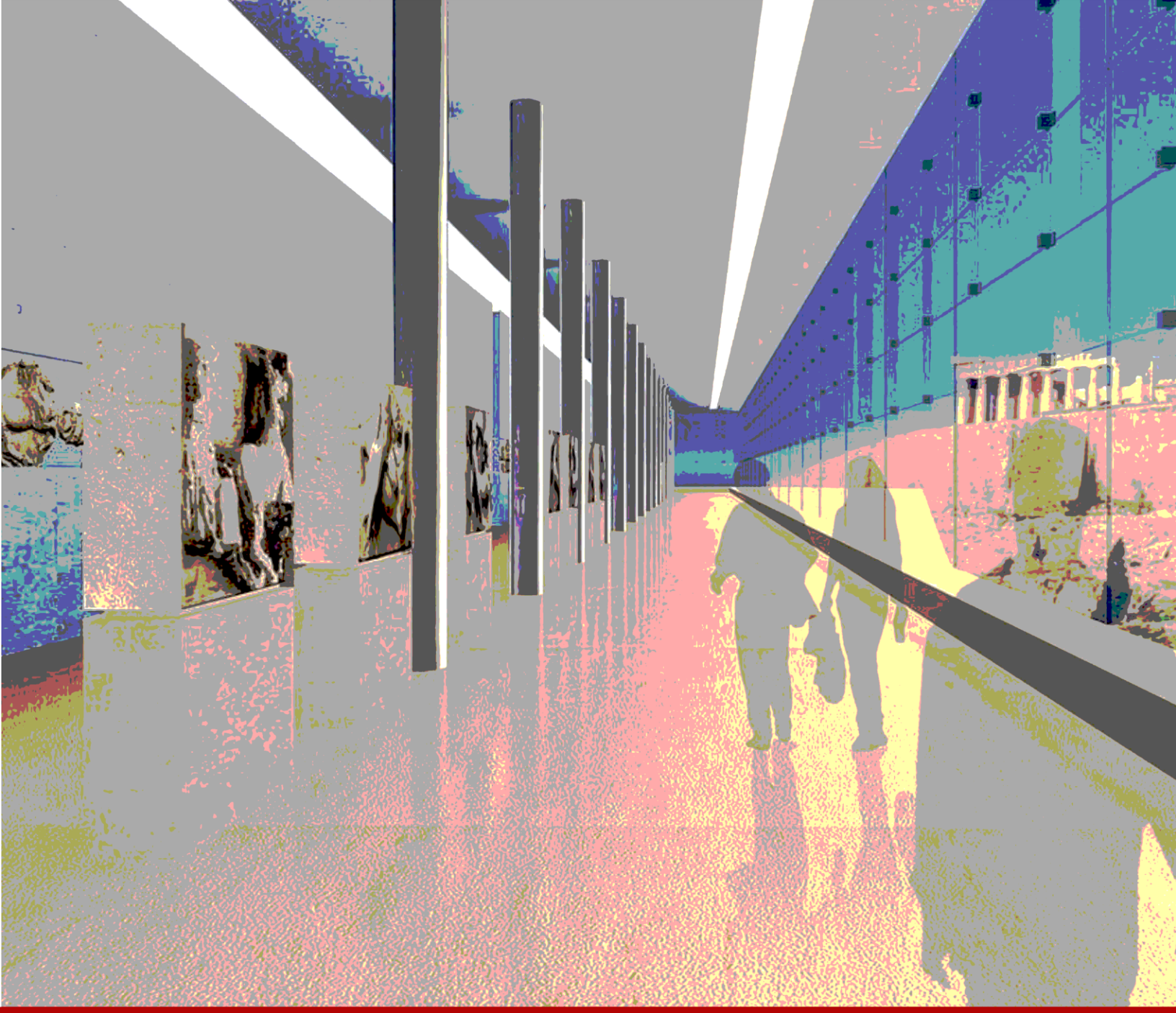

Politics of Art

Debating the Marbles

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::Chapter Five::

The New Acropolis Museum

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Abstract:

The New Acropolis Museum, opened in 2009 after over thirty years of debate surrounding its purpose, location and design. Originally begun only as a project to expand the storage and display capacity of the original museum, the current museum takes part in the complicated international debate regarding the home of the so-called Elgin marbles. The current paper explores how the new museum successfully re-contextualizes the art and artifacts of the Acropolis in order to provide a holistic understanding of its history. The current chapter addresses three issues: the goals and objectives of the New Acropolis Museum, architect Bernard Tschumi and director/curator Dimitrios Pandermalis' programmatic solutions to these problems, and the general audience response to the museum and its exhibitions. By thoroughly addressing each of these issues, it will become apparent that the New Acropolis Museum is an appropriate space for not only the Parthenon sculptures, but all artifacts from the Acropolis.

It has to convince the world that the Elgin marbles should come back. And I believe it will.
-Bernard Tschumi, 2009 (Gauge 2008)

The history of cities is made out of layers. The Museum is another layer where we protect and reveal archaeological information.
-Bernard Tschumi, 2011 (Tschumi, pers.comm)

Speaking on the eve of the opening of his New Acropolis Museum in 2009, architect Bernard Tschumi verbalizes the thoughts of many Greeks and, in fact, many individuals throughout the world. Two years later in 2011, Tschumi's words express the complicated nature of the New Acropolis Museum as more than just a building for housing and displaying the Parthenon sculptures, but as a strategically designed project with wide-reaching goals. Conceptualized, designed and built over a period of thirty years, the long-awaited New Acropolis Museum stands at the base of the Acropolis itself, the Sacred Rock, and its galleries exhibit the many artifacts from the site, including portions of Parthenon sculptural program. Drawing heavily on his own theoretical principles of space and display, Bernard Tschumi developed a built vocabulary that achieves the goals and objectives outlined for the Museum by the public, museum committee and curatorial staff. The current chapter reconciles Tschumi's statements; it is suggested that the New Acropolis Museum is a space that successfully re-contextualizes and displays many artifacts of the Athenian Acropolis, including, *but not limited* to the sculptures from the Parthenon, in order to provide a holistic understanding of the historical Acropolis.

The New Acropolis Museum re-contextualizes the artifacts of the Acropolis not only in terms of physical location and a visual relationship with the Sacred Rock, but also by providing a constructed experience intended to mimic the actual process of visiting the Athenian Acropolis. Complex processes of movement through space, filtered light and physical association with other

artifacts from the Acropolis prompt museum visitors to not only associate artifacts with their original location, but also to recall their visit to the nearby Parthenon with similar processes of movement. Thus, the New Acropolis Museum acts as a sort of conceptualized version of the Acropolis itself. Moving through the Museum, visitors reenact their procession up the slopes of the Acropolis and around the Parthenon,. The current chapter addresses three issues: the goals and objectives of the New Acropolis Museum, architect Bernard Tschumi and director/curator Dimitrios Pandermalis' programmatic solutions to these problems, and the general audience's response to the museum and its exhibitions. Through an exploration of these three concepts the chapter suggests that the subject of the Museum is not the artifacts as individual objects, but the Athenian Acropolis itself and its long, rich, and varied history.

The Museum and its Goals: A Brief History of the Problem

The New Acropolis Museum is located in Athens at the base of the Acropolis.[1] It currently houses the sculptural treasures of the Acropolis including portions of the Parthenon reliefs, great works of Archaic sculpture and the famous Caryatids of the Erechteum (Lobell 2006). The Museum has three interior exhibition spaces and a fourth "level" of archaeological excavations that have been incorporated into the Museum space (Bernard Tschumi Architects, 2009b).[2] Each of the three levels are rotated on a vertical axis, resulting in spaces not only distinguished by content, but also by their orientation. The building is composed of marble, concrete, and glass creating a minimalist exterior that stands in opposition to the classical exterior of the neighboring Parthenon. The interior of the building is a light-filled, open space punctuated by sculpture with the entire fourth floor devoted to the sculptural program of the Parthenon. The third floor Parthenon Gallery

[1] For an illustration of this location, consult Bernard Tschumi Architects 2009a, 12.
[2] For illustrations of the exterior and plan of the building consult Bernard Tschumi Architects 2009a, 120-121, 76-77.

replicates the dimensions and layout of the Parthenon itself in an attempt to mimic the experience of visiting and viewing the sculptural program *in situ*. The following paragraphs examine Tschumi's Museum within the context of its history and the many objectives surrounding its construction including the issues of its location, collection and exhibition.

The New Acropolis Museum, as it stands today, achieves a number of goals articulated by various individuals, groups and interested parties. To understand the Museum, one must first step back and examine the conditions surrounding its construction, in particular the objectives as outlined by the selection committee and the community as well as the specific needs of exhibition display. In many cases, these needs and objectives align, but in certain instances it is the burden of the architect to creatively construct a site, which answers to all interested parties. Additionally, the Museum's objectives have changed significantly over time resulting in a building that is particularly suited for its temporal and physical location.

After thirty years of planning and construction, the New Acropolis Museum opened on June 20, 2009 replacing the building re-constructed and re-designed after World War II by Yiannis Miliadis (Brouskari 1974, 14). Miliadis' building replaced the original Acropolis Museum, designed by Panages Kalkos, which had opened in 1865 on the site of the Acropolis and was itself the source of much debate concerning the appropriateness of building a museum on the Sacred Rock. Following the 1885 discovery of the pits from 480 BC containing a large number of desecrated votives and other artifacts, a second, smaller annex was opened near the original building, appropriately dubbed the Small Acropolis Museum (Pandermalis 2009, 27). Interestingly, the original impetus for the construction of a new museum was not the reunification of the Parthenon reliefs, but rather the need for more exhibition and storage space. Following World

War II and the removal of the remaining sculptures from the Acropolis the need arose for a new museum as the original spaces were simply at capacity. In fact, the idea that the new museum could serve as a site for the unified reliefs was not developed until much later in the building's history.

The structure of the new Museum was not completed or even considered until the 1976 competition, but the site was pre-determined by a 1965 decree by the then Prime Minister Karamanlis. The decree identified a location for the museum in the Makriyianni block at the base of the Acropolis (Pandermalis 2009, 28). This early proclamation was later reaffirmed by the additional Presidential Decree of 1996. With this site in mind, the Ministry of Culture sponsored a competition in 1976 as well as a second competition of 1979; both of these competitions were inconclusive and a third competition was announced in 1989. Between the conclusion of the 1979 competition and the advent of the third competition, however, significant events occurred surrounding the museum and its artifacts. Most notably, in 1982 the Greek government, represented by Melina Mercouri, former Minister of Culture, proclaimed its intent to reclaim the so-called Elgin marbles from Great Britain.[3] Not surprisingly, the announcement incited intense emotions from many sides and directly affected the plans for the Acropolis Museum, which had been temporarily suspended following the unsuccessful 1979 competition. The new museum was no longer only a location to store the extensive collections of sculpture and other material from the Acropolis, but now also took on a deeply political and personal reality for Greek individuals and members of the global community.

[3] Although Mercouri's letter represents the first, major official plea for the return of the marbles, this is not to say that such sentiment did not exist earlier amidst the Greek community.

With the potential reality of housing the Parthenon reliefs in Greece, the Ministry of Culture renewed their campaign for a new museum design in 1989, this time with a much more specific objective in mind: the return of the reliefs. Incidentally, although two Italian architects, Nicoletti and Pasarelli, were granted the commission from the 1989 contest, their work was never implemented due to the unexpected and ultimately project-stalling discovery of ancient ruins on the previously sanctioned site of the museum. Despite this, the circumstances surrounding the 1989 competition are fairly well-publicized and offer insight into the museum's new objectives and purpose.

In her article on the conditions surrounding the construction of the New Acropolis Museum, Mari Lending scrutinizes this competition, pointing out the Committee's deliberate objectives and the insights these statements provides into the museum's eventual design (Lending 2009, 571). According to Article 1 of the programme for the 1989 competition, the Committee defines the primary objective as "securing the best solution for the 'great works of the Acropolis" (Lending 2009, 571; Athens Ministry of Culture 1989, 11). While this language seems somewhat mild, not directly invoking the Parthenon reliefs, further into the programme a clause appears necessitating the inclusion of space for the so-called Elgin marbles saying "since the repatriation of the marbles is envisioned, room must be provided to facilitate their display together with the remaining architectural members and sculptures which are found in Greece" (Athens Ministry of Culture 1989, 49). Thus, the objectives of the 1989 programme, as outlined by the Ministry of Culture, betray the already clear undertones of the project: return the Parthenon reliefs. Lending goes so far as to understand the objectives as manifesting in two distinct ways in the new museum: a) the building of an empty venue, remaining open for the reliefs until their return or b) a

provision for the extension of the building for when the reliefs are returned (Lending 2009, 572). Thus, although no building was constructed, the 1989 competition is valuable because it clarifies the Committee's newly formed objectives, which become fundamental to the 2001 competition and the eventual construction of Tschumi's museum.

With no published programme outlining the Committee's goals for the museum, it is not clear how these objectives may have changed from the 1989 competition to the 2001 competition, but it seems fairly certain that similar objectives remained in place: to design a space both to house the treasures of Greece and consider the display of the Elgin marbles upon their return. The competition was held in September of 2001 and accepted proposals from architects worldwide who were judged by an Evaluation Committee composed of international archaeologists, architects, engineers, and museum professionals (Pandermalis 2009, 27-28). From the group of proposals, Swiss-born architect Bernard Tschumi was selected as the winner of the competition. Tschumi's design promised to pay homage to the still-standing Parthenon, create a livable space for the artifacts of the Acropolis, and most importantly provide space for the absent, but rightfully Greek, Parthenon reliefs.

In addition to fulfilling the Committee's mandate for the Parthenon reliefs, Tschumi's design carefully considered the major problem faced by the 2001 competition: the Makriyianni excavations. The Makriyianni block, previously identified as the location of the museum, became the site of extensive excavations during the years of 1997 to 2002 after preliminary work following the 1989 competition revealed remains of ancient Athens. The area contains archaeological evidence dating as early as the Neolithic period, but the majority of evidence comes from the sixth century BC, particularly domestic structures and urban infrastructure such as city walls and roads.

Because of the magnitude of this discovery and its eminent need for further archaeological study, the Committee included as part of its objectives for the new museum the preservation of the Makriyianni site.

Along with the objectives dictated by the Evaluation Committee the New Acropolis Museum also addresses exhibition goals. As stated by the Committee, the museum is meant to house and display the great works of Greek art from the Acropolis, but the immense challenge of this goal runs much deeper than it may seem. Foremost in the challenge is the problem of material and its display within the museum. The display of the Parthenon sculptural program alone requires enormous consideration and although this is arguably the most famous work exhibited in the museum, the building is also home to a significant array of other material spanning a vast range of time. There are votives and other sculptural pieces from the Archaic, Classical and Roman periods as well as the sculptural programs of the Sanctuary of Athena Nike, the Erechtheum and the Propylaia (Bure 2008; Bernard Tschumi Architects 2009b). Not to be forgotten are finds from the late antique and Byzantine periods as well as smaller artifacts from the slopes of the Acropolis. Although exhibition design is typically the responsibility of curators and other museum staff, in the case of the New Acropolis Museum the architect and curator worked together closely from the beginning to solve the problems of exhibition. The museum staff and architect were faced with the challenge of determining how best to display the vast range and large quantity of material in a clear, digestible manner to a wide audience—local and global, scholarly and non-scholarly, Greek, British and international.

In addition to accommodating the treasured collections of the Acropolis and presenting them in an acceptable manner, the museum also confronts the more practical challenge of its

physical proximity to the Acropolis and the Parthenon itself. The Museum must provide an acceptable and respectable space for artifacts that does not encroach upon or diminish the Parthenon, but at the same time, the new Museum must be an attractive and innovative structure that fits within the Athenian urban landscape. Ideally, the building should act in dialogue with the neighboring Parthenon. For these reasons, Bernard Tschumi's solution to the New Acropolis Museum does not answer to one, monolithic community with a clearly-stated objective, but instead responds to a number of political, museological, practical and site-driven goals. Tschumi's winning design, although conceived within a specific historic moment, is the result of many years of new ideas related to the museum's purpose and the opinions of diverse groups and individuals. While the Museum's official client was the Organization for the Construction of the New Acropolis Museum, of which Dimitrios Pandermalis is the president, Tschumi was realistically faced with a wide range of opinions including those of the local and international communities (Bernard Tschumi Architects 2009b).

Solution: Concept, Context and Content

As the architect of the New Acropolis Museum, Bernard Tschumi played a significant role in determining the overall design and concept of the building's exterior, its interior exhibition space and the ways in which visitors encountered these elements within the building's layout. Previously the dean of the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia University in New York, Tschumi, in association with the Athens-based architect Michael Photiadis, created the award-winning design for the New Acropolis Museum that successfully accomplishes the objectives as outlined by the Awards Committee and the multi-faceted Greek community. A large number of interviews have been published with Tschumi following both his

win of the competition in 2001 and the completion of the building in 2009 (Mauss 2010). These interviews, coupled with Tschumi's own publications on the building, construct a picture of the architect's vision- for the project and provide an intimate understanding of the ways in which the New Acropolis Museum fits within Tschumi's own theoretical oeuvre.

Tschumi's design for the museum is heavily indebted to his own architectural theories, which are widely published and relate to his built constructions. Tschumi's career in architecture began as a result of his deeply theoretical engagement with the field, which he developed during his tenure at the Architectural Association in London in the early 1970s. This early work led to an invitation from architect Peter Eisenman to join the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) in New York in 1976 (Bure 2008, 11). Frequent host of the New York Five (Eisenman, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, John Hejduk and Richard Meier), the IAUS provided a perfect location for Tschumi to further develop his own theoretical ideas, which have little to do with style and more to do with the relationship between form, function and/or concept. Although at the time of his move to the United States and IAUS Tschumi had not yet constructed any of his designs, and would not for several more years, the transatlantic relocation marks a pivotal moment in his career: the point at which he began to rapidly develop and publicize his own concepts on architecture. These moments became crucial building blocks for Tschumi's later structures, including the New Acropolis Museum.

During his early years in the US Tschumi was primarily interested in investigations of movement, in particular the role of the body in architecture. Tschumi's early work was exhibited at several New York City galleries and museums including his first architectural exhibition "Architectural Manifestoes I" at Artists Space in 1978 and 1994 show at the Museum of Modern

Art, "Architecture and Event" (Bure 2008, 13). For Tschumi, these exhibitions, with their focus on individual action, movement and interaction, led directly to his more direct and fine-tuned definition of architecture. According to this, architecture is not static, but instead a dynamic concept grounded in the notions of space, event and movement. Tschumi's first major, public building commission, the Parc de la Villette in Paris, tested his theoretical notions of movement, event and space (Bure 2008). The Parc de la Villette project was commissioned by the French cultural authorities in 1982 and required Tschumi to design an innovative, urban park within the city that was a cultural center for a city-wide audience. The Parc de la Villette project sky-rocketed Tschumi to a position of international acclaim in the world of architecture and also allowed him, for the first time, to put his theoretical and conceptual ideas into action in the real-world.

As he gained additional experience with built, as opposed to conceptual projects, Tschumi's interest in space, event and movement resurfaced in new ways. Although he had always shown an interest in movement through space as a generator of architecture, his newfound experience with actual building practice instilled a desire to understand what he termed "envelopes," or the means of enclosing space (Walker 2006, 142). Tschumi explains the relationship between the two elements saying:

> Early on, I tended to emphasize the notion of movement vectors as generators of an architectural project. But as I began to build, the issue of defining an overall envelope became a crucial question. How does one enclose or define space, and how does that enclosure relate to movement vectors? As a result, our projects became an exploration of the nature of the envelope-roof and exterior walls-in relation to movement vectors and envelopes. How one enters a building and moves through it constitutes the vectors. What keeps out the rain, cold, heat, noise and burglars constitutes the envelope. Vectors activate; envelopes define (Bure 2008, 116).

The strong emphasize on enclosure and the movement within these spaces influenced Tschumi's designs throughout the 1990's, which were a series of investigations of the envelope in its various forms.[4] Tschumi's more recent work, including the New Acropolis Museum, has incorporated notions of the envelope and vector. and bears witness to his strong preoccupation with enclosing movement. At the same time, his more recent work has also developed to become centered about three interrelated terms—concept, context and content—ideas which he has specifically formulated as a result of a retrospective reading of his own work following the completion of the New Acropolis Museum design (Walker 2006, 155). These ideas are clearly explained in Tschumi's 2004 volume *Event-Cities 3: Concept vs. Context vs. Content*. According to these distinct, but highly related principles, concept can be distinguished from form as "an overarching idea, diagram or *parti* that gives coherence and identity to a building. [Coherence] distinguishes architecture from mere building" (Tschumi 2005, 11; Mauss 2010, 15).[5] Context, on the other hand, is a building's environment, which may be defined geographic, historical, economic, or other terms. Context, in Tschumi's words, is not solely historical, but is constantly changing. Because of this, concept and context are very closely related and Tschumi conceives of three ways in which architecture can relate the two ideas: indifference, when architectural context and content are do not interact, reciprocity, when both have equal play, and conflict, when either context or concept clashes with the other. Just as concept and context are directly related and equally important to a successful building, *content* is a quality essential for architecture because there is no architecture without something happening inside of it, a purpose, program or list of objectives. Tschumi disputes the logic "form follows function" preferring the terms concept and content, suggesting that in many

[4] For example, see his Rouen Concert Hall project, which is the first demonstration of the envelope, as well as the Museum of African Art New York in Walker 2006, 144-146.
[5] *Parti* refers to the French phrase *prendre parti*, which is often referred to as a big idea or concept.

instances concept precedes content or, as in the case of the New Acropolis Museum, content and concept develop simultaneously.

In *Event Cities 3* Tschumi outlines his own approach to the New Acropolis Museum and how his notions of concept, context and content are at work in the project. While the complex goals and objectives for the museum have been discussed at length in the previous section, Tschumi pares these down to three questions: 1) How does one construct a building next to the Parthenon, one of the most iconic buildings in history? 2) How does one construct a building on top of an archaeological site and also in an earthquake prone region? 3) How does one construct a building to house a collection of art, part of which is absent? (Tschumi 2005, 437; Tschumi 2009b, 82). From these statements it is clear that Tschumi is attuned to the myriad wants and desires expressed by various factions of a widely-defined community. Surely these three questions heed special attention to any goals outlined by the 2001 Committee as these are the individuals directly employing Tschumi. Even without these specific goals, however, the questions express the precarious position of the Museum, particularly in relation to its context— that is, adjacent to the Parthenon, on top of an archaeological site, and in an earthquake zone—and content—the unique collection of Greek sculpture, a large portion of which is absent from the Museum. The Museum design fulfills these challenges, balancing the issues of content and context with an appropriate concept.

::*Context*::

As a site-specific museum, the building's context is unique and integral to its design. Three major contextual components play a role in the concept: the physical location at the base of the Acropolis in Athens, the Makryianni excavations, and the unique Athenian light. Not only is the

museum located in Athens, at the base of the Acropolis, but it is within 500 meters of the extant Parthenon. Although this can certainly be viewed as an advantage, as visitors may experience the artifacts in a physical proximity to their original location, it also creates a challenge for the architect and curators to appropriately balance the two sites. In addition, the building sits atop active and ongoing excavations.

Because the excavations are ongoing and a significant part of the building's context, the lobby, entrance and terrace are raised above the archaeological remains using carefully placed pilotis. The pilotis do not interfere with the archaeological work and allow visitors to view the excavated areas.[6] The entrance, lobby and terrace are partially placed on a glass floor providing views down into the excavations, which visually integrates the ancient world into the modern world.

The building's materials further evoke and emphasize its context. The building uses a vertical core and concrete columns rather than a traditional system of partition walls. This results in open spaces, which Tschumi describes as:

> Free and unconstructed spaces that approximate natural outdoor light and air—[these] are most eloquent in the Archaic Gallery on the middle level, where twenty-nine concrete columns articulate an eight-meter high space. As a result, the marble statues appear to populate this open space in casual arrangements of figures-the first and "original" inhabitants of the Museum (Tschumi 2009b, 85).

Concrete and marble are employed throughout the building, chosen because of their neutral palette, which focuses the viewer's attention on the individual, ancient sculpture. Local Greek marble is used for the statue bases to blend with the floors, creating a seamless gallery space in which the sculptures appear to float, as if in a crowd. The most important material, however, is the

[6] For illustrations of the excavations see Bernard Tschumi Architects 2009a, 13.

use and moderation of light through glass (Gonchar 2007, 176; Ritter 2010, 2-3; Bernard Tschumi Architects 2009c). Athens is known for its clear light, which is particularly potent on the Acropolis. Because of the importance of this natural light as a condition of original viewing context, the project was concerned with simulating identical lighting conditions within the building. The unique environment created by the Athenian light made the use of glass "the greatest material focus" of the project. The architect and curators were concerned with the balance between harnessing the natural light, and thus capturing context, protecting the artifacts, and maintaining a comfortable temperature inside a glass building (Tschumi 2009b, 85). These concerns led to innovative glass technologies including a double glass envelope in the top Parthenon gallery coupled with clear glass (as opposed to glass with a greenish tint) to replicate the clean light that shines upon the Parthenon itself. The glass walls of the Archaic Galleries utilize a unique silk-screen dot gradient which helps absorb sound within the museum as well as regulate the entrance of light.

::*Content*::

In addition to considerations of physical context, the Museum's concept was also heavily influenced by its content: the artifacts and their exhibition. In *Event Cities 3*, Tschumi notes that "most architects begin with a program, that is, a list of users' requirements describing the intended purpose of the building" (Tschumi 2005, 11). The New Acropolis Museum, as has been discussed, had a number of purposes ascribed to it, but perhaps the most obvious, yet sometimes overlooked, of these is the exhibition of artifacts, including the much-discussed Parthenon sculptural programs. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the museum, it is necessary to look beyond Tschumi's design concept and consider also the exhibition program as articulated by the museum's curatorial

staff and how this relates to the built environment. Because the New Acropolis Museum is site-specific it, provided an opportunity for architect and curator to work together to create a space which dually reinforces an intended message through exhibition program and visitor movement.[7]

In the foreword to Peter Mauss' recent monograph on the museum, Dimitrios Pandermalis, the President and curator of the museum, offers a suggestion of the relationship that existed between Tschumi and the museum professionals throughout the design process. "The Acropolis Museum is admirable evidence of the outcome of an excellent working relationship between curator and architect" (Mauss 2010, 9). The working relationship between architect and curator, in this case Tschumi and Pandermalis, was uniquely close and was described by Tschumi as a "remarkable collaboration" in which both parties were constantly aware of all actions and decisions (Tschumi, pers.comm).

While a wealth of information has been published on the architectural concept and design of the museum, including insights into Tschumi's own biography, comparatively little information is in circulation regarding the actual exhibitions, the supposed purpose of the museum. In interviews, Tschumi has repeatedly offered his understanding of the space, which in most instances incorporates the artifacts of the museum's collection. Similarly, critical response to the museum has been couched largely in terms of Tschumi's stunning design and only infrequently are the interior exhibitions cited, even then in generalized terms. Perhaps the most thorough explanation of the museum's exhibition program is offered by Pandermalis in Tschumi's monograph *The New Acropolis Museum*, published following the grand opening of the museum. The 165 page volume offers color photographs, plans, architectural drawings and two essays by Tschumi and

[7] The New Acropolis Museum is a unique site-specific, archaeological museum. For additional discussion of site-specific museums in other contexts consult Stone 1994.

Pandermalis. In his essay entitled "The Museum and its Context" Pandermalis addresses the exhibition program under the heading of the "visitor experience," explaining the building's layout, the location of various galleries within this space, and the overarching goal of the exhibitions, which is distinct from the old museum (Pandermalis, 2009).

The original, nineteenth-century Acropolis Museum was built to store and preserve the many artifacts constantly being discovered on the Acropolis. Following World War II, with the renovation of this space, Yiannis Miliadis initiated processes of conservation and repair, close study of objects and innovative display techniques with which he intended to highlight sculptures as individual pieces (Brouskari 1974, 15). In both the original and the renovated museum, standard exhibition programs and plans were followed; the objects were arranged chronologically in separate rooms and visitors moved from one room to the next (Brouskari 1974; Dontas 1979).[8]

The content of the current exhibition remains similar to that of the original museum, however, the exhibition program is drastically changed. Pandermalis describes the archaeological material as representative of the first human settlement on the site, the Archaic period, and the most famous works of classical antiquity. With this broadly defined material content in mind, he defines the goals of the exhibition program:

> to provide all of the significant information gleaned from the archaeological artifacts of the Acropolis, covering themes of worship, mythology, politics, the economy, the arts, and society. The exhibits are not presented solely as works of art, but also as evidence of the historical and social context of the period from which they developed. With the topographic, chronological, and thematic organization of the collection, it is hoped that the Museum will attract a broad range of visitors, since visitors are the central focus of the New Acropolis Museum. The visitor will become familiar with the sanctuaries

[8] Consult Noordegraaf 2004 for a study of the changing means of display in early nineteenth and twentieth century museums.

> and monuments of the Athenian Acropolis through their sculptural adornments and assorted votives and, assisted by the Museum narrative, achieve a comprehensive understanding of the whole (Pandermalis 2009, 31).

Accordingly, the museum's exhibitions are meant to educate the audience in the culture and society of ancient Athens, not limited to the city's art and architecture. Artifacts and objects displayed are not meant to be viewed only as objects of aesthetic beauty or interest, but as representative of larger social and historical processes and themes. Thus, in Pandermalis' view, individual objects may be spectacular, but within the Museum their purpose is to illustrate a larger understanding of Archaic and Classical Athens. Ideally, the museum's visitor should gain a holistic understanding of ancient Athens after walking through all of the galleries.[9]

To encourage this broad understanding of Athenian culture, the museum has four exhibition levels: the ground-level archaeological excavations (Level -1), the so-called "Gallery of the Slopes" located on the ramp that links the ground floor to the first floor, the first floor divided into a two-story archaic gallery (Level +1), and the third floor Parthenon gallery (Level +3). The galleries are organized in a somewhat chronological order moving from archaic to classical to Roman and Byzantine. These broad categories are broken down into sub-categories, emphasizing important historic, religious and cultural themes. Visitors are meant to progress through the building in a winding path that begins in the excavations and ends in the Parthenon gallery, thus tracing a somewhat chronological journey through the site's past.

The journey begins at the excavations (Level -1), which are currently closed to the public, but are still visible through large openings in the floor as well as glass panels. Visitors have a glimpse into ancient domestic life with bathing structure and a house (Pandermalis 2009, 34). From the excavations, the path continues into the gallery of the Slopes, a location that serves a

[9] For a thorough explanation of the importance of space in exhibition design see Hillier and Tzortzi 2006.

dual purpose as transitional space, linking the entry level to the first floor galleries, and exhibition area. The walls of the gallery house small-finds from the slopes of the Acropolis such as votives from the Sanctuaries of Aphrodite, Asklepios, and Dionysus, ceramic vases, and other small items from the houses and tombs in this area. Although small, these items are meant to evoke a sense of daily life and everyday activities that occurred on and around the Acropolis, but their location in a veritable hallway could actually detract from the effectiveness of the message.

From the Gallery of the Slopes, the viewer moves to the two-story, Archaic gallery (Level +1) Initially, the pediments from the Hecatompedon greet the visitor. The first large, peripteral temple of Athens, the Hecatompedon was dedicated to Athena and its presence in the gallery "signal[s] the shift in [the site's] status to an important religious center"(Pandermalis 2009, 34). The pediment's three sections—Herakles and Triton, two lions killing a bull, and the sea-monster—are all reconciled for the first time since their removal from the site. Further in the Archaic gallery, the focus shifts from an emphasis on the site's religious importance to The sculptures are arranged according to thematic coherence so that "visitors [may] understand the objects and the environment from which they evolved" (Pandermalis 2009, 36).

The Archaic gallery is divided into two stories and the sculptures are arranged on pedestals evenly dispersed through the open, spacious and minimalist galleries; here, Pandermalis envisions seven identifiable sculptural groups, which are thematically categorized according to place of production, workshop, and purpose.[10] Group one consists of architectural sculpture from Archaic buildings of the Acropolis including the Hecatompedon. Groups two, three, and four includes large votive statuary and objects from island workshops, Early and Middle Attic workshop, respectively. Group five consists of the Acropolis horse riders and group six contains other major

[10] For an illustration of the Archaic Gallery consult Bernard Tschumi Architects 2009a, 48-49.

Attic works. Lastly, group seven is comprised of korai and other Late Archaic works, evidencing the Persian destruction and "prepar[ing] the visitor for the next installation of works from the so-called Severe Period" (Pandermalis 2009, 36). Objects of the Severe Style and Early Classical period are displayed in a small area preceding the transition into the Parthenon gallery. The break from the otherwise thematic division of material, however, is inconsistent with the remainder of the space.

In conceiving of thematic divisions, Pandermalis reflects a desire to organize the material for the viewer, making sense of a large number of works and at the same time remaining faithful to the exhibition's overall goal to present a broad understanding of Athens. As exhibited, the Archaic sculptures are evenly spaced through the large gallery, permitting visitors to mill about the room. Although the impetus behind this choice of exhibition was a desire to permit viewers to see all sides of the sculpture and provide natural light to all parts of the sculpture, the current arrangement also has downfalls (Tschumi, pers.comm). While they are united as sculptural votives of the Acropolis, Pandermalis' thematic divisions do not reflect ancient categories or notions, but are purely modern stylistic or subject-based distinctions. Despite these problems, the exhibition unites the Archaic objects, not only with one another, but with other material from the Acropolis.

From the open spaces of the first floor Archaic galleries, the exhibition program continues in its search for a coherent narrative towards the culminating third floor Parthenon gallery (Level +3). The gallery replicates the dimensions of the cella of the Parthenon so that the sculptural frieze hangs on an interior shell at a height of 1.5m. The entire frieze spans the interior of this inner gallery with plaster casts of the original standing in for the missing portions and easily discerned based on their bright color and lack of natural patina. Visitors circumambulate the gallery to view

the frieze, just as they would have done with the original building. The arrangement allows visitors to progress in a circular motion around the inner structure while simultaneously viewing the reliefs. This Stainless steel columns surround the inner "mock" Parthenon, creating an interior rhythm that echoes the classical form of the neighboring building, which is conveniently and intentionally visible through the 360 degree glass windows.[11] The metopes hang between the steel columns at a height of 2.5m—higher than the frieze, but still obviously lower than their original height on the Parthenon. Although the metopes and frieze are lower than they would have originally hung on the Parthenon, they are positioned above eye level and mimic the act of looking upward to view the sculpture, as would be done for the Parthenon itself. The pediment sculptures occupy a specific, but separate space in the east and west areas of the gallery. Each pediment rests on a long base and is positioned so that viewers may easily see both the front and back of the piece.

The journey is not over when the visitor completes his/her tour of the third floor Parthenon gallery. Upon descent from the third floor, the exhibitions in the northwest area of the first floor (Level +1) highlight prominent architectural sculpture from the Classical Acropolis. The Sanctuary of Athena Nike is installed in these galleries along with the famous Caryatids from the Erechtheum which are mounted on a base and visible as the viewer processes up to the first floor from the archaeological remains below. The figural frieze of the Erechtheum is mounted on a slab and looms behind the Caryatids, visually linking the two sculptural groups. Also in this northwest portion of the first floor are a number of significant Classical sculptures including Praxiteles' *Artemis of Brauron (*Pandermalis 2009, 42*)*. An exhibition area is also included for Roman and Byzantine items as an epilogue to the climactic Parthenon gallery.

[11] For an illustration of the Parthenon Gallery consult Bernard Tschumi Architects 2009a, 118-119.

::*Concept*::

Returning to Tschumi's tripartite approach to building design, it is now possible to understand how and why Tschumi terms his solution to the New Acropolis Museum "conceptualizing context." The expression reflects his intention to entirely integrate the site into the design of the building, which is completely "unthinkable" outside of its location (Tschumi 2009b, 82). The building's minimalist design takes the *form* of three superimposed levels, mathematically precise, which are made of three materials: glass, concrete and marble—materials chosen for their ability to negotiate the unique Athenian context. Each of the three levels—base, middle, and top—contains specific and different content and are rotated around a vertical axis to conform to their specific contextual orientation: ground level excavation, first level Archaic, or third level Parthenon. This simple division and rotation of the building creates the basis of its concept, which becomes more complex when the actual content (the sculptures) populate the space and contribute layers of historical and cultural meaning.

Besides form, Tschumi's concept for the Museum is rooted in the process of re-contextualization. In the case of the New Acropolis Museum, re-contextualization refers not only to the return of artifacts to the original, physical location, but also a reunification with an historical and cultural past. According to Tschumi, the Museum is unusual and affective because it brings together artifacts from the rich history and culture of Athens in one space (Tschumi pers.comm).

In terms of physical location, the Museum provides the perhaps the closest available option for displaying the artifacts of the Acropolis in close proximity to their original find-spots. Short of

re-mounting sculptural panels on the Parthenon or returning votives to their pits, the Museum is the most realistic means of physically reuniting objects with their original locations in a controlled environment. Although the objects are removed from the actual Acropolis, they are visually linked through the use of a 360 glass envelope. This glass envelope is a powerful tool of re-contextualization as it not only enables visitors to see the Acropolis, only 500 meters away, but also promotes visual connectedness within the space of the Museum (Bernard Tschumi Architects 2009c). The multiple levels of the museum are connected and easily traversed by visitors both physically, through ramps and elevators, as well as visually due to the building's glass walls, which create a transparent environment enabling the audience to gaze from one gallery to another, emphasizing the connectedness of the artifacts within. Thus, the Museum not only unites the artifacts with their physical location (the Acropolis), but also with one another. Until this point, the artifacts have been separated in storage rooms, the older Acropolis Museum and its Annex, and international museums partially due to the lack of space to exhibit all of the material.

In addition to the physical re-contextualization of objects at the site and as a unified entity, the Museum recreates the deeply experiential processes of movement, approximating the personal journey up the neighboring Acropolis. The discussion of the museum's exhibition program highlighted Pandermalis' notion of archaeological narrative and the tendency towards a chronological progression through artifacts of the Acropolis. In response to the exhibition program, the building's design emphasizes physical progression (Bernard Tschumi Architects 2009c). The galleries are arranged in a relatively fixed pattern that mirrors the experience of ascending the Acropolis, circumambulating the Parthenon, and finally descending the slope. The mimetic parallel inherently connects the viewer to the experience of visiting the actual Parthenon,

although it does not attempt to create a substitute for the actual Acropolis and buildings. Similarly, the third floor Parthenon gallery effectively recreates the more specific process of viewing the Parthenon frieze, metopes, and pediments. Although none of the sculptural elements are arranged *exactly* as they would have been placed originally, for example all of the pieces would have hung much higher, the current arrangement approximates the processes of movement that individuals would have taken up the Acropolis and around the building in their pursuit to visit the building. In a recent interview, Tschumi notes the conscious decisions to recreate original viewing conditions, as closely as possible. Regarding the placement of the metopes, which were originally slated to be arranged on the ground, he says:

> We realized that that didn't work because these sculptures were meant to be high up and the details of the sculptures at the upper part of the sculpture were very rough because nobody would ever see them in the original temple so we knew that we had to resolve the line of sight…we then decided, again it was a common decision between the curators and us, to move the metopes and put them on a higher part so you could see them from below (Tschumi pers.comm).

The steel columns surrounding the metopes not only support the sculpture, but also punctuate the space in an identical manner as the nearby Parthenon and invokes the same rhythm that one feels while walking beside the ancient building.

The third floor Parthenon Gallery, in particular, participates in a mimetic process of representation, that does not attempt to directly recreate or appropriate the Parthenon sculptures and the architecture itself, but instead "invent[s] intentional representations" that are similar to the original structure and its viewing context (Donald 1992, 162). In this way, the gallery is a space in which the audience experiences the objects of the Parthenon, not in their exactly original context—which is impossible—but in a new context that approximates the ways they would have originally been seen. In bringing together the artifacts and recreating the experience of visiting the

Acropolis, the Museum does not focus on individual objects as pieces of artwork, but as evidence of the Athenian past. Each gallery space attests to a different aspect of Athenian history and/or culture, leaving the attuned visitor with a full knowledge of history on the site.

Evaluating the Museum: the Audience

The final step in understanding the New Acropolis Museum is to ask what message it communicates to the audience and how successfully this message is transmitted. Although Tschumi and Pandermalis both envision the museum as a clear, readable building, it is not necessarily true that these concepts are realized in the building or that all visitors actually respond to the space in the same way. Surely an architect or curator's concept is not always fully realized in a space by all visitors. According to an article published by the Agence France Presse in 2010, the most visited the Acropolis and the Acropolis Museum were the most visited sites in Greece in the past year, together receiving 1,087,889 visitors in 2010, a 1.6% increase from 2009. This number is almost twice that of the visitors to Knossos in Crete, 588,996, which decreased by 3.5% in 2010. The museum attracts tourists on their pilgrimage to Athens, but even this familiar label requires further refinement. Duke defines tourists to archaeological sites as individuals who come to a site primarily for reasons of relaxation and enjoyment and visit the site out of secondary interest as part of a vacation. They gain their knowledge of the site through non-academic sources and most likely will only visit the site once (Duke 2007, 58).

The scientific study of museum visitors has grown significantly in the last quarter of the twentieth century. This is in large part due to the advent of the New Museology in the 1980s and its shift towards the study of the "underlying value systems that are encoded in institutional

narratives" (Hooper-Greenhill 2006).[12] Within this discourse, "visitor studies" is a term used to describe a number of smaller fields that all address museums and their audience, both virtual and real, to understand how successfully information is transmitted to the audience through exhibits and other material. Visitor studies take many different forms including exhibition evaluation in the form of visitor surveys or visitor observation. These studies grade visitors based on how well they learn the intended information included in any exhibit, following what Hooper-Greenhill calls the "bulls-eye" approach (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Hooper-Greenhill 2006, 367). In this method of exhibition design, the curator designs the exhibition and selects the important information to be transmitted. It is assumed that the generalized audience will automatically gain this information by following the exhibition. The model, however, does not account for audience diversity. Most recently, studies aimed at providing a more holistic understanding of "the complexity, contingency, and provisional character of communication as mediated cultural transactions between individuals or groups" have led to new methods of research (Hooper-Greenhill 2006, 372). Rather than track *if* visitors received or understood a predetermined set of information, these studies examined *how* visitors actually learn from museums. The majority of research of this type has been conducted in science museums and focuses on individuals' perceptions. The studies often utilize anecdotes and personal experience or perception, making it less easily accepted in the academic world. If pursued carefully and cautiously, however, such work has the potential to explain visitors and influence museum exhibitions.

J. Falk's 2009 series of studies survey individual visitors to the Baltimore Aquarium asking standardized questions concerning perceptions of the exhibits, areas of interest, and understanding

[12] For an overview of museum visitor studies see Hooper-Greenhill 2006, Hooper-Greenhill 1992, Falk 2009. For the New Museum see Marstine 2006, 5. For the advent of the term see Vergo 1989.

of the material (Falk, 2009). Contending that a visitor's experience is framed by motivation, Falk identifies several types of museum goers: the "explorers" who are curious and value learning; the "facilitators" who visit museums to satisfy their partners or parents; and the "seekers" those who visit to check the experience off of their life-list (Falk 2009, 190).[13] Each of these visitor types, learn material in different ways because they approach the museum with different expectations and desires.

As a newly opened space, the New Acropolis Museum has not yet been the subject of published, traditional visitor-study surveys or newer methods of evaluating visitors and their response. Because of its international acclaim, the museum attracts a diverse audience making it difficult to even define a clear demographic. As an archaeological museum, the building appeals to a wide audience, including archaeologists, art historians, historians, architects, the Greek and international public, and tourists. Many of the visitors to the Acropolis Museum fall into Falk's categories of explorers, facilitators and seekers and the Museum must respond to their individual needs. Although it is impossible to understand how these groups respond individually to the museum without additional information, several preliminary conclusions can be made based on recent reviews, both scholarly and popular, as well as an understanding of the different visitor-types.

For tourists, or even educated visitors, who come to Athens to visit the Museum it is possible to consider three of Faulk's categories of viewers: the explorers, facilitators and seekers. It is reasonable to assume that many individuals—the explorers—seek out the Museum as a destination, intentionally add Athens to their itinerary and come prepared with a basic knowledge

[13] It must be noted that Falk distinguishes several other categories of visitors, which could all be applied to the Museum, but for the current discussion only three are being considered.

of Greek archaeology, Athenian history or a mix of both. For these visitors, the Museum offers a richly articulated program, a breadth of material, and the opportunity to simultaneously witness many layers of the Athenian Acropolis, including the current moment. Other visitors—the facilitators—visit the Museum as partners, parents, or children and have less direct interest in the material. For these individuals, the Museum provides a number of individually digestible exhibition spaces, on-site educational material, and access to the most-treasured artifacts of the Athenian Acropolis. Lastly, many individuals—the seekers--come to the Museum because of its reputation, the hype surrounding the building itself or its contents. For these visitors, the Museum delivers world-class architecture and artifacts and access to individual gallery spaces. Thus, while no visitor is alike, and not all visitors spend the time to acknowledge the ultimate exhibition program, the Museum has much to offer to many types of audiences.

Certainly tourists are one of the primary audiences of the museums in its day-to-day life, however, the building as a conceptual space reaches a far greater audience with a much larger message. Since its delayed opening in 2009, the museum has received mixed responses from the public and professional communities, but the majority of publicity surrounding the building is overwhelmingly positive lauding its homage to the Parthenon reliefs and citing the building as further reason for the return of the reliefs from the British Museum(Kelly 2007; Gonchar 2007; Bors 2009; Stephens 2009). Negative critiques of the space, while scarcer, attack the overly minimalist exterior, warehouse-like interior and poor exhibition design in galleries other than the Parthenon level (Stara 2009). The museum's design and its relationship with the Acropolis accomplishes many goals – political, conceptual and museological – which are articulated by a

variety of individuals within a widely defined community. Moreover, the museum itself is often cited as an argument for the return the Parthenon reliefs to Athens.

The Parthenon gallery, as the climax of the museum, has received the most attention from critics who understand the space as a physical, visual and experiential replication of the adjacent Parthenon. In a August 9, 2009 article, Kenneth Baker of the *San Francisco Chronicle* says that the gallery, "duplicates the footprint and orientation of the Parthenon, so visitors encounter the sculptural fragments on view in the relationship they would have had when the Parthenon was intact." *The Times* writer Hugh Pearman says on June 28, 2009, "If ever a new piece of architecture were politically charged, the New Acropolis Museum is it.…Tschumi, then, has remade the Acropolis inside his building. Professional critiques bear a similar tone as Suzanne Stephens from the *Architectural Record* notes that "The Parthenon Gallery's space and majesty alone makes the strongest argument for returning the Elgin Marbles to Greece" (Stephens 2009). Although these comments do not come as the result of an academic study or museum survey, they all reflect the positive audience response that is echoed throughout the global community. Furthermore, the comments, although specific to the Parthenon Gallery, indicate an awareness of Tschumi and Pandermalis' successful and influential program.

Response to the Archaic galleries has been slightly less laudatory, perhaps due to the space's lower profile. Although in theory the thematic divisions of the Archaic gallery seem somewhat clear and even appear to contribute to an overarching archaeological narrative, as constructed, their clarity to the audience remains questionable. In review of the museum in the *New York Times* on June 23, 2009 writer Michael Kimmelman expresses a rare, and extremely subtle, critique of the second floor Archaic galleries saying, "statues mill about a big gallery like a

crowd at an agora, a curatorial and architectural whimsy that risks visitors missing works like the *Kritios Boy*, which nearly hides to one side." Kimmelman's critique expresses the potential problems in gallery's intended exhibition program, the complex nature of which is not clearly articulated to the viewing audience. Nonetheless, as Kimmelman's comments make clear, although Pandermalis' carefully crafted thematic categories are not evident, the sculptures' arrangement within the gallery does provide a sense of unity and perhaps even invokes their original setting on the Acropolis as votive offerings.

Conclusions

As Tschumi has noted, the concept for the New Acropolis Museum arose as a result of both content and context. The product of this conceptual marriage is a building that does not merely house artifacts as artworks, but actually makes a poignant statement. Although the original concept for the museum focused on the treasured objects using minimalist architecture that highlights these individual pieces, the confluence of many factors has also resulted in a building that highlights the Athenian Acropolis as a whole, rather than any one, individual piece. As Duke noted in his writings on cultural tourism,

> [each] site is a performance presented by people in the present, that is archaeologists, site managers and so forth so when tourists visit a site, they are looking not just at the past, but also at themselves, or at least their society as defined by the people putting on the show (Duke 2007, 61).

Thus, according to Duke, it is impossible for the New Acropolis Museum to be entirely neutral because of its modern-day creators who hold their own opinions and biases. Therefore, it is entirely possible to understand the New Acropolis Museum in terms of its creator(s), whether this is understood to be Bernard Tschumi, Dimitrios Pandermalis, the Museum Committee, or the

Greek and international community at large. For the present purposes, *who* created the museum is not as important as *what* they created and although the attention has been largely focused on the building as a realization of Tschumi's own tripartite notions the most basic issue at hand is its ability to effectively communicate a message to the audience, in this case museum visitors. As has been demonstrated, the museum responds to a variety of goals and objectives with different solutions, but perhaps its most significant comment relates to its own ability to successfully and appropriately reunite and re-contextualize all artifacts from the Acropolis as an attestation to the greatness of the Athenian Acropolis itself. The Museum, unlike any other space, unites artifacts from the Acropolis and provides a visitor-experience that is similar to that one undergoes when visiting the *actual* Acropolis. In its present state, Christopher Hume explains the museum's success when he says "the New Acropolis Museum puts Athens back in the forefront of its own history" (Hume, "Modernity Enhances Antiquity" *Toronto Star* June 21, 2009). It is this realization that Tschumi's building invokes in its viewers—whether virtual or real, local or global, archaeologist or collector, explorer or facilitator. The Museum does not merely display artwork, but it encapsulates and shelters the history of the Athenian Acropolis within its transparent glass walls. In this way, the Museum convinces the world that the marbles must be returned--because in order for the history to be complete, the marbles, along with all other artifacts, must be together as a testament to the Sacred Rock.

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