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# ***City* revealed: The process and politics of exhibition development**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which the process of exhibition development and the politics this involves affects the practice of history in the museum. It does this by establishing the broad parameters of history practice in the museum and places this in relation to academic practice, focusing on the New Zealand context and specifically upon Auckland War Memorial Museum. From this basis the thesis examines the development of *City* exhibition at Auckland Museum as a large-scale museum history exposition. The development process for this exhibition was created with the aim of changing the traditional Museum approach so as to create a more engaging and scholarly history exhibition than is traditional. At the same time however, there was also an aim of retaining the appearance of the traditional Museum within this programme of change. These aims were to be met by the innovation of the collaboration between an academic historian and the Museum's practitioners in the development process.

The research is based upon a detailed investigation of the roles played by the exhibition team members and the decisions, negotiations and compromises that they made through the development process. Beginning with their original intentions and concepts for the exhibition its metamorphosis into the exhibition as it was installed in the Museum gallery is traced. Emphasis is placed on the resonance that the various decisions and changes carried into the finished exhibition. The findings indicate that the Museum's traditions of developing and displaying knowledge exerted a strong conservative effect over the exhibition development in conflict with the programme of change. This conservatism vied with the authorial intentions of the exhibition development team. As a result of this influence the exhibition developed lean towards the conventional. The unexpectedly orthodox outcome resulted from the absence of critical museological practice. The thesis argues that although Auckland Museum had undergone extensive restructuring, including the introduction of new exhibition development processes and a new outlook as an organisation, the conception of history in the Museum had not changed. Ultimately this precluded that the practice of history in the institution would advance through the revised exhibition development process. However, the development of *City* did help achieve the updating of social history in the Museum and remains a platform upon which a more critical approach to the past can be built.

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## Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents	v
List of illustrations	viii
Abbreviations	x
Prologue: <i>City</i>	xiii
<b>Introduction</b>	1
Background	2
Objectives	6
Methodology	7
Exhibition Data	8
Contextual Data	12
Limitations	12
Outline	13
<b>Chapter One</b>	
Seeing is believing: History and museums	16
Introduction	16
Material culture as evidence: Definitions, qualities, problems and methods	17
Working definition	17
Qualities an problems	18
Methodological paradigms	24
Museums and the collecting of material culture	33
Collections and collecting	33
Material culture and museum meaning	40
Museum exhibitions	41
Communication	41

Display history	43
Politics	46
Exhibition development	47
Curators, academics and history	52
Introduction	52
Academic historians and museums	53
Curatorship	56
Urban history	59
Summary	63
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
Auckland Museum: Collections, context, process	66
Introduction	66
History collecting at Auckland Museum	67
The 1990s, a context of change	73
The Grand Design	74
Introduction	74
Creative directions	75
Developing the Creative Team	78
The evolution of the concept	81
Narratives and collections	81
Concept development	82
The brief	85
Processing the brief	89
Crisis point: A black budget	94
Summary	96
<b>Chapter Three</b>	
Action and reaction: The physics of exhibition development	98
Introduction	98
Action: Constraints, translation and negotiation	99
Space, budget and politics	99
Confronting the Museum	105
The problem of inaction	107

Reaction: The team	109
Thinking in 3-D and organising space	109
Analysis	115
<i>City</i> as urban biography	115
Social history	118
Dealing with difference	123
Making object stories	124
“Nostalgism”	131
Little white lies and historical truth	133
Living up to the Act	134
Summary	136
<b>Conclusion</b>	138
Review	139
Answering questions	141
<b>Appendix One</b>	
<i>City</i>	151
<b>Appendix Two</b>	
Exhibition brief	173
<b>Selected Bibliography</b>	189
Interviews	189
Exhibition documentation	189
Newspaper and magazine articles	189
Auckland Museum serial publications	190
Auckland Museum books, articles and published pamphlets	190
Secondary sources	191

## List of illustrations

1. Footprint E showing the final proposed layout for <i>City</i> exhibition.	xii
2. Auckland War Memorial Museum, main entrance.	xiii
3. Auckland Museum ground floor plan.	xiii
4. Hobson's Choice.	xiv
5. Women's Work	xiv
6. Blokes Shed, interior.	xiv
7. The People's Wall, looking towards Auckland's Britons.	xiv
8. First gallery floor plan. Rose Young <i>City</i> Project Files.	86
9. First gallery floor plan, section.	88
10. First gallery floor plan section.	89
11. Teutenberg's bust of Queen Victoria.	100
12. Section of Footprint E showing the Reading Room.	102
13. Section of Footprint E showing the Backyard Shed and His Majesty's.	103
14. Alcove waiting for installation of computer terminals.	108
15. Tableau.	123
16. Pistol and bible in the display Hobson's Choice.	125
17. Electric servants in The Farmers display.	130
18. Old Radios	133
19. Footprint E showing the final proposed layout for <i>City</i> exhibition.	150
20. Auckland Isthmus.	152
21. Hobson's Choice.	152
22. Pistol and bible in the display Hobson's Choice.	152
23. Lively Capital and the Price of Auckland.	152
24. Māori Foundations.	154
25. Māori Foundations, detail, iron patu and tomahawk	154
26. Māori Trade.	154
27. Sea Links	154
28. Mapping, Naming, Ruling.	156
29. The Edgerly Collection	156
30. The Ligar Canal.	156
31. Timber Rush	156
32. Gaol Cell Door.	158

33. Queen Street Gaol Peep Holes.	158
34. City Building.	158
35. Women's Work	158
36. Wife Rush.	160
37. Fire City.	160
38. Reading Table.	160
39. George Grey, City Father.	160
40. A Genteel Business and Russell's Web.	164
41. Gold and Thomas Russell.	164
42. Tram, Shifting Gear.	164
43. The Farmers.	164
44. Old Radios – Main Events.	166
45. Lenses On Auckland and Old Aucklanders.	168
46. Kiwi House Peep Hole.	168
47. The People's Wall – New Aucklanders.	168
48. Peple's Wall	168
49. Sporting Auckland	168
50. The Blokes Shed.	169
51. The Blokes Shed, interior.	169
52. Brescians and Haywards.	170
53. Televisions.	170
54. Protest.	170
55. Bright lights.	170
56. Coming Out.	172

## Abbreviations

DS  
JB  
MB  
RW  
RY

Daniel Smith  
James Belich  
Margaret Belich  
Rodney Wilson  
Rose Young



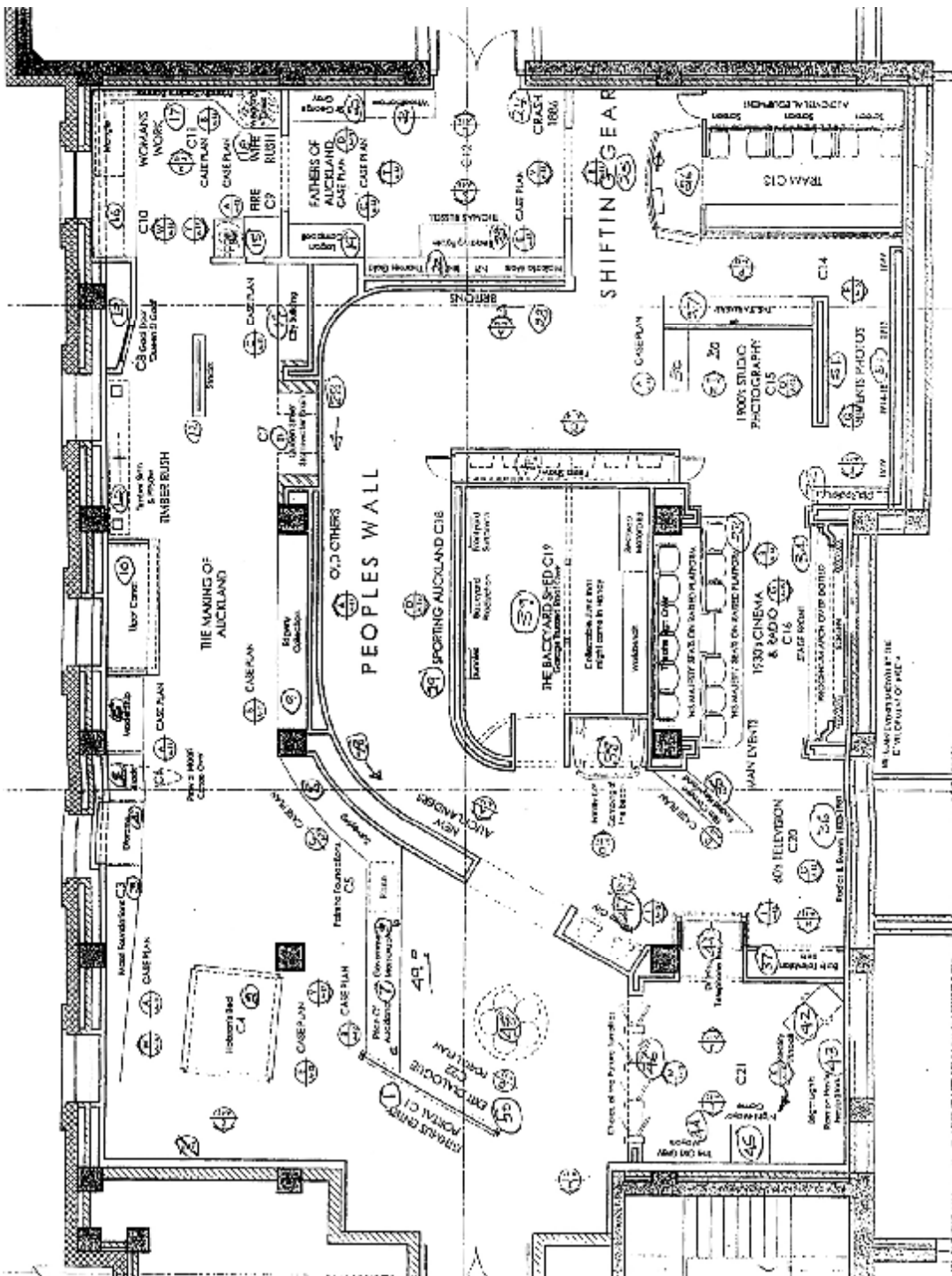


Plate 1 Footprint E showing the final proposed layout for *City* exhibition. Rose Young *City* Project Files.

## Prologue: *City*

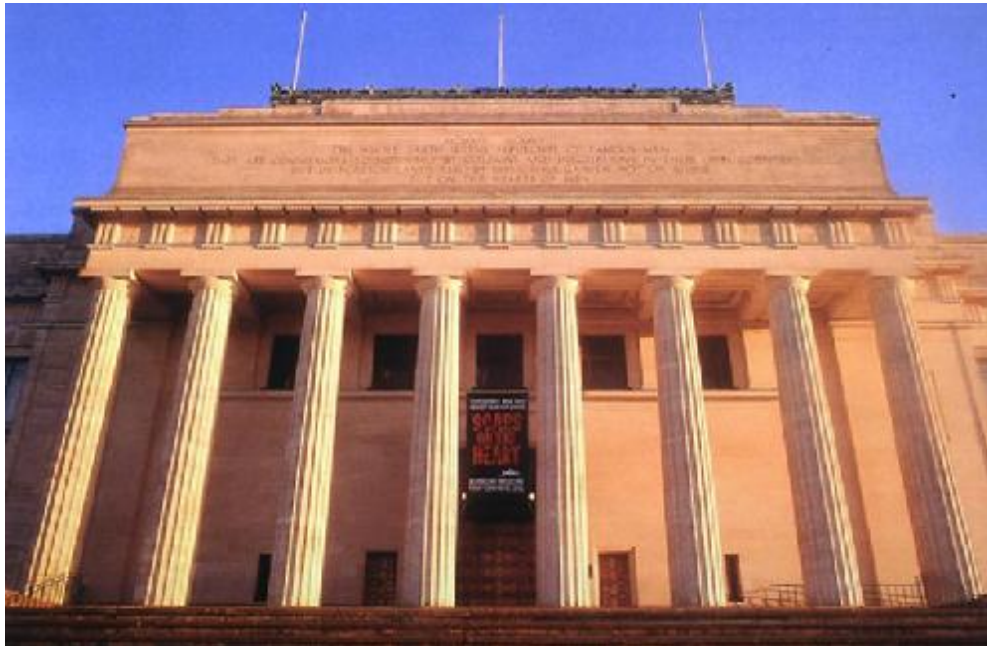


Plate 2 Auckland War Memorial Museum, main entrance. Collection of Auckland University Art History Department.

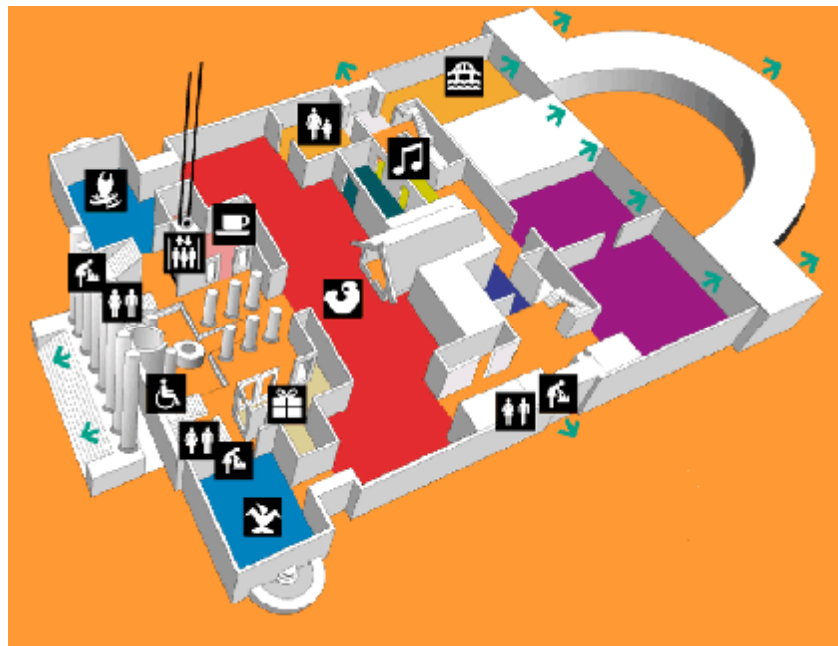


Plate 3 Auckland Museum ground floor plan. *City* is located in the back left hand corner from the front entrance (the room with the bridge icon). Image from Auckland Museum website, URL: <http://www.akmuseum.org.nz/web/floorplans/ground.html>



Plate 4 (top left) Hobson's Choice. Plate 5 (top right) Women's Work. Plate 6 (bottom left) Bloke's Shed interior. Plate 7 (bottom right) The People's Wall, looking towards Auckland's Britons.