Introduction

Preludes: Founding Myth and Archive

After Alexander had conquered Egypt, he was anxious to found a great and populous Greek city there, to be called after him... As he lay asleep he dreamed that a grey-haired man of venerable appearance stood by his side and recited these lines from the Odyssey:

Out of the tossing sea where it breaks on the beaches of Egypt
Rises an isle from the waters: the name that men give it is Pharos.

Alexander rose the next morning and immediately visited Pharos... he declared that Homer, besides his other admirable qualities, was also a very far-seeing architect, and he ordered the plan of the city to be designed so that it would conform to this site. (Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 1973:282)

Alexandria, which is our birthplace, has mapped out this circle for all Western language: to write was to return, to come back to the beginning to grasp again the first instance; it is to witness anew the dawn. Hence, the mythical function of literature to this day, hence its relation to the ancient: hence, the privilege it has granted to analogy, to similarity, to all the marvels of identity. Hence, above all, a structure of repetition which indicated its very existence. (Poucalt, *Le Language et L’Espace*, [1964] quoted in Errera 1997:138)

According to Plutarch, the city of Alexandria, Egypt, was revealed to Alexander the Great in a dream; his mentor, the philosopher Aristotle (the ‘grey-haired’ ‘venerable’ man) is said to have appeared before Alexander guiding the hero to what was to become Alexandria’s famous promontory: the Isle of Pharos. Alexander’s map or guidebook was *The Odyssey*. This famous ancient epic
account of an heroic homecoming was subsequently positioned as the city’s founding text, an act that afforded Homer the accolade of the city’s ‘architect’ in the epic visionary sense (Plutarch 1973:282). Accompanying this epic drama of the city’s foundation were further examples of what Jacques Derrida has dubbed the ‘sure signs’ of a tradition (Derrida in Naas 2003:48–49) in the form of ‘preludes’ and ‘heroic precedents’ accomplished by Alexander that accentuated the ‘predestined’ nature of the city’s creation (Polignac 2000a:33). Plutarch’s focus turns to Alexander’s pilgrimage to Siwa Oasis and his consultation with the Oracle of Zeus-Ammon. The Oracle subsequently legitimated both hero and city. Not only was Alexander ‘proclaimed son of god’ and thus conferred with ‘divine origin’, but his project of ‘world conquest’ was endorsed, which drew him further East (Polignac 2000a:33).

A long line of inventors and promoters of legend spanning both ancient and modern worlds have engaged in ‘reviving and reformulating’ Alexandria’s myth and memory (Polignac 2000b:214). It is, however, those of the West, as self-appointed heirs of the ‘Greek’ tradition, who have dominated the scene and whose ‘monolithic transmission’ (Jacob & Polignac 2000:18) of Alexandria’s legacy into modernity has claimed possession of Alexandria’s foundational dramas and its motif of homecoming as part of the West’s own odyssey: its epic search for origins, for an ancient homeland, and, crucially, for metaphysical roots. The accompanying desire to stage modernity’s march of civilisation in the footsteps of Alexander also saw the Westernisation of Alexandria’s potent lexicon of ‘signs and images’ (Polignac 2000b:212) and its ‘ready canon’ of ‘myths and icons’ (Halim 2002a:5). A claim is thus made both to the monumental heritage of this iconic, marble city and its associated set of values. Not only then do the Pharos Lighthouse (one of the Wonders of the ancient World), the Ptolemies’ royal palaces site (synonymous with the seductions of Cleopatra, Mark Anthony, and Julius Caesar), the Serapeum (the famous temple complex), and Alexander’s Tomb feature within this vision but the vision is extended by the West to encompass Alexandria’s potent characterisation as the New Athens and as the ‘meeting point of East and West’ and to use these characterisations as an entry point to lay claim to the city’s foundational values: as the ‘birthplace’ of cosmopolitanism, universalism, and the scene of intellectual, humanistic philosophical inquiry (see Klibansky 2000; Polignac 2000b).

Significantly for this book, in which I engage in a critical dialogue with the disciplines of museology, heritage discourse, and cultural memory (with the intention of opening these domains up to interdisciplinary scrutiny), it is Alexandria’s ancient archive – the Mouseion and Library – that as Strabo, and other ancient authors made clear, emerges at the locus point of the city and its mythologisation (Polignac 2000a). Built in the third century BCE by...
Prolemy Soter, the Monoseion/Library has been cast as an ‘enigma’ (Abadi 1990:15). Although little is known about the institution, it is best understood as a composite of a Temple of the Muses, a ‘universal’ library, a philosophical academy, and a planetarium. The ancient Alexandria brought together texts, learned men, and artefacts in an attempt to fuse ‘Greek’ heritage with aspirations of acquiring ‘universal’ knowledge (Abadi 1990:15). Writ larger, the archive and wider mythologisations of the city merge powerfully to cast the city as ‘centre-point’, as ‘microcosm of the world’ and as ‘memory of the world’ (Polignac 2000a:42). A series of metaphors have been mobilised to define Alexandria further as ‘a museum town, a mirror town which would reflect the entire world at the same time as the glory of the dynasty’ (Jacob & Polignac 2000:14).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, for the many historiographers and writers reflecting on a vision of themselves within Alexandria’s ancient heritage, the ancient Alexandria has provided a mirror for the retrospective gaze of traditional museum historians intent on (re-)possessing a desired or imagined ancient ancestor (cf Bazin 1967; Burcaw 1997 [1921]:25–26). The museological/heritage purchase can be seen as part of wider acts of empathetic identification (often bound up in a narcissistic, colonising trope) that more generally have claimed possession of Alexandria’s ‘signs and images’ and its ‘myths and icons’ as exclusive ‘self objects’ (cf Kohut 1978) and resources by which the West’s identity and memory-work can be managed, mediated, and manipulated. As such, Alexandria has come to serve as the point of origin for the West’s cultural identity, many of the West’s cultural institutions, and, with more depth still, its foundational values.

In a final, but equally potent endnote, Alexandria as odyssey and as homecoming is underpinned by both a trauma of origin and a myth of redemption. It is the destruction of the Ancient Monoseion/Library that, with some paradox and great effectiveness, secures its status as phoenix institution (Findlen 2000:176). The event is read by the West as the traumatic loss of an ancient ancestor and embeds the institution, like the city itself, in an eutropic poetics of melancholy, nostalgia, and loss. It is also the mechanism that gives birth to the redemptive urge and the repetitive desire to build Alexandria ‘on the ruins’.

What has become known more broadly as the Alexandria project and particularised by traditional museologists as the Alexandria paradigm is bound up in a ‘Myth of Return and Redemption’ (Foucault 1964), in which Alexandria and its archive are positioned as a site of renewal and rebirth. Here, too, the myth holds in tension its initial expression as a literary, metaphorical/metaphysical project of retrievalism – as Foucault makes explicit ‘to write was to return’ – with acts of material objectification (quoted in Errerra 1997:138).
The latter, for example, has seen the ancient Alexandria objectified from the Renaissance onward as a template in the West for its archival institutions (and subsequently mapped into its colonial possessions); more specifically, it has been invested as a model for the ‘universal’, encyclopedic collections synonymous with the Enlightenment period and into the late nineteenth and twentieth century as the blueprint for the cosmopolitan, colonial, public museum. The British Museum (Boulton 1939) and the Louvre, among others, have claimed a shared ancestry as a ‘latter day Alexandrian museum’ (Lewis 1992:10). The ancient Alexandria, as the casualty of what is understood as an originary act of iconoclasm, has been canonised as the icon from which the traditional heritage paradigm of loss and preservation establishes its roots (Lowenthal 1985:109). In the process, Alexandria’s wider foundational values – its cosmopolitanism, its universalism, and its humanism – have been essentialised as core heritage values and the motivations behind modernity’s ongoing ‘heritage crusades’ (cf Lowenthal 1996).

**Egypt’s Fourth Pyramid**

Despite its loss, or rather because of it, the ancient library has never lost its hold on the European imagination... What had been not the only but perhaps the most famous library, museum, and even garden of the Hellenistic period was banished to the arts of legend and myth... Today, this interest in the past is being encouraged by a vision of the future – the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, an ultramodern library and conference centre, developed under the auspices of UNESCO and the Egyptian government, and rising on the shoreline of Alexandria, near the place where the ancient buildings are thought to have been. The international enterprise is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge and will attract scholars from many countries. It will celebrate the cosmopolitanism that is the city and culture of Alexandria, and the traditions of internationalism, critical questioning, and freedom of enquiry that were at varying times the hallmarks of the ancient library (MacLeod 2002:xx)

The central focus of this book is a new, powerful, intervention into Alexandria’s genealogy. This intervention makes new and alternative purchases on the Alexandria project and its associated myths of return and redemption and takes the form of a contemporary scheme initiated by academics at Alexandria University in the 1970s and subsequently developed by the Egyptian government in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) with the objective to rebuild the Alexandrina ‘on the ruins’. This contemporary endeavour to reclaim Alexander’s dream is...
itself of epic, monumental proportions. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina – or the New Alexandrina – has been dubbed ‘Egypt’s Fourth Pyramid’ and a ‘Wonder of the Modern World’ (see Mitchell 1998:107–08) and hailed as Egypt’s millennium cultural project. The New Alexandrina has taken nearly thirty years to emerge and has cost over $220 million (Figure 1).

In a creative cosmopolitan conflation of ancient and modern worlds, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina mirrors and reflects, in modern form, the key components of the ancient third-century institution. Where was once the Mouseion (the Temple of the Muses) are now museums dedicated to, among other things, science, calligraphy, and archaeology. A planetarium completes another aspect of the ancient ancestor institution, while a vast library space occupies a substantial part of the building and contains collections of both ‘real’ and digital texts (Figure 2). In a further creative translation, the hybrid design of the Alexandrina building combines the old and the ultramodern with the intention of pitching the institution, like the city itself, into future-oriented visions.

What interests me is that the revival of the ancient Alexandrina marks a dramatic inversion or reversal of the usual flow of translations and transmissions of an archive’s mythology into modernity, and, as such evokes new crossings-over and hybridisations. As MacLeod (quoted above) reiterated,
the project marks a shift in terms of opening up the myth and the memory of the city and archive from the exclusive hold of the European, or, more broadly stated, Western, imagination and has the ability to repossess associated ‘signs and images’ and ‘myths and icons’ – notably those of cosmopolitanism – for contemporary Egyptian dream-work (MacLeod 2002:xii).

New Alexandrina, New Museology

My central claim is that the current Alexandria project and its dreams of contemporary cultural revival exact a challenge to academic engagement with the Alexandrina paradigm. The timing of the project, for example, is such that it sets in play further crossings-over and paradoxes; most significantly, Egypt’s return or reattachment with the Alexandrina comes at a time when the Western academy is strategically detaching itself from the Alexandrina paradigm. Although the Bibliotheca Alexandrina has already been consigned to the ‘anxiety of legend and myth’ (MacLeod 2002:xii), full detachment from the Alexandrina paradigm has been exacted as critics have responded to more general shifts within the academy. Not only has postmodernity’s never-ending return finished with myths of return by having squeezed these myths
dry of all metaphor, but, in more broad terms, social scientists and cultural theorists have also made explicit their rejection of the discourse of ancient origins and of elitist, colonial, universalising ‘cosmopolitics’ (see, for example, Clifford 1998).

Moreover, following in the footsteps of the critics mentioned above, museologists and heritage theorists in recent times have critically reviewed their historical attachment to the Alexandrina paradigm as an adherence to an ‘old’ museology (cf Vergo 1989) and have compared the ‘old’ museology unfavourably to a ‘new’, critical museology that has similarly placed the ‘birth’ of the museum in modern times by placing a stress on alternative Foucauldian genealogies of rupture and discontinuity (for example, Bennett 1994; Crimp 1997 [1993]; Hooper-Greenhill 1992). Here, then, just as critics are detaching themselves from the paradigm – significantly without any critical reflection on its ongoing potencies – is a drama in which Alexandria is reexperiencing a revival of its museological past and ancient heritage by rerecting – if you like – the stones that ‘Western’ academics were setting out, intellectually and metaphorically, to demolish.

More significantly, the motif of repossession and of the reenactment of foundation ‘stones’ has a concomitant material expression within contemporary cultural revitalism. For, at the same time as the New Alexandrina project was returning this key icon to the contemporary city, wider acts of destabilisation took place as Alexandria – previously noted for its poverty of archaeology – witnessed the return of objects from its ancient past to the modern city. Significantly, recent land and underwater excavations have reclaimed other potent ‘lost’ icons; special attention has been focused on excavations directed by French teams at Fort Quit Bey, where Pharos once stood (Figure 3), and the ‘Cleopatra ‘96’ project at the ancient royal palace site in the Eastern harbour of Alexandria (Empereur 1998; Goddio 1998) (Figure 4). These projects and the return of archaeological ‘material memories’ (Kwint 1999) have prompted further aspirations and have emerged as the point of origin for a dramatic ‘museumification’ and ‘heritagification’ of the contemporary city (Figure 5). Plans, again supported by UNESCO, have been mooted not only to build a museum in the Eastern harbour ‘to rival the Sphinx underwater’ but also to inscribe the whole of Alexandria as a UNESCO world heritage site (UNESCO 1997).

Contemporary Return

The central argument of my text is that the ‘Western’ academy and ‘new’ museology, by detaching themselves from the Alexandria project, have lost
Figure 3. Reemerging Heritage in Alexandria’s Eastern Harbour: Object lifted by archaeologists at the Qait Bay/Pharos site. The object is one of a number of 60-ton blocks surrounding the ancient lighthouse’s entrance. In the background is Qait Bay Fort, built in 1477 on the site of the ancient lighthouse. (source: ©stephecompoint.com; photo Stephane Compoint)

Figure 4. Past in the Present, Royal Palace site, Alexandria’s Eastern Harbour: A diver is locating the exact position of a Sphinx, supposed to represent Cleopatra’s father, Ptolemy XII, with a differential underwater GPS. (source: Franck Goddio/ Hilti Foundation; photo Jérôme Delafosse)
Figure 5. Revivalism As ‘Heritification’: Line drawing of Alexandria’s Eastern Harbour showing the proximity of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina to the archaeological missions (source: Beverley Butler and Stuart Laidlaw)

a potent paradigm with which to investigate what is at stake in the contexts mentioned above and thus to engage with contemporary commitments to new and alternative acts of memory-work. Moreover, since contemporary Alexandria is reemerging as a site of international museological and heritage activity, by extension, museologists and heritage critics are the best placed to critically investigate this context. In this sense, museological and heritage practice has outstripped academic museological discourse, and so contemporary Alexandria is witness to a crisis/breakthrough of the Alexandria project and associated Alexandrina paradigm. The practical working out of the project in contemporary Alexandria is indicative of the fact that, despite intellectual rejection of the Alexandrina paradigm by many academics, ancient Alexandria continues to exert a mythology powerful enough to fuel a substantial ‘new’ attempt at revivalism. The project is also illustrative of the potency of the ancient myth and memory to provide a means of reformulating many of the ‘old’ museological characterisations in new national, elite, and global configurations.

Contemporary revivalism has destabilised the traditional Western thesis predicated, historically, on the export of the Alexandria project to the West. The Alexandrina paradigm’s own homecoming has also been met with the destabilising effects of the return of objects from Alexandria’s ancient past to the modern city. Not only has revivalism disturbed the Western mythical vision
of Alexandria based, as it is, on an *a priori* poetics of nostalgia and loss, but it has also opened this vision up to reformulation, redevelopment, and hybridisation as a means to enact the renewal and redemption of contemporary Alexandria and of the wider Egyptian context. An investigation of this process provides an opportunity for harnessing these motifs of destabilisation, homecoming, and crisis/breakthrough of origins in order to use them as tools to critically recast Alexandrian revivalism as an ethnographic case-study analysis. My objective is thus to gain an empirical purchase on the subtleties and the complexities of the rise of heritage, of urban revivalism and memory-work, in Alexandria in a post/excolonial context.

**Homecoming**

I use the overall theme of the Alexandrina’s homecoming as my central organisational motif. I use it as a means to critically read the contemporary odyssey and return to origins as an act of destabilisation of the Alexandria project. As the cultural critic Edward Said stated – with a specific gesture to the Alexandrian poet Cavafy – the genre of the ‘odyssey’ is that of a journey/process that is subject to the discovery of what ‘attracts’ and what ‘threatens’ and to a certain Freudian ‘working out’ as one makes one’s way along an ‘extremely intricate’ voyage/pathway toward something ‘new’ (Said in Barenboim & Said 2002:48). I also view Alexandria’s contemporary odyssey in terms of a movement that potentially brings new insight into the Western imagination’s purchase on the city and archive and the process in which the ‘old’ dreamworld is opened up to ‘new’ visions, hybridisations, metamorphoses, and mediations as it encounters the ‘real’ of the modern city of Alexandria.

My objective is to access a shift beyond the ‘old’/‘new’ museological polarised positions in a specific contribution that links alternative conceptualisations of museum/heritage/memory discourse with grounded research. My critical return to museology’s origins thus allows me to engage in a fundamental rethinking of the core, foundational values as they map across myth-historical, literary-metaphysical, and intangible/tangible realms and onto the operational ‘real’. Moreover, this engagement leads me to address what I argue is the need for a reconceptualisation of museology/heritage theory and practice based on alternative sets of values, critical approaches, theorisations, lived experiences, and ‘cosmopolitics’ (cf Cheah & Robbins 1998), which are currently located outside mainstream museology and heritage studies and so remain largely unrecognised. I argue that these framings, which currently characterise the contemporary global domain of cultural revivalism, need to be centred as the basis for museology/heritage studies’ articulation of their own ‘possible futures’ (cf Venn 2002:65).
**Ethnography of the ‘Post-Museum’**

The contemporary Alexandria project is perfectly placed to offer an ethnographic account of what Hooper-Greenhill has recently characterised as the ‘post-museum’ (Hooper-Greenhill 2001:152–62). She envisages the ‘post-museum’ as retaining ‘some of the characteristics of its parent [the Modernist museum], but it will reshape them to its own ends’ (Hooper-Greenhill 2001:152). In a dramatic break with ‘old’ museological discourse, she asserts how ‘it is likely too, that much of the intellectual development of the post-museum will take place outside the major European centres which witnessed the birth of the museum’ and will be a space within which the tangible and intangible (memories, songs, cultural traditions) heritage motivates and mediates ‘mutual nurturing partnerships and celebrations of diversity’ (Hooper-Greenhill 2001:153). To avoid ‘new’ museological idealisations and post-museological ‘redemptive’ formulas, however, one needs to problematise whether Hooper-Greenhill’s interventions make a serious break with origins and with authenticity. Maleuvre, for example, in his text *Museums: Memories* (1999), body disputes the ability of museology to articulate such a break, and, pursuing a politics and an alternative discourse of memory, he argues that museologies both ‘old’ and ‘new’ continue to ‘deal in identification rather than identity’ and as such demand the ‘mimetic absorption of the individual into an ideal image of a group, the prototype, the ancestor, the father’ and thus ‘compliance with an ego-ideal’ (Maleuvre 1999:109–10).

The challenge being addressed is, therefore, not to be understood and critiqued simply in terms of either ‘old’ or ‘new’ museologies/heritages, but rather the process of identification and memory-work that takes place in the discourse of ‘empowerment’ that surrounds the ‘revised’ museum simply underscores the fact that museums and heritage projects are still in the business of transforming individuals into collectives and into citizens. I would, therefore, reiterate that underpinning this drama is the failure and the need of the mainstream museum/heritage culture to fully conceptualise a vision of itself within a wider globalised and more grounded realpolitik. Furthermore, for any substantial change to take place, this fundamental redefinition of foundational identities needs to move beyond that of ‘old’ and ‘new’ returns to Classical Aristotelian and Platonic philosophical-memory paradigms and templates and to dissolve the dichotomies and Eurocentrism bound up in characterisations of ‘collective’ and ‘individual’ memory in order to apprehend more subtle and nuanced ‘memorialist approach’ to memory-work. This process demands a commitment to the centring of alternative theoretical perspectives on museological and archival discourse as ‘institutions of memory’ (Crane 2000) or, better still, as ‘technologies of postmemory’ (Hirsch 1997), in order to
address the ‘messy politics’ of exchange and encounter – and [the] utopian/distopic tensions and clashes as they map across elite and popular discourse – which the Alexandrina project as ‘cosmopolitan contact zone’ (cf Clifford 1998:369) and as ethnographic case study brings home.

An Ethnographic Approach

In pursuing an ethnographic approach to the Alexandrina’s odyssey of homecoming in subsequent chapters, my objective is to bring to contemporary mainstream museum heritage studies and cultural memory a sufficiently grounded approach that goes beyond that of ‘visitor studies’ response to museums, galleries, and sites and that shifts the focus from quantitative to qualitative methodologies. I see my research as an important contribution to the growing body (though still small in proportional terms) of ethnographic approaches to heritage and museums, but one that is nevertheless original in its approach. Therefore, although an embryonic ethnography of specific museum and heritage sites can be currently identified (for example, Geismar & Tilley 2003; Handler & Gable 1997; Jones 2006; Kreps 2003; MacDonald 2002; Meskill 2006; Smith 2006), the task of this text is to shift attention to a much wider and complex operational reality in which globalised heritage revival programmes are conducted and can be understood.

In developing my approach, I have been influenced by recent reworkings of actor-network theory (Callon 1998; Latour 1993, v1999; Law & Hassard 1999). A major concern of mine has been to avoid the macro/micro distinction that often accompanies studies that purport to relate international agencies, state entities, and local networks involved in the actualisation of a project such as the Alexandrina. As Latour remarked: ‘The two extremes, local and global, are much less interesting than the intermediary arrangements that we are calling networks’ (Latour 1993:121–22). From this critical position I examine how international cultural heritage projects are ‘formatted’ through the operations of a range of social actors.

I chart the Alexandrina’s contemporary odyssey as it undergoes transformation and translation, entanglement and disentanglement – from an idea initially revived by academics from Alexandria University; to its subsequent reinscription as a partnership between UNESCO and the Egyptian government; to its emergence as an architectural object; and to the continuous reworkings as the project is shaped and translated (and often contested) via a series of institutions (governmental and NGOs), groups, and individuals at local, national, and international levels. Ethnographic methods thus offer a means of
focusing on certain key players in actor-networks as a means to see them in a multifaceted sense as acting toward the Alexandrina project as a material part of a network that is always in process and that is subject to redefinitions in terms of informants’ sense of its importance or value. In exploring contemporary revivalism in terms, for example, of a set of aspirations, as a bureaucratic creation, and by mapping the subsequent operational networking and impacts of the Alexandrina project, I argue that what is required is the need to ‘talk to people’ (typically in semi-structured interviews) in several and diverse settings in order to precisely establish the connections and relationships that space, time, and amnesia interrupt and disjoin. Revivalism, for example, as a model or fulcrum for future-oriented projects is given substance through informants’ recollections of past dramas and in the articulation of a set of aspirations.

This approach also allows me to demonstrate that, alongside the Bibliotheca Alexandrina's emergence, also emerges an 'official' celebratory revivalist thesis and a complex 'messy cosmopolitics' bound up in 'border-crossings' and 'contact zones' (Clifford 1998:369) born of the intimacies, tensions, and discrepancies between this dominant thesis and coexistent struggles to particularise, pluralise, and popularise the Alexandrina's cosmopolitics.

In this context, cultural heritage projects are instituted as spaces in which all actions are analysed in terms of combinations, associations, relations, and strategies of positioning. Given that globalisation is itself broadly best conceived as a dynamic of flows (capital, information, images, persons, and so on) rather than discrete positions as implied by the languages of First and Third Worldism, studying such networks of actors is also consistent with the dynamic of interaction rather than institutional oppositions and conflicts. Similarly, given the recognition of the diverse and interactive nature of global/local relations, the idea of context has taken on a more dispersed and integrative definition than the usual meaning of identity in one place. To address the methodological challenges I have pursued a multi-sited ethnographic approach to map the diverse networks, flows, and impacts of contemporary revivalism (Marcus 1998).

I have also followed Latour in not limiting the notion of actor to persons and instead recognise that ‘actors’ better describes the processes by which persons and objects are interchangeable ‘agents’ in their capacity to have an effect and, as such, emerge as foci for looking at connections and tracing relationships of agency that combine persons and objects into a single nexus (cf Gell 1998). I have therefore been concerned to show that the physical building of the Alexandrina and the archaeological objects discovered in Qait Bey cannot be separated from the agency of persons and in fact fuse with them to create hybrid
person/objects in the space constituted by each of these heritage projects. If we use the concept of ‘actants’ then, rather than actors, subjectivity can permeate the person/object relation and also the language of my text such that symbolic inversions can be specifically used to demonstrate the potency of buildings and objects within the discourses of ‘revival’, ‘entanglement’, and ‘transformation’ that rely on the institution of various practices, knowledges, and spaces.

In addition, I have been able to integrate literary, political, economic, and cultural arguments in the construction of those spaces that superficially we then choose to define as cultural heritage. I consider these arguments vital, too, for understanding the technicist ‘languages’ and ‘development apparatus’ (cf Ferguson 1994) deployed as standard discursive practices of heritage revivalism and regularly employed by a largely routinised group of ‘experts’ in different settings. I accept that my own role as an ‘actor’ requires self-reflection in terms of my attitudes and my reactions to ethnographic contexts and events. I am also aware of and moreover am interested in what might be described as the relative position of a previously investigated context or event to the results of a later investigation. And what is the nature of memory-work as ‘revision’?

The motif of fluidity, changing perspectives, and the shaping and redefinition of revivalist ‘memory’ (that is, revivalism’s account of ‘itself’) is a specific concern and interest of my ethnography, and, I would argue, it is a dynamic that not only narrates collaborations and ‘ententes’ but also illustrates how revivalism has emerged as a traumatic experience for some actors and groups. It reveals that the very process of disentangling actually entangles things in new contexts. Moreover, the need to disturb the vision of revivalism as a ‘world in itself’ must also be recognised in terms of highlighting how revivalism’s most dramatic faultlines relate to its increased exposure to the real of a world traumatised by the events of the September 11th attacks. Also, closer to home, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians as well as the ongoing Intifada, as I show, continue to have profound effects on the Bibliotheca’s homecoming. I seek to draw from my alternative theorisations and the operational expression of these dramas in the setting of contemporary Alexandria a radical critique of the implications my research has for reconceptualising the foundational concepts, values, practices, and ethics of cultural heritage discourse. Therefore, while the theoretical work of this book is not set apart from the concrete practices of the individual chapters, Chapters 1 and 2 provide a critical intellectual basis for moving ethnographically into the contemporary context in Chapters 3 to 7. This arrangement allows me to restate my text within the context of my fieldwork investigations and my own series of returns to Alexandria (my fieldwork phases).
Notes

1. Derrida reiterates that any act of 'taking on a tradition' requires engaging in 'not only the philosophical [notably Aristotle and Plato’s work] but the literary tradition that begins with the epic poetry of Homer' (Naas 2003:xxiv). Derrida’s point is to open the European 'epic tradition' to 'other' noncanonical readings.

2. Hypatia is typically identified as the (only) female presence at the ancient Alexandria. I address the gender dynamics of her myth-history later in my text.

3. The terminology used in relation to Alexandria and its institutions, past and present, takes various forms. The Alexandria Museum/Library is a reference to the legendary ancient institution; the Alexandria project refers to the Euro-Western intellectual-metaphysical urge and aspiration to 'rebuild' Alexandria on the ruins. As Foucault argued, this has typically taken the form of a literary 'return' and 'revivalism.' This project has in turn been particularized by traditional museologists as the Alexandria paradigm with these paradigmatic qualities increasingly bound up in the process of 'return/revival' as material objectification. The ‘Bibliotheca Alexandria’ and Alexandria are terms identified with both the ancient and contemporary institutions; in keeping with fieldwork informants and other commentators I make the distinction between past and present institutions by further defining the difference between the ancient Alexandria and the New Alexandria, respectively.

4. Critical museologists, such as Hooper-Greenhill (1992) and Crimp (1997), have engaged in strategic, critical returns to what have been dubbed 'original institutions' (Crimp 1997:18) within the 'old' or traditional museological trajectory—that is, to Renaissance institutions/Wunderkammer and so on. Taking into account honourable exceptions critiqued in Chapter 2 (which are very different to my own ethnographic project), no large-scale critical returns have been made by critics to either ancient origins or to the Alexandria paradigm. Therefore, while I take as a useful starting point Crimp’s recommendation that museological acts of return to 'originary institutions' need to be undertaken not just to 'uncover their [museums'] true histories' but to observe how they have been pressed into the service of contemporary museological historicism (Crimp 1997:18), my own project of going beyond the 'old/new' museological looks to alternative critical perspectives.

5. My objective to reconceptualise museum and heritage memory-work aligns me to a critical appreciation of the intimacies of heritage discourse to Classical and Renaissance 'arts of memory' (cf. Yates 1978) and to debates of the nineteenth-century crises of memory and the twentieth-century 'memory-boom' as apprehended by Nora, Halbwachs, Benjamin, Freud, and other theorists (see Radstone 2000). Here one can navigate discussions on collective, private, and counter memory plus the dynamics of commemoration, trauma, remembering, and forgetting. My interest, however, goes beyond 'Euro-North American' preoccupations and aligns me to an 'ethnographic turn' and critical 'memorialist approach' (see Butler 2006) that allows me to explore alternative, marginalised, and non-western forms of cultural transmission, ancestry, and tradition, which situate memory-work as an active, performative process bound up in memorialising, ancestry, ritual, and embodied acts. I am interested in the emergent ‘cosmopolitics’, hybridisations, and the return and presence of ‘old’ essentializing tropes often in new configurations.
6. Kreps (2003) and her call to liberate culture from Eurocentric values and concepts should be noted as a powerful intervention. While she pursues ethnographies of ‘new heritage discourse’ and a ‘new professionalism’, which she further defines as ‘comparative’/‘cross-cultural’ museologies, my task looks more to apprehending the hybridising cosmopolitics and neoessentialising tropes of large-scale global heritage discourse.

7. Meskill has recently claimed to have established a new field of archaeological ethnography. Given the nature of my research work, I could equally lay claim to such a pioneering field.

8. I am interested in the ‘reworking’ of actor-network theory to include literary, poetic, and other sources capable of further opening up and ‘humanising’ network discourse.

9. The core part of my fieldwork was carried out in the period 1995–2002 during the time of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina’s construction. I also made a number of return visits to Alexandria once the institution was fully opened. I was assisted in my work by Ahmad Omar, translator and epigrapher-diver, Department of Egyptian Underwater Archaeology, Alexandria.