to intrigue, engage and surprise',[104] to be 'excited about my research!'[105] Participant Renske Vos, who has experience of leading non-traditional experiential academic events, observed that her own collaborative research project, 'Legal Sightseeing', tends to draw one of two (related) responses: 'where is the power?' in this method, or 'how can it be so fun?' These questions feel 'like a challenge, like a sign of a certain kind of mistrust almost'. Choosing 'fun' appears to be understood as choosing 'naivety, and this, it seems is alleged, precludes serious critique'. Vos explains how an encounter with a work in the British Museum – a colour screenprint with flocking and glitter by Enrico Baj entitled *The CIA Meeting in the Wood* produced in 1973 in the midst of the Cold War – helped her to push back on that view:

> By depicting CIA agents as glittery and spacey fantasy creatures, they become an object of fun. This releases some of the tension, diminishes some of the prestige and related power of the agents and their organisation, and opens-up the possibility for questioning these institutions. Fantasy Legal Exhibition likewise speaks to a sense of fun, creativity and imagination, as opposed to a buying into the constraints

100 Helen Rutherford, Reflection Statement.
101 Fred Motson, Peer Feedback.
102 Helen Rutherford, Reflection Statement.
103 Fred Motson, Peer Feedback.
104 Helen Rutherford, Reflection Statement.
105 Almas Shaikh, Reflection Statement.

> of existing (power) structures … Adding fantasy works to add a dash of fun, which in turn helps to open-up the imagination.[106]

Participant Helen Rutherford concurred, observing that: 'more "play" and exploration benefits everyone – academic work does not have to be dull'. The workshop:

> gave me permission to continue to try new things … It underlined the importance of experiential learning and 'having a go'… I emerged brimming with plans … Having the freedom to think without limits, in the context of 'fantasy' legal exhibitions, was liberating.

The project created the kind of space-time 'to think and experiment', which 'is lacking in the increasingly overcrowded diary of academia'. It also 'enriched my appreciation of the galleries I [later] visited over the summer. I gathered ideas for the future.'[107] Indeed she did: within two years, Rutherford had repeated the Fantasy Legal Exhibitions experiment with six colleagues in Newcastle and co-curated an exhibition 'Newcastle Gaol' online and in a library.[108]

This project took space, time, and money – resources that could have been deployed elsewhere. So it was important to us that participants found it to be useful: 'a really effective use of our time'.[109] What they took from it – what made it useful – varied. As one pair of participants put it:

> For some the workshop made the move from fantasy to reality more likely, more exciting. For others, it confirmed the freedom and possibilities staying in the realm of fantasy. For us, it was a mistressly exercise in practical feminist legal history.[110]

We hope that this article will be useful to you: encouraging you to consider exhibition, actual and fantasy, as a legal research method. We have tried to make that more possible and probable by being transparent about our process and the experiences that it generated.

At the minimum we hope to encourage you to feel that time in museums and archives is time well spent. There is growing acceptance that cultural institutions contribute to public well-being – that is, to 'feeling good and functioning well'.[111] Academic researchers Helen Chatterjee and Guy Noble have found that when we engage with museums we gain practical benefits, such as 'opportunities for learning and acquiring new skills'; social benefits, such as new relationships and

106 Renske Vos, Reflection Statement. See further the Legal Sightseeing website.
107 Helen Rutherford, Reflection Statement.
108 See Newcastle Gaol website.
109 Fred Motson, Reflection Statement.
110 Erika Rackley and Sharon Thompson, Reflection Statement.
111 Felicia A Huppert, 'Psychological well-being: evidence regarding its causes and consequences' (2009) 1 Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being 137–164.

networks of community; and psychological benefits, such as increases in 'self-esteem and a sense of identity', 'inspiration and opportunities for meaning making'.[112] This project suggests that engaging with museums can likewise contribute to the well-being of legal scholars, perhaps also practising lawyers.[113]

112 Helen J Chatterjee and Guy Noble, *Museums, Health and Well-Being* (Ashgate 2013). See further Thomas Kador and Helen Chatterjee (eds), *Object-Based Learning and Well-Being: Exploring Material Connections* (Routledge 2020).

113 Caroline Strevens and Emma Jones (eds), *Wellbeing and the Legal Academy* (Springer Nature 2023); Richard Collier, 'Wellbeing in the legal profession: reflections on recent developments (or, what do we talk about, when we talk about wellbeing?)' (2016) 23 International Journal of the Legal Profession 41–60.