COMMEMORATION, VOICES AND MUSEUMS

On a very hot afternoon on 4 January 1998 a small crowd gathered in the Anglican Chapel of Fremantle Prison, Western Australia. The prison has been a dedicated heritage and museum space since its decommissioning in 1991. The crowd comprised former prison officers, police officers and former police officers, chaplains, psychologists and tourism, curatorial and administrative staff of Fremantle Prison. The chapel service commemorated the riot, hostage taking and burning of the convict-built prison which had taken place ten years earlier on 4 and 5 January 1988. It was a public program, which was followed later in the year by an exhibition, *Riot: Fremantle Prison 1988.* This exhibition was researched and curated by the writer and traced the confused and contested elements of this explosive event.

In the hot, quiet weeks of the Christmas and New Year holiday the horror of the riot burst onto Australian news services. The burning of one of Australia's most imposing convict buildings, in plus forty degrees Celsius heat, was coupled with hostages threatened with gruesome death and ensured massive coverage. The prolonged trial, the biggest in Western Australian legal history, and the following decade of unresolved bitterness between people caught up in the events meant that memories were raw and bitter when Fremantle Prison, as a heritage space, began to tackle the riot for an exhibition.

Exhibition development occurred in the context of media reporting of a growing crime rate, on-going indigenous deaths in custody, the expansion of new prison facilities on the perimeter of the metropolitan area and public debate on the issues of incarceration and court sentencing. The museum stepped into a public debate by examining a contested event in recent memory.

The chapel commemoration was intended as a symbolic closure of the riot. By contrast, the exhibition foregrounded contestation. The two forms of commemoration, chapel service and exhibition, highlight the complexities of the emerging role of museums as cultural commentators. The prison could have concentrated on promoting itself as a heritage institution by celebrating its somewhat romanticised convict past (Newman 1996). However, it chose to acknowledge a recent, violent event through a ritualised, commemorative

intervention into memories and thus signalled that it would adopt the position of cultural commentator.

Museums are public memory institutions that have often reproduced a hegemonic and celebratory canon of memory. Commemorations depart from celebration because, through commemoration, museums state the desirability of remembering something that was painful. Commemoration in museums usually means that museums foreground the act of memory in a way which is not seen in the reproduction of self congratulatory canonical memory. Although celebration has a strong memory component, often maintaining cyclical remembering, it tends to shun engagement with critical issues because it is designed to promote social unity through the attempted erasure of differences. Many local Australian museums, for example, were established with the explicit intention of celebrating uncritically pioneering achievements. Pioneer history has often been excised from its colonial context in order to achieve this. The reflective aspects of commemoration, by contrast, foster critical contemplation of what are often bitter memories.

Consideration of the concept of commemoration raises a number of key problems for museums. During research on the 1988 riot, one of the issues to emerge was that of voice/s. Voices are central to grappling with the concept of commemoration which often seems uni-voiced. Voices were integral to the construction of the exhibition where they were used to emphasise the contested nature of the riot. The commemoration revealed both the complexity of the foregrounded speaking role of museums and contemporary museum difficulties of grappling with multiple voices. Contemporary museum voices sometimes appear hesitant and contradictory. This paper argues that the hesitancy and contradiction are related to the suspension of museums between first, the fading traditions of authority derived from their reliance on the empirically verifiable nature of objects, and, secondly, their emerging desire to be provocative cultural commentators and facilitators of the voices of others. This paper discusses the exhibition and the chapel service as two parts of the commemoration. It begins with a brief overview of some theoretical museum issues and the background to the Fremantle Prison riot. It then discusses the issue of voice. Fremantle Prison as a museum and heritage space is referred to variously as the museum, Fremantle

Prison and the prison throughout this paper.

NEW ROLES FOR MUSEUMS

As the curator of the riot exhibition I was both an organiser and observer of this commemoration. I was part of a management team of people with various expertise both of the subject area and museum issues. Experiences during exhibition development placed pressure on established ideals of distanced curatorship. While researching the riot I found that some of the people I interviewed seemed to want to unburden themselves to me. There were several long emotion charged interviews during which some people involved in the riot spoke in ways which showed that they wished to have me identify with their positions and, in one instance, to make journalistic investigations into the cases of particular prisoners. Direct curatorial comment was avoided by using contestation between groups involved in the riot as the structuring device for the exhibition. My responsibility to protect the privacy and raw emotions of some of the interviewees meant that some of the most pithy quotes could not be used.

The expanding role of museums in commemorative events is indicative of the impact of the New Museology (Vergo 1989). Relationships between museums and communities are reaffirmed continuously. Commemorations of wartime events and, in Australia, Reconciliation between immigrant colonisers and indigenous people are linked increasingly to museum institutions. Museum-based commemorative events, therefore, participate in contested issues within wider public debate.

When museums participate in war remembrance and Reconciliation they often take stands on issues. For example, the Australian Archives (1995) exhibition, *Between Two Worlds* was critical of government policies which resulted in the removal of Aboriginal children of part descent from their families in the Northern Territory. Taking a stand highlights the current difficulty for museums of maintaining their apparent objectivity. Analysis of the role of commemoration in museums shows that museums are beginning to embrace the role of cultural commentators and, therefore, are interrogating implicitly older museum values of objectivity and scientific distance. The emerging role of museums is comparable to the role of commentator in literature and art. Whereas the socio-political role

of literature and art has long encompassed comment on contemporary issues, the social role of museums has tended to be limited to one of pedagogy, practised, for the most part, by the reflection of ideas which were assumed to be embodied in objects. Until late in the twentieth century, the voices of museums were limited by implicit philosophies of the self-evidence of the object (Bennett 1988: 12; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1990). Despite change, many institutions remain reluctant to engage with the concept of broadening their role to include provocative interpretation.

FREMANTLE PRISON BACKGROUND

Fremantle Prison is the largest convict-built establishment in Western Australia and the most intact of all the Australian penal institutions constructed by convicts. Its vast mid nineteenth century limestone walls dominate the centre of the port city of Fremantle.

As a heritage and museum space, Fremantle Prison presents two faces to the public. First, the Fremantle Prison Guardians are composed of, among others, former prison officers who now act as tour guides. The second is called Fremantle Prison: Conservation and Future Use and is composed of administrative and curatorial staff who oversee the development of the prison as both a space for representing the past and a space for a mixture of uses such as a College of Technical and Further Education, a children's literature centre and offices for small businesses. The curatorial service mounts exhibitions and provides information to the Fremantle Prison Guardians. The commemoration of the riot was produced by Fremantle Prison: Conservation and Future Use.

The physical discomfort endured by prisoners and officers in Fremantle Prison had been notorious at least since the late nineteenth century when it was condemned as uninhabitable. Poor conditions had become entrenched: cold in winter and blistering heat in summer combined with pest infestation, the use of toilet buckets, overcrowding and boredom. Following the 1988 riot, more than a million dollars was spent on conservatorially appropriate repair to an extensively burnt wing of the prison and the installation of some comfort features such as better ventilation.

An alleged bashing of a prisoner by officers on the morning of 4 January 1988 resulted in a tense day during which the prison administration withdrew some privileges and

prisoners huddled in groups. The temperature climbed to 42 degrees Celsius. The intense summer heat is often said to be magnified by ten degrees in the radiant heat of the high limestone walls of the prison exercise yards. The explosive start of the riot occurred when prisoners were leaving an exercise yard and were preparing to return to their cells for the night. As some prisoners stormed the door of the exercise yard, others splashed officers with boiling water which had been prepared for tea. Other prisoners used metal plates and cutlery fashioned into weapons; a few stormed through a cell block hurling onto beds flaming kersosene-soaked toilet rolls.

It was just chocka, you know; it was chocka with crims. It looked like crims were either trying to climb over each other or climb down from each other, you know. People were boxing on everywhere. (Prisoner, Paul Keating, quoted in the exhibition.)

As the melee intensified, six hostages were taken prisoner. As prisoners and hostages faced each other in the exercise yard the asbestos roof of the burning cell block exploded raining showers of sparks into the yard. A seriously wounded hostage was released, but the other five endured a terrifying night. One hostage was threatened with having a wooden stake rammed through his temples.

He told me he was doing 20 years for nothing and that he was going to use the length of wood. He was going to kill me and then he'd be in jail for something worthwhile. (Officer, held hostage, quoted in the exhibition.)

Police negotiators soon took over from prison officers.

The media was intense in its reporting of the riot and was used by the prisoners to communicate with the outside world. Holding aloft sheets bearing messages written in charcoal, prisoners used the attention of media cameras to demand face-to-face communication with the Attorney-General, Joe Berinson. During the nineteen hours of the riot, media involvement resulted in unwitting impacts on negotiations. Television helicopters hovered so close over the exercise yard that prisoners thought that they were about to be attacked by the elite anti-terrorist squad, the Special Air Service. Although prisoners clearly wanted to use the media to convey their message beyond the prison walls, the media's proximity increased the danger.

The media helicopters [were] coming down... through all the smoke and the fire... The guys were on the roof and every time there was a movement they'd be yelling out and screaming. 'Look out! They're coming!' (Robert Kucera, chief police negotiator, quoted in the

exhibition.)

The media nearly got us killed. We were praying that the SAS would not come in. The prisoners were terrified of the SAS. (Officer, held hostage, quoted in the exhibition.)

On some occasions, speculative media reports heard by prisoners with radios caused them to act in ways which baffled police.

About half past ten... they were getting very agitated, filling buckets and they were soaking rags and cloths and everybody was draping cloths around themselves and over their faces... then we realised what it was. The [media] report said that the people were going to come and attack them with tear gas. (Robert Kucera, chief police negotiator, quoted in the exhibition.)

The riot wound down during the morning of 5 January with hostages bartered for food and cigarettes. Although no-one died in the riot, the prison was damaged extensively and its effects were far reaching with the imposition of longer prison sentences, the implementation of a restricted prison routine, serious physical injuries to officers and reports ten years later of suicide attempts and Post Trauma Stress Disorder. The riot and its aftermath raised a host of questions such as the existence of endemic officer corruption, the relationship between officers and prisoners, the role of non-officer staff such as chaplains and psychologists and why authorities had not responded earlier to poor prison conditions.

COMMEMORATION: WHO SPEAKS?

The commemoration of the 1988 prison riot was the remembering by a museum of a contested event in recent public memory. Contestation was used to structure the exhibition. The contestation was not only between officers and prisoners, but also between the media and the police, the media and prison administration, police and officers, officers and psychologists, and the Catholic chaplain and prison administrators. The most basic issues were disputed, such as details of prison routine. For example, the following quotes were juxtaposed in the exhibition.

42 degrees and you are locked in your cell 14 hours a day and allowed a shower every third day. (Prisoner, Nedwood Osbow, quoted in the exhibition.)

Each weekday they are taken on parade to the shower block where they have the option of showering. (Spokesperson for the Prisons Department quoted in the exhibition.)

A race element, however, appears to have been absent from this atmosphere of conflict. Aboriginal prisoners seem to have decided not to participate in the riot nor were goaded into taking sides.

With violence and lingering ill-will at the heart of memories of the riot, who was to speak in the exhibition? How should commemoration be articulated/voiced? In this section, aspects of the commemoration of the riot at Fremantle Prison are analysed. Three elements of commemoration are discussed in order to describe the textual function of commemoration as an element that can produce museums as self-reflexive cultural commentators that enable others to speak through them. Each sub-section commences with a brief theoretical contextualisation of the issues.

(i) hegemony and exclusion

The formation of new nation states in the twentieth century has been accompanied by a plethora of commemorations (Gillis 1994). The rapid expansion of heritage culture (Hewison 1987; Walsh 1992) has resulted in the creation of events which mark the past and reinforce local and national identities (Bennett et al. 1992). These festive events celebrate local or national identity. However, although constructed with the intention of being socially inclusive, they often function as exclusory. A commemorative and celebratory public culture is fraught necessarily with contradictory and contested views of the community. Gillis (1994: 8) notes that national commemorations have always had some degree of contestation. Celebrations of the Dublin Millennium (Mullin 1991); the Quincentenary of the arrival of Columbus in the Americas (Simon 1993) and the Australian Bicentenary (Bennett et al. 1992) were all repudiated by sectors of the local population at some point -- in Australia, by a year of protest by indigenous people.

Ozouf (1988) argues that the Bicentennial of the French Revolution functioned to exclude and even to construct implicitly some French people as ‘pariahs’ (Ozouf 1988: 11, quoted in Bennett, et al. 1992: xviii). The structural similarities to a small town festival, apparently without any historic contestation, is shown by Lavenda (1992).

The voices of most of the people out for a good time on a Saturday night in a small Minnesota town do not influence the design of the festival... it is carefully constructed by the local middle class. An exercise in impression management, a Minnesota community festival is the more or less self-aware celebration of the values of its middle-class organizers, made

in the name of the community as a whole. (Lavenda 1992: 77)

The problematic of missing voices in a small town festival is related structurally to the issue of voice in a museum. Who speaks? Whose voices are missing? Whose voices are silenced?

To commemorate is not only to remember, but to claim the right to speak. The claiming of this right encompasses a claim to speak on behalf of someone. These two claims are challenging for museums. The first claim highlights the existence of the institutional museum voice which has been denied implicitly during the formation of museum institutions based on the discourse of objectivity. The question of speaking on behalf of others was not able to be articulated when the museum institution was regarded as not having a voice, but only a display and pedagogic function. In the past twenty years, however, there has been a steady erosion of the assumption that the institutional voice is neutral. Now, the voice of museums is being either articulated consciously or revealed through critique, as was the gender bias in the Stockman's Hall of Fame in Queensland (Trotter 1992: 165)

Once the institutional museum voice is revealed, engaging with the issue of speaking on behalf of others becomes urgent. The work of Bennett et al. (1991), Bourdieu and Darbel (1969) and Merriman (1991) show that this issue is resolved in some ways rather simply by attendance. If people do not experience museums as environments which match their cultural needs, then they have often chosen not to attend. However, one of the dominant ideals of museum institutions is that they are educational resources for all. Museums often adopt the voice of speaking for all, despite the findings of visitor studies that the composition of visitors has a middle class skew.

The curatorial intention for the exhibition, *Riot: Fremantle Prison 1988*, was the inclusion of the diverse participants in the riot. However, when this was not fully possible the project still proceeded. A history of clashing voices dominated exhibition development. The decision to structure the exhibition around the voices which described this violent event was discussed earlier. Although contestation was the structure, there was a problem in reaching prisoners for comment. In socio-economic terms, for the most past, the prisoners

represented poorly empowered and marginalised members of the wider community. Most of the prisoners who were central to the events of the riot were still in prison nearly ten years later when exhibition research was undertaken. Of the other dominant prisoners not in prison at that time, one was an escapee and another considered too psychologically fragile to approach. Western Australian Ministry of Justice authorities denied me access to the prisoners for interviews. Therefore, no prisoners were interviewed, although many interviews were undertaken with prison officers, police officers, administrators, indigenous representatives, psychologists and the chaplain.

The instigators of the riot were absent, therefore, from contemporary interviews. They had no part in the construction of the exhibition. However, the exhibition went ahead without them. This action illustrates the nature of commemorations to speak for others. The fact that the curatorial intention had been to be inclusive of all those involved, and the fact that the exhibition proceeded without interviews with prisoners show to what extent the intentions of commemorations can be altered. The representation of the riot through the exhibition omitted new interviews with prisoners and, therefore, despite the best intentions to be fair and balanced, functioned to exclude them from contemporary comment.

With the structure of the exhibition being the juxtaposition of voices, it was necessary to attempt to overcome the absence of contemporary comment from the prisoners by the extensive use of prisoner quotes from court transcripts and newspaper reports. The decade-old comments of the prisoners were sometimes juxtaposed to recent comments of others gathered in interviews only weeks before. The lively language and, at times, humorous events of the courtroom helped to give the impression of fresh comment from the prisoners although they had not been interviewed. Quotations from the exhibition illustrate the effect.

Currently in prison a time bomb is developing... and if something is not done soon to defuse it, it will explode. (Prisoner, Mario Ciminata quoted in the exhibition.)

I heard some prisoners say. 'Let's belt the screws.'... I then turned around and yelled out to all the prisoners in the yard, 'Nobody is to touch these officers.' (Prisoner, Gary Roser quoted in the exhibition.)

The vigour of the prisoners' voices was exploited by the exhibition to construct a feeling of dramatic immediacy to the events. Most of the other people who were interviewed were cautious and measured in their reflections on events and people. By comparison, the

prisoners' voices were full of the passion of the riot and seemed uninhibited.

My immediate concern was that the MSU [Metropolitan Security Unit, an elite police squad] were in the division, flogging prisoners over the meetings we had had that day... it was just mayhem. There were prisoners everywhere, plates getting thrown, people screaming. (Prisoner, Gary Roser, quoted in the exhibition.)

The only other person to use such passionate language was a former prison guard who continued to suffer the psychological consequences of the riot a decade later.

It took me six months to accept that I was alive, but I was back at work two weeks later. The riot cost me a lot. Promotion - career direction, it destroyed my career... I became dangerous. I had no regard for myself or other officers. The other person does not exist, just hatred for crims and a compulsion to provoke yourself because you were a failure because you were caught. (Officer held hostage, quoted in the exhibition.)

The prisoners were excluded in terms of input into the construction of the exhibition and having the time to reflect on past events. Given that they were the most active force in the riot it seemed a grave absence in the development of the exhibition. In the context of contemporary ideals of museums as providing access and curatorial possibilities for disempowered people, the most disempowered of all people -- prisoners -- thus were not able to be active in the construction of this exhibition.

Although the prisoners' contemporary absence was a factor beyond the control of the museum, the fact that the museum and I, the exhibition curator, constructed a commemorative event without them highlights the assumption of the right to speak on behalf of someone, an assumption made even when the museum staff are anxious to include the disempowered.

The intention to display *Riot: Fremantle Prison 1988* in functioning prisons, however, indicates the good faith of Fremantle Prison in attempting to reach the disempowered prisoner audience. Documentation of their reactions to the exhibition and the adding of these comments to the exhibition would assist in giving them a contemporary voice.

(ii) apparent objectivity and ritual

Psychologists appointed to the Post Trauma Team proposed a commemoration of the riot for its first anniversary.

The commemorative service was approved all the way to the superintendent of the day, but he said it was 'like a party' and it did not go ahead. (Gabrielle Egan, psychologist, quoted in the exhibition.)

The commemoration of the riot in 1998 was, therefore, the first symbolic recognition of the trauma. One of the cultural reasons that commemorations can be organised by museums rests on the element of ritual which is inherent to commemoration and echoed in wider museum functions. This section discusses the problematic appearance of commemorative ritual in the context of philosophical change in museums. It explores contradictory elements in the Fremantle Prison commemoration and shows that both types of museum voice -- the older voice of apparent objectivity and the emerging voice of cultural commentator -- are currently copresent in museums.

This part of the paper draws on Luke's (1975) definition of ritual which is quoted in Connerton (1989):

Rule governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance. (Quoted in Connerton 1989: 44.)

Connerton (1989: 48-51) identifies three disciplinary approaches to ritual: the psychoanalytic, the sociological and the historical. This paper uses the sociological as summarised by Connerton. It is a 'quasi-textual representation' which 'functions to communicate shared values within a group and to reduce internal dissension... social stability and equilibrium are constituted'. (Connerton 1989: 49-50)

In his description of social remembering, Connerton argues that, in comparison to myth, ritual has 'significantly less potential for *variance*' (Connerton, 1989: 57).

There remains a potential for invariance that is built into rites, but not into myths, by virtue of the fact that it is intrinsic to the nature of rituals -- but not of myths -- that they specify the relationship that obtains between the performance of ritual and what it is that the participants are performing. (Connerton 1989: 57)

Similarly, for Simon (1993), it is the *relationship* between the representation and the viewpoint that is structured for the visitor that is one of the defining aspects of commemoration.

Practices of commemoration... initiate and structure the relation between a representation of past events and that constellation of affect and information which define a standpoint from which various people engage such representations. (Simon 1993: 76)

Museums also have a tendency to ritual. The structure and decorum of exhibitions and museum institutions are based on conventions. The tendency to ritual in museums is found in the conventions of the sequence of a visit, standards of behaviour and visitor expectations of seeing artefacts in glass cases explained by hierarchised informational texts in which the museum voice makes an introductory 'truth' statement which is supported by other statements. The riot exhibition observes museum conventions -- objects in cases, informational panels on walls and a hierarchy of written texts. Objects in the cases include weapons from the riot: sharpened dinner knives, metal plates and pointed sticks with cloth wrapped around the ends to provide hand grips. Public programs that support exhibitions are also part of the tendency to ritual. The cocktail party air of exhibition launches is derived from semi ritualised theatre first nights. The speech at the opening event of *Riot: Fremantle Prison 1988* was made by the presiding judge of the riot trial, Judge Desmond Heenan. A judge, of course, is a representative of a highly ritualised institution. It is no surprise that Merriman (1989: 156) finds that many people associate museum visiting with other elements that are linked to ritual, for example, monuments and churches.

Although based on conventions, the relationship established between museums and visitors has long shared characteristics of the invariance associated with ritual. One of the strongest aspects of this relationship is linked to a ritualised conveyance of knowledge in which the museum assumes the superior role of bearer of information and the visitor assumes the inferior role of receiver of information. This relationship is now challenged as museums enable the hearing of new voices and find strategies to foster a dynamic relationship between institutions and visitors (Clifford 1997; Karp et al. 1992; Vergo 1989).

Despite growing change, a cultural logic is derived, nevertheless, from the confluence of three elements: the invariance of ritual, the relationship structured by the act of commemoration and the discourse of museum objectivity with its implied inflexibility of meaning. The three elements stream together when museums produce commemoration. The confluence results in texts in which the invariance of ritual and its structuring of a relationship become linked to the taken-for-granted, 'commonsense' nature of the history of museum objectivity and object-centredness. The nature of objects seems to be invariable

and graspable through empirical analysis -- it seems that you only have to go and look in order to understand them. So too, the power of rituals is reinforced by their invariance which implies a rightness to the relationship which they structure. They 'give value and meaning to life' (Connerton 1989: 45). Value is derived from rituals because they mirror some life need. Connerton (1989: 45) notes that participation in them gives assent to their meaning. Once participating in a ritual, the rightness of the act is rarely questioned, assent is taken for granted. In museum commemoration, the unchanging nature of rituals is mirrored in the appearance of changelessness and apparent objectivity at the heart of the empirical museum tradition which results in the exhibition of objects in ways that imply that they contain their own meaning. Although this paper discusses challenges to the empirical tradition through commemoration and argues that its authority is receding, commemorative ritual still echoes this long tradition. This results in a textual link between ritual invariance, relationships and museum objectivity.

The chapel service held by the museum is an example of museum-based ritual and illustrates why museums are able to voice commemorations. Although the prison chapel service was a single event, by structuring itself on Christian rites it showed itself to be part of a long history of ritual repetition. Although attendance at Christian church services is declining in the western world, the long history of the use of Christian rites for important occasions, particularly occasions which commemorate painful events, ensures that they persist.

Descriptions of the chapel service reveal to what extent commemoration can be produced as soothing and apparently neutral despite having its own politics. I spoke to Fremantle Prison Curator, Anne Brake, about the intention and function of the chapel service.

> The chapel service provided closure to a damaging event. It provided recognition in an official way, the riot happened. There was long term damage, it was good to air that in a spiritual way. (Brake, 17 December 1998)

The service included prayers of intercession which expressed the desire to see the end of such events.

For all those still suffering from the effects of events of ten years ago, that they may be

healed from pain, anger and fear, we pray to the Lord... For all who are victims of crime or oppression, we pray to the Lord... To an end to all acts of violence and hatred, we pray to the Lord. (Fremantle Prison, 4 January 1998)

The commemoration highlighted the complexity of heritage spaces: a religious service, cafe, tourism, convict jokes and violent memories all coexisting. The prison as a site of commemoration suggested the potential for more heritage spaces to become places within which difficult ideas could be expressed. Several people commented to Brake after the chapel service that the commemoration was a good idea following such violence.

[One person] had felt that it would be difficult for the chapel service to be successful in the wider context of tourism to Fremantle Prison. He had feared that the prison would become trivialised through tourism. By commemorating the riot, the prison staff showed commitment to wider issues. (Brake 17 December 1998)

Although the violence was not resolved in historical terms by the ritual, that is, causes and sequences of events were not confirmed, it tried symbolically to move the participants towards social equilibrium. There are other examples of one-off commemorations of violent events. In the 1990s, the joint commemoration by Turkish and Australian soldiers of the 1915 Gallipoli campaign and the joining of old Japanese and Australian enemies on the site of the World War II construction of the Burma Railway show to what extent commemorations are intended to assuage tragic memories.

The prison chapel service was conducted by two former prison chaplains, Fr McGregor and Rev. Gwilt. Fr McGregor had been the Catholic chaplain at the time of the riot and showed his strong sympathies towards the prisoners when he left the prison on the morning of 5 January 1988 after a tense night of keeping hostages' and prisoners' families informed of events by telephone. When Fr McGregor left the prison he said to the waiting media,

The temperatures in the prison yard are about 10 to 15 degrees higher than outside... In my opinion the prison is unfit for humans. (Fr McGregor, quoted in the exhibition.)

If animals were kept in the same conditions as prisoners at Fremantle, the RSPCA [Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] would have complained years ago... The tragedy is that it creates problems instead of solving them. (Fr McGregor, quoted in the exhibition.)

These comments so angered prison authorities that he was suspended from his prison duties

for four days. The Attorney-General reacted angrily.

The preacher's comments are totally inaccurate. Conditions are sub-standard, but the fact remains they have considerably improved since the Labor Government was elected in 1983. (Joe Berinson, Attorney-General, quoted in the exhibition.)

The suspension of Fr McGregor was a central media event during the time the prisoners had control of the yard.

The request by the prison, ten years later, for Fr McGregor to conduct the chapel service carried implicit assumptions about the appropriateness and degree of neutrality of the service as a ritual and, therefore, of the chaplain's voice. The organisers of the service understood, of course, that he had been a controversial figure during the riot. However, the ritual elements associated with churches combined with the empirical tradition of museum textual production provided a cultural logic that made the request to him to conduct the chapel service make museological sense.

The request to him not only assumed the possibility of appropriate professional distance on his part, but revealed also an unarticulated nostalgic desire for former days when the objectivity of museums was taken for granted. Fr McGregor's appearance as officiator at the commemorative service highlighted the contradictions and difficulties for the museum as a producing/authoring institution while seeming to look back to the time when museum practice had been constructed from the apparently objective, 'voiceless' voice. The convergence of ritual and museum ideals of objectivity, albeit fading, resulted in the museological logic of the commemoration.

The institutional voice of museums is being challenged in many places. It is also strained internally by the appearance in museums of the contemporary curatorial desire to reveal the politics of museums and to take stands on certain issues. For example, Fuller (1992), Garton Smith (1997), Kronenberg (1997) and Tchen (1992) describe museum projects in which politics was foregrounded and museums moved away consciously from the apparently objective institutional voice. The commemorative chapel service in Fremantle Prison and the centrality of Fr McGregor served to highlight unintentionally the tension between preserving the old, aloof institutional museum voice and admitting the more controversial interventionist museum voice. The museum, therefore, functioned unwittingly

to interrogate its own 'voiceless' voice through commemoration. This potential for self-interrogation is discussed in the following sub-section.

(iii) deconstructive counter-hegemony

Commemoration is often exclusive and hegemonic, but contains within its hegemony the potential for counter-hegemony. Bennett et al.'s (1992) discussion of the Australian Bicentenary, Mullin's (1991) discussion of the Dublin Millennium and Simon's (1993) discussion of the Columbus Quincentenary, noted above, analysed counter-commemorations and counter-hegemonic events to mainstream celebrations. These phenomena were separate, although related, movements from the large scale celebrations upon which they focussed. By contrast, in this section, the concept of counter-hegemony does not refer to separate movements but to an internal capacity of commemoration within museums to speak contradictorily. The internal contradictory position of hegemony/counter-hegemony is brought into focus in the context of museums and commemoration because of the struggle of emerging museum voices as cultural commentators.

Commemorative museum voices oscillate between two positions. The first position is a nostalgic harking back to the illusionary objectivity of the institutional voice. This position, discussed above in relation to commemorative ritual, is linked to the ritualistic framing of commemorative acts. The ritualistic framing gives the appearance of erasing the political nature of remembrance. However, every commemoration is grounded in the history of its own construction and, therefore, cannot transcend politics. Young (1993), for example, describes a wide variety of Holocaust memorials and traces the history of their construction in order to show how each memorial has its own history in addition to being part of the wider history of calling the Holocaust to memory.

The second position is a seizing of the opportunity to be a cultural commentator, this is a foregrounded voice which is self-reflexively aware of the cultural politics of speaking.

As museums move hesitantly towards complex engagement with current issues, they face a considerable self-challenge in recognising the tension between, on the one hand, acknowledging self-reflexively the politics of their own actions, and, on the other hand, desiring to virtually transcend their own politics through nostalgic glances at themselves as

apparently objective institutions. The resulting voice oscillates and enables hegemony and counter-hegemony to be copresent in commemorative museum texts.

This rich, deconstructive potential is embedded in the contemporary contradictions of museums' voices. At Fremantle Prison, a partly hegemonic voice was heard in the exhibition when it purported to speak on behalf of prisoners by quoting exclusively from their ten-year-old statements. But by contrast, the exhibition was structured by including many other conflicting voices. Disagreements, opposed interpretations and radically opposed memories functioned as structuring devices for an exhibition which revealed the desired persona of the museum to be one which listened actively, and enabled others to hear all persons involved in the conflict. The museum appeared not to take sides because it did not resolve the events and meanings of the riot. The museum voice seemed to erase itself.

In her discussion of the institutional voice of the Museum of Sydney, Marcus takes up the issue of the museum voice in relation to the exhibition of multiple voices. Marcus describes the apparent absence of a controlling curatorial voice as a 'nihilistic emptiness... but there is no place where there is no power' (Marcus 1996). The aesthetics and politics of an assumed transparent and, therefore, powerless institutional centre thus form the problematic. In her terms, the exhibition of many voices, without a foregrounded museum voice, can be a sign of an apparent disavowal of power. The inherent contradictions in the voices of museums are evident in relation to the commemoration of the riot. On the one hand, Fremantle Prison appeared to offer a commemorative action which was drained of politics, a disavowal of power, which, appearing neutral, would be soothing to all involved. On the other hand, Fremantle Prison clearly took a position as cultural commentator because it enabled clashing voices to be heard without resolving them. The museum's position, therefore, was that exhibiting diversity was morally and museologically appropriate. The exhibition and the chapel service aimed to do different things. The service aimed to soothe while the exhibition exhibited dissension. The closest the exhibition came to making a statement about prison issues was with the inclusion of a February 1998 newspaper clipping. The report said that due to overcrowding and generally poor conditions a riot in Western Australian gaols was likely. Except for the date, the discussion in the article could have

related to the situation ten years earlier. The same elements of prisoner discontent were listed. There was considerable discussion about the inclusion of this article by the exhibition management team because, in the context of the exhibition, it seemed to suggest that the Ministry of Justice was repeating errors made many years before.

In contrast to Marcus, a more optimistic interpretation of the commemoration can be drawn from Clifford (1997: 188-219). He uses the expression 'contact zone'. The term is drawn from Pratt's analysis of colonial encounters.

> When museums are seen as contact zones, their organizing structure as a *collection*, becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship* -- a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull. [It] functions like Pratt's frontier. A center and a periphery are assumed. (Clifford 1997: 192-193)

By emphasising the relationships of museums to collections, visitors and themes, the museum as an institution interrogates itself and finds its old voice to be inadequate.

The strength of museums as contact zones -- literally as well as metaphorically -- was evident at the opening event of the exhibition in May 1998. Old enemies who had refused to meet in the years since the riot consented to appear at the prison together. Strikingly, no prisoners were present, the enemies were within groups which would have appeared to an outsider to have been united in their opposition to rioting prisoners. One former hostage told me that it was the first time in ten years that he had been able to tolerate the presence of some people who had been caught up with him in the riot and its long traumatic aftermath.

CONCLUSION

Museum commemoration of a violent, contested event, such as a riot, illuminates the problems of memory and voices in contemporary museums. A study of the approach taken by Fremantle Prison to this anniversary highlights the contemporary multi-faceted role of museums, locating them as does Macdonald as ‘key cultural loci of our time’ (Macdonald 1996: 2).

Although museums are tackling issues in public debate through commemoration, their doing so reveals the uncertainties of contemporary museum voices. Sometimes museum voices seize opportunities to be cultural commentators and enable museums to

take their place among wider cultural institutions. Other museum voices look back nostalgically to the apparent objectivity which was once the hallmark of museum work. Although this results in hesitancy and contradiction it suggests a rich moment for museums.

Fremantle Prison made a ritualised, commemorative intervention in the events of ten years earlier. This foregrounded a speaking voice for museums and signalled the appropriateness of museums in fulfilling wider cultural roles.