Few places trigger such intense responses as former sites of punishment and confinement. Prisons, penal colonies and concentration camps are the material expression of the philosophical paradigms that bring them into being. When those paradigms collapse the physical sites that remain are laid bare, no longer justified by ideology and concealed by the bureaucratic mechanisms that sought to normalise them. With their mitigating contexts gone, the physical capacity for these sites to organise, discipline, punish or torture bodies remains. And in the new ideological contexts that follow, these sites become valued and preserved as cautionary reminders: Auschwitz-Birkenau, a site of the most horrific confinement, is now a museum.

At the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum visitors enter the surviving barrack buildings, which are nothing more than horse stables adapted by the Nazis to offer their victims meager protection from the unforgiving Polish weather. Up to a thousand men were confined in each building, packed into crude wooden three-tiered bunks. In that space, at that site, the Museum’s visitors need little explanation of the cruelty of these conditions; they are led to an understanding through their physical encounters with the site, its spaces and objects. Jules Prown calls this mode of interpreting sites and objects the “affective mode of apprehension”. Unlike traditional modes of museum interpretation, such as text panels, the affective mode aims to convey information through embodied experience. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that affective modes of interpretation are more prevalent in contemporary museums, observing that “the museum today… increasingly opens itself up to the embodied and the lived.”

Much art theoretical debate has focuses on the function of this affective mode in the gallery context. Art theorist Jill Bennett argues that affective encounters function at the level of the body. She says that affect is a language of the body, “not so much semiotic” but rather “the image [is], in a very palpable sense, ‘felt’ rather than merely observed”. Our response is more immediate and spontaneous; we have no time to think and negotiate the

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2 Prown, Jules, ‘Style as Evidence,’ Winterthur Portfolio, 15:3, 1980, p. 208
3 Chakrabarty, Dipesh, ‘Museums in Late Democracies,’ Humanities Research, X: 1, 2002), p. 9
5 Bennett, Jill, ‘Kama and Eroticism: The Five Senses in the Work of Francesco Clemente and Pierre Klossowski’, Body, Bookman Schwartz, Melbourne, Australia, p. 132
meaning of what we see. Affect, according to Prown, “is clearly a different way of engaging the past than abstractly through the written word. Instead of our minds making intellectual contact with the minds of the past, our senses make affective contact with the senses of the past.” In other words, our engagements with objects and sites can build a powerful empathic bridge between ourselves and people who once engaged the same site or object. The affective mode “allows us to put ourselves, figuratively speaking, inside the skins of individuals... to see with their eyes and touch with their hands, to identify with them empathetically”. The physicality of objects and sites, their smells, tastes, textures and presence can trigger intense sensory memories. Importantly, sensory memory is different from the remembering of linear narratives; sensory memory involuntarily conjures vivid past events into the present. As Esther Leslie says, “involuntary memory provides an unexpected, shocking link between an experience in the present and one in the past. It disrupts linearity, confounds temporality.” Affective encounters can also evoke strong emotional responses. Sue Cataldi argues that “tactile and emotionally felt feelings overlap... There are tactile dimensions to emotional feelings and emotional dimensions to tactile ones. To say that we have been ‘touched’... is synonymous with saying that we have been emotionally affected.” The emotional dimension of our encounters with sites and objects plays an important part in how we understand them.

So, what is the place of the archive in this matrix of affect, sensory memory, empathy and emotion? Of course, it must be acknowledged that affective encounters are only meaningful insofar as they are contextualised by broader cognitive knowledge; as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill points out, affect is extra-cognitive, an adjunct to the linguistic.

In other words, often we must know the contexts of a site or objects for the physical encounter to be meaningful for us at an affective level. In this respect, the archive is pivotal. However, the role of the archive is more complex than that. Archival documents are also objects, with powerful affective capacities. The prison records from old The Hunter Street Police Station, the site of The Lockup in Newcastle, are in themselves affecting. With each prisoner’s record we build a half-imagined narrative from a list of crimes and an accompanying photograph of the offender. No doubt, the potency of these mug-shots is carried by our faith in the inherent indexicality of photography; but it is their faces that are particularly evocative. With these faces in mind we move through this once harsh site knowing that we share that same space. Archives, like the sites that remain, reveal much about the philosophical paradigms that brought them about. Archives are surviving fragments of the bureaucratic mechanisms that once concealed these harsh spaces with an ideological shroud that normalised padded cells and hard labour. We now find ourselves alienated from that ideology and may well read these records against the grain of their original function; what endures is the humanity captured in these faces, which permeates through the archive, in spite of it.

Dr Kit Messham-Muir September 2008

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7 Prown, ibid
8 Prown, ibid
Art and the Archive

1. Liz Ashburn Lost Time
When I visited the Lock-up I was moved by the claustrophobic spaces, the stained walls and the lost time. The prisoners attempts to mark off each day underlined their monotony and boredom and the possibility of a jail term left an environment still marked by desperation and despair. This is the atmosphere I wanted to evoke in this work.

Elizabeth Ashburn

2. Cida de Aragon The Prisoner’s Faces
The large-format Prisoner’s Faces Panel is the first image seen by visitors when entering the lock up. The panel is a selection of authentic faces graphically exaggerated in scale and arranged in a grid - a reference to the cellular grid of prison units. It shows inmates who were locked-up at this place, some of them for a longer period. The art work is intended to add an emotional element to the entry of the place.

The compelling faces display all the misfortunes and hardships of their life stories; the selection was made to represent the diversity of people that found their way into these cells.

Cida de Aragon

3. Allan Chawner Padded Cell Peephole, Ceiling, Window, Door, Pillow
This is the place that affects me the most in the Lockup. It is a place that holds you (as the cells are supposed to be holding cells only) a lockup, and not a gaol. It holds you not with stone walls but with leather padded walls to prevent you from self harm. The other cells of stone are cold and hard but this cell is warm and soft. There is a strange contradiction in saying that because I feel more unease in this space than the others; I went in and stayed there for a while, the sounds deadened, and the air seemed to increase in density. I felt that if the door had closed I would not just be trapped but that I would be my own enemy as it was for others who have occupied the cell in the past. Self harm would overtake me and I might attempt not to escape but to withdraw into myself and even though the cell walls are soft I would find myself in the belly of some beast, consumed and lost. I looked up to the lights, daylight and incandescent and both seem strange and off colour. I look down to see my shadow, my head on a leather pillow and I could feel that there would be little rest in this womb. This is place where you are not only trapped and entombed but where the mind is already lost before release.

Allan Chawner

4. Anne Graham Locked Up
The small framed photographs on glass shelves are intended to remind us of family photographs of loved ones; but these photographs are displaced, removed from the family home, the fond memory is replaced by a sad reality. The larger photographs, with details of date time, place and action are accompanied by a material relic which relates to the charge sheet. The objects evoke the event. The hair mattress is a bodily reminder of the discomfort of displacement, the bed at the lockup is no bed of roses.

Anne Graham
5. Miranda Lawry  Episodic Memory, 1 to 8

Within the vicinity of the Lockup and hospital site memory exists as a trace, as an archive and a place where the absence of memory might suggest notions of oblivion. These images document the remnants of the Royal Newcastle Hospital shortly before it was demolished in mid 2008.

Walking through the once pristine wards I stepped over makeshift beds where the homeless slept, pigeons nesting on cupboard tops and glass shattered across the floors from the relentless storms. The remnants of the life force of the hospital was evidenced everywhere. Notice boards with faded paper outlines, walls painted that now revealed cupboards or machinery removed in the relocation and the vast kitchen covered in fine dust and remnants of utensils.

The distant voices of the staff and patients resounded through the window glass, on which was scrawled: this location is so therapeutic for patients and staff.

Miranda Lawry

6. Pam Sinnott  ‘a mat’, ‘a blanket’ and ‘a rug’

The work in this exhibition is based on several aspects. Firstly, as a ‘visitor’ to the cells I wanted to reflect on what I thought was the most important feature of the cells from the perspective of someone who was locked in a cell. I thought that this would most likely be the facility that would provide a means of communication and glimpses of the ‘outside’. For me, this crucial point was in the observation holes which would have provided those incarcerated with contact to the ‘outside’. Control over this contact was of course in the hands of the jailers due to the locks being on the outside.

The openings in each door are variously shaped. I became interested in the rugged simplicity of their forms and lines. Thus, the aesthetics of the various openings was another aspect that I wanted to develop in the studio work.

Further, in reading the historical newspaper clippings on the Lock-Up website [http://www.thelockup.info/html/docevid.html], I was struck with the article copied from the Newcastle Morning Herald from the 3 April, 1918.

A Death in Police Custody  – Newcastle Morning Herald, 3 April 1918.

The circumstances surrounding the death of Frederick Thornton in the Newcastle lockup were investigated by Mr. C Hibbie, the district coroner, at the city’s courthouse yesterday.

Inspector Buzzacott represented the Police Constable A. Armstrong, acting jailer at Newcastle, stated that the deceased was received at the lockup about 10 o’clock on Saturday morning and a charge of vagrancy was preferred against him. He was in a weak condition and was placed in a cell.

He was given a mat, a blanket and a rug. A witness placed the rug partly over him. Up until 12 o’clock he had seen the deceased every fifteen minutes. He was then asleep and all right, and continued so up to half-past one, after the witness returned from lunch.

He saw him again a few minutes before 2 o’clock and he appeared to be in a state of collapse. The doctor was sent for and in a few minutes pronounced life extinct. The man never spoke a word during the time he was in the cell and made no complaint of any kind.

I just felt so sorry for the man who had died alone in such a manner.

Pam Sinnott