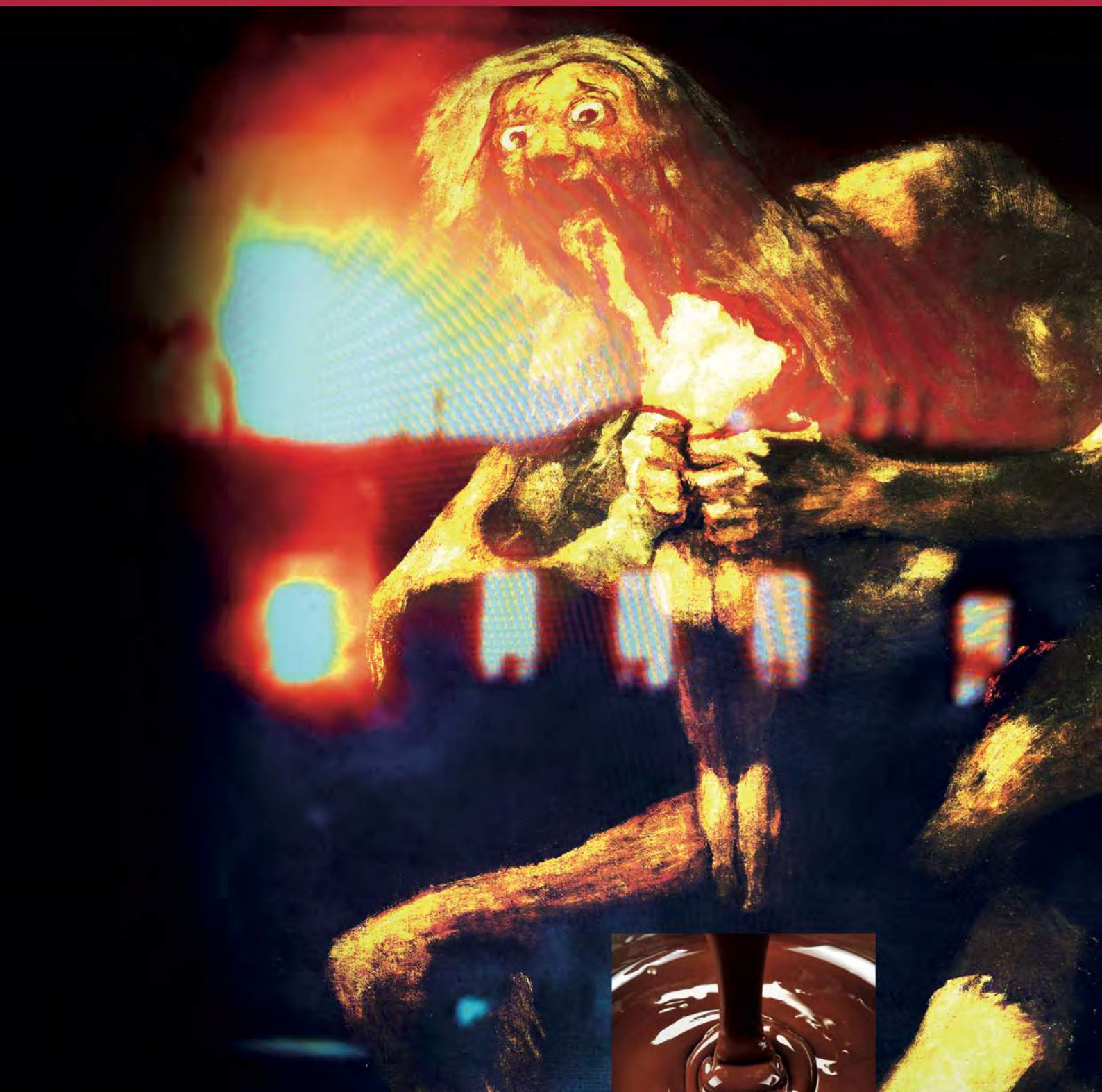


ISSUE 23, 2019

MUSEOLOGICAL REVIEW: (DIS)EMPOWERED MUSEUMS

A Peer-Reviewed Journal Edited by the PhD Students of the
School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester



Museological Review

Editors-in-Chief

Yang Chen

Chiara Marabelli

Editors

Cesare Cuzzola

Despina Gerasimidou

Blanca Jové

Lanzhou Luo

Anna Tulliach

Xueer Zou

Cover Design

Samantha Aylward (Creative Team, Marketing & Student Recruitment, University of Leicester)

Cover Image

Pedro França

Layout Design

Yang Chen

Contributors

Kristin Barry, Jelle Bouwhuis, Madeline Burkhardt, Abbey L. R. Ellis, Valeria Florenzano, CD

Green, Lisa Kennedy, Justyna Ładosz, Donata Miller, Paulo Miyada, Inês Quintanilha, Anamaría

Rojas Múnera, Kémel Sade Martínez, Alejandra Saladino, Sarita Sundar, Zoi Tsiviltidou, Barbara

Wood, Olga Zabalueva

Our Special Thanks

All Anonymous Peer-Reviewers

Strategy, Marketing and Communication, External Relations Division, University of Leicester

Web Team (Creative Services), Division of External Relations, University of Leicester

Gurpreet Ahluwalia, Katy Bunning, Christine Cheesman, Robin Clarke, Sandra Dudley, Tom

Eaton, Eloisa Rodrigues, David Unwin, Isobel Whitelegg

Contact

School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 19 University Road, Leicester LE1 7RF

museologicalreview@leicester.ac.uk

Social Media

Twitter: @LeicsMusReview

Illustrations

Absurd.Design

© 2019 School of Museum Studies,

University of Leicester

All rights reserved.

Permission must be obtained from the Editors for reproduction of any material in any form, except limited photocopying for education, non-profit use.

Opinions expressed in the publication are those of the authors, and are not necessarily those of the University of Leicester, the Department of Museum Studies, or the editors.

ISSN 1354-5825

Issue 23, 2018 - 2019

Issue 23

(Dis)Empowered Museums

Welcome to Issue 23 of Museological Review. This year's theme is '(Dis)empowered Museums'. As a response to the seventh PhD-led conference 'Museums (em)Power' in September 2018 at the Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, we invited people to reflect on the power of museums today.

Museums have the power to influence behaviour, foster change, improve lives and establish partnerships between different individuals and communities. Nevertheless, some would argue that museums are gradually losing their power. This disempowerment can be attributed to various factors, from financial restrictions to the current political situation. The fire at Brazil's National Museum last year, for example, has prompted reflection about the conception and development of the topics tackled in the issue. What does power, or lack of power, in museums look like today? And how does this impact their social role?

Following the huge number of responses during our call for papers, it has turned out that such themes are particularly timely and compelling on an international scale. The contributions presented show a variety of stories dealing with empowerment and disempowerment in museums and cultural institutions.

The image on the front cover of this issue is the very first that has been commissioned for the Museological Review. Created by Brazilian artist **Pedro França**, it offers a very personal representation of how disempowerment in museums looks like today.

In line with previous editions, Issue 23 offers a selection of platforms: twelve academic articles, one visual submission, two exhibition reviews, two interviews and the work of an artist. Contributions have been arranged according to three sub-themes: politics, visions and communities.

For the interviews, the terrible damage occurred to the National Museum of Rio and its collections provide the topic of discussion. Both **Alejandra Saladino** and **Paulo Miyada** live and work in Brazil. The former is a museum scholar based in Rio de Janeiro, the latter is a curator and researcher active in São Paulo. Both offer their perspectives on the social, political, economic situation that Brazil is currently facing. Drawing on the past, the conversations touch upon the relationship between historicism and the visual arts, social exclusion, artistic activism, the role of social media, public engagement activities and the future of neglected cultural institutions. Although the examples looked at in this issue are local in focus, their implications are global. Indeed, museums in various countries around the world are currently experiencing a time of considerable uncertainty.

The first thematic section of this issue, 'politics', begins with **Barbara Wood's** theoretical discussion about the significance of

'power' in the heritage sector. **CD Green** then dedicates an article to the attempts of the *Musée des Confluences*, a natural history museum in Lyon, France, to decolonise its uncomfortable past. Similarly, **Jelle Bouwhuis** looks at the de-colonisation of practices in art museums. **Olga Zabalueva** discusses the Museum of Movements in Malmö, Sweden, questioning the idea of political neutrality upon which the institution was founded. The first of the exhibition reviews is devoted to the Norwegian Fisheries Museum in Bergen, where **Zoi Tsviltidou** explores the potential of social agency that museums might utilise in prompting political change.

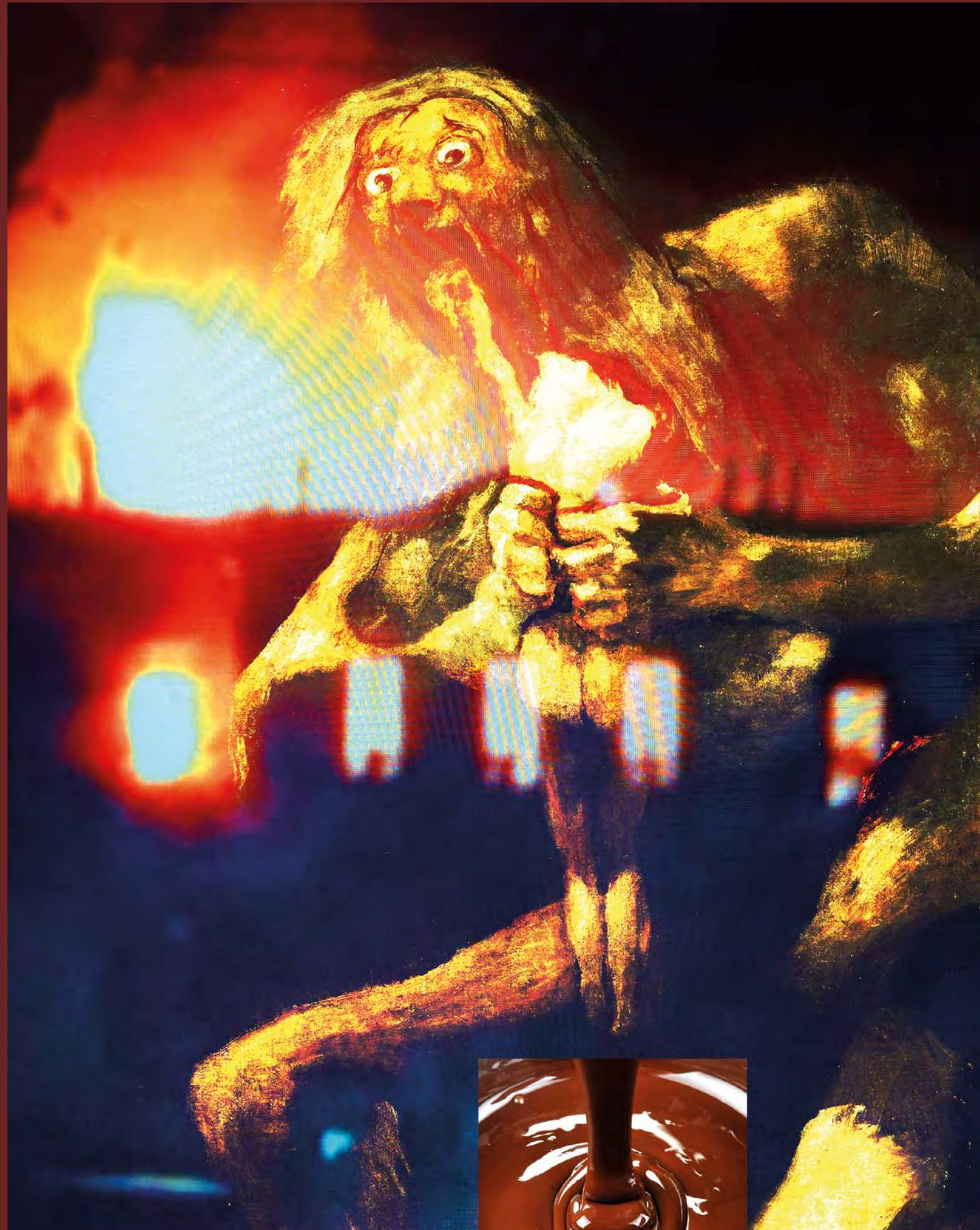
In the next section, 'visions', **Inês Quintanilha** examines the museological decisions behind the exhibition *Interactions* that was held at the House of European History in Brussels, Belgium, and the supposed message of *Europeanisation* it was meant to convey. **Lisa Kennedy** and **Donata Miller**, the founders of the Museum of Dissent, discuss their attempt to challenge what they perceive to be a lack of balance in traditional interpretation practices. **Madeline Burkhardt** talks about the importance of empathy and sensory engagement in interpreting challenging histories in the context of three exhibitions she curated for the Rosa Parks Museum, Montgomery, USA. The visual submission for this section is a photographic work by **Valeria Florenzano**. It portrays the archaeological site of Castellone di Suasa, Italy. The pleasant, tranquil scene depicted is deeply at odds with the economic struggle the site is actually facing.

For the third theme of this issue, 'communities', **Abbey Ellis** offers the second exhibition review, a critical perspective on the temporary, LGBTQ+-themed display *No Offence* at the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology in Oxford, UK. **Anamaría Rojas Múnera** and **Kémel Sade Martínez** discuss the Aysén Museums Network, a project that aims to strengthen the social impact of museums in the isolated region of Aysén, Chilean Patagonia. **Justyna Ładosz** explores the notion of empowerment in relation to the restitution of bodily remains and objects of cultural significance from museums to the communities to which they belong. **Kristin Barry's** contribution to the issue looks at the positive effects of community engagement activities and polyvocal interpretation in American plantation museums, an understandably contentious form of heritage site. To conclude, **Sarita Sundar** highlights the vital importance of co-operation and participation between museum professionals and locals during interpretation and representation processes in India.

Issue 23 Editorial Team

Contents

03	Editorial
05	Cover Image: AMUSEUM THERAPY ~ Pedro França
09	Contributors
11	Q&A with Paulo Miyada
15	Who Holds Power in Heritage and What Does That Mean for Museums? ~ Barbara Wood
25	Natural History Disavowed: Confronting Colonial Legacies in the <i>Musée des Confluences</i> ~ CD Green
37	Decolonise Art History, Decolonise Art Museums! ~ Jelle Bouwhuis
46	‘It’s the Right Who Belong in a Museum’: Radical Popular Movements in the Museum Context ~ Olga Zabalueva
58	Exhibition Review: The Norwegian Fisheries Museum: Industry, Power, and Ecology ~ Zoi Tsiviltidou
63	Q&A with Alejandra Saladino
67	<i>Interactions</i> in the House of European History ~ Inês Quintanilha
77	Creating the Museum of Dissent: Showcasing the Changeover Exhibition at the Museums Association Conference and Exhibition, Belfast 2018 ~ Lisa Kennedy & Donata Miller
88	Challenging the Narrative Through Art ~ Madeline Burkhardt
97	Visual Submission: A Place for All? Cultural Accessibility at Stake: an Italian Example ~ Valeria Florenzano
98	Exhibition Review: No Offence? – LGBTQ+ Histories at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford ~ Abbey L. R. Ellis
103	Museums networks in isolated territories: the case of Aysén Museums Network in Aysén Region, Chilean Patagonia ~ Anamaría Rojas Múnera & Kémel Sade Martínez
115	The Return of Cultural Objects and Human Remains as a Way of Healing the Historical Trauma of Indigenous Communities ~ Justyna Ładosz
126	[Dis]embodied Voices: War, Conflicting History, and the Interpretation of Plantation Museums through Community Involvement ~ Kristin Barry
136	Within and Without: Inclusions and Exclusions in Folk and Tribal Museums in India ~ Sarita Sundar



Cover Image: AMUSEUM THERAPY

By Pedro França

(1)

A museum is a decontextualization machine. The museological operation transforms objects into art, a gesture of the readymade, a *détournement*. As Malraux put it: “A Romanesque crucifix was not, for its contemporaries, a piece of sculpture. Nor was Cimabue’s *Madonna* a picture. Even Pheidias’ *Palas Athene* was not, primarily, a statue”.

However, objects removed from the everyday dynamics of life don’t simply die. Transported into the museum, they are like ghosts in a trap, undead entities that cannot see the light of day anymore, but may wander inside the museum walls, its windows covered by uv-blocking filters.

From a contemporary perspective, its clear why Europe needed museums. As a product of the modern state, the museum can be said to be its tool to elaborate a collective memory, to narrate the world according to a specific community’s perspective. In the worst case, a museum is the official confirmation of the imperial outlook, the site of a top-down ideological version of history, stories of taste, forms, civilization, etc. In the best case, however, a museum could function as the place for a collective psychoanalytic practice, where the living fragments of the past are combined and recombined, narrated, repeated, elaborated, in order to produce the past as past... a collective therapy through objects: invented objects, found, stolen or copied objects, involuntary objects.

In the movie *Night at the Museum*, Larry Daley (Ben Stiller) is a guard at the Museum of Natural History, in NY. During the night shift he notices that, after the public is gone, the figures in the museum take life and interact with each other. In this time out of time, Pharaohs, dinosaurs and American Civil War characters interact freely, reassuming their position in the morning. I claim this is correct. It corresponds exactly to the function of the museum to keep inside undead

fragments of time. Figures, documents and artworks inside it interact, play different roles, fight. This is why they should be kept inside. As the movie tells us, the true nightmare is not what goes on inside the museum, but what happens the moment the fragile pact that keep the museum pieces within its walls is broken, and the past breaks free (dinosaurs skeletons and giant stuffed mammals running wild in the streets).

(2)

In Brazil we feel at odds with museums. We are uncomfortable with its institutional character in the same way we are uncomfortable with the idea of state in general. For we are not fully Europeans, and the state apparatus (the centralised power) has always been seen by Amerindian societies as a political anti-destiny, something to be avoided at any cost. We have a cultural drive against the state, in the name of a political flexibility and social creativity. As every Brazilian knows very well, keeping minimum relations with it is a matter of survival (an Indio advises: ‘if you are out at night, by yourself, and you meet the State and it talks to you... Don’t answer’).

On the other hand, because we’re also not fully non-Europeans (or because we are uneuropeans, as in “undead”), we do have a state, a formal modern democracy, and we do have museums. However, we have always felt uncomfortable with them. I remember the endless debates that took place in Rio de Janeiro artistic circles during the 2000’s about how illegitimate it was to keep Helio Oiticica’s *Parangolés* in a museum. As we always hear about the institutionalisation of the art of the 1960s, the argument was as follows: one is supposed to be activating these works as they in the original manner, not staring at them as sacred objects. Well, I always felt weird about this logic. It seemed like institutional critique

in a context of very precarious institutions. Also, looking at the streets and the people around me, I always felt that the *Parangolés* really belonged to the past. It's as if its DNA has spread through culture, but the specific conditions of its existence outside the museum are now gone (and as we know, the *Parangolés* always existed at the fringe of institutionalisation, being shown for the first time by the doors of the Museum of Modern Art. The point is that the museum, as in society in general, could not really deal with the *Parangolés*, with samba, and the black bodies that wore them at Helio Oiticica's performance for the exhibition *Opinião 65* in 1965).

Like the state, however, museums cannot be avoided. If its not our future (hopefully) it's our past. Even if we dream of the collapse of the state – or especially if we do so, given that the state and capitalism are constitutive of who we are, of our collective *psyché* – we might have good use for museums, and we can feel the urgency of a museological turn in Brazil as the cold horses of authoritarianism, of militarism and racism return to the present from the past. I don't mean that we only need more museum “buildings”, although they are necessary; what we mostly need is a “museum attitude”, the crude confrontation with the haunting past, of its undead entities. Because in spite of what we thought could be possible – for example, when we made the *Anistia*, the official amnesty of the crimes committed during the military dictatorship (1964-1985) – torture and torturers of the past couldn't just disappear with the signing of a decree, just as the ghost of slavery in our society didn't vanish with emancipation. So I claim that the political situation in Brazil today would be different had we properly “musealized” slavery, dictatorships and other forms of state violence. That means: if we had built collective contexts to narrate the stories, to safely repeat the mechanisms of oppression, to face the wounds and traumas

produced by them, and to keep their undead agents within narrative, collective boundaries (no need for walls) that could keep them from participating in the external world of social and political life. As in the movie *Night at the Museum*, we should expect that in museums of Brazilian history, generals, torturers, activists, murdered rebels, slaughtered cities and slave owners should be walking around, at night, out of our sight. If that sounds bad, look at what we have now: the past loops over the present, devours it like Chronos does with his sons. As the museum trap burns down, our Tyrannosaurs walks freely. It sits at my dinner table, it participates in daily life, and just took political power. The living dead will meet us 'round the corner.

(3)

Postscript: or should we inaugurate a series of entropic museums, nouveaux-sites, which would of course be the Museum of Attempts, the Museum of the Unbuilt and the *Undestroyed*, the Museum of Amnesia and Phantasmic Return? We could re-enact the fire of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio in 1978. We could partially drain the water that flooded the city of Canudos, in Bahia, whose 30,000 inhabitants were slaughtered by the army in 1897, to establish the Cocorobo Dam, and then *re-flood* it from time to time; the Scatological Mud Museum perhaps in partnership the Museum of Pharaonic Bankrupted Contemporary Art Institutes. And for sure, we should leave intact the ruins of the Museu Nacional destroyed late in 2018, leaving its wood structures on the ground, the remains of burned paper, clothes and feathers suspended by the breeze, grass growing over the asteroids. This undead museum, the main piece of the museum of museums, of the concrete museum of our own imaginary.

Pedro França, 2019

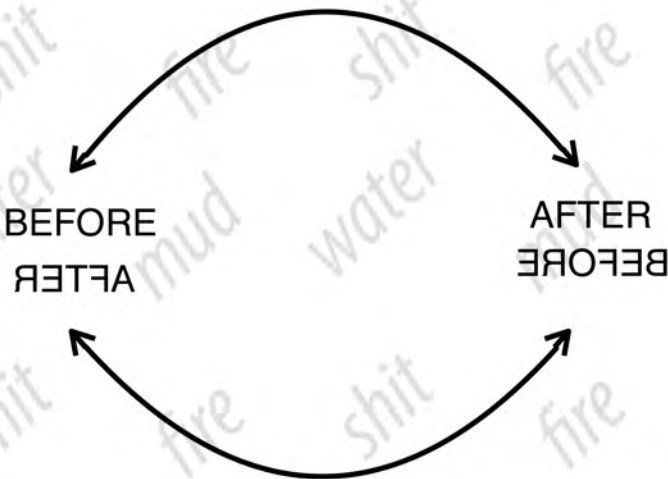


Pedro França (Rio de Janeiro, 1984) is an artist and member of Ueinzz Theatre Group. He studied at the School of Visual Arts of Parque Lage in Rio de Janeiro between 2001 and 2005 and holds a Master Degree in Social History at PUC- Rio (Rio de Janeiro). Since 2011, Pedro França has been working as an artist in a variety of media, mainly installation and video. His work engages in schizo and metonymical rearrangements of images and objects, in both individual and collaborative practices. Since the same year, moreover, he collaborates with Ueinzz Theatre Group, a neurodiverse theatre collective that works in the threshold between theatre, schizoanalysis and clinic. There, he participated in the development and performance of the works *Noreadymademen* and *Zero Gravity* [2015-2017]. He taught Art History and Theory in School of Visual Arts (Rio de Janeiro) between 2006 and 2011; Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo (since 2011) and at the Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo, (since 2011). Finally, he was nominated for the PIPA Prize in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 and Marcantonio Vilaça Prize in 2019.

Email: mail.pedrofranca@gmail.com

Sketch for AMUSEUM, a museum of virtual objects. Sketch: may 2019

GIF AGE (TRAPPED IN THE PRESENT):



A NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: LIVING DEAD
WILL MEET YOU 'ROUND
THE CORNER

Contributors

Paulo Miyada

Paulo Miyada is a Brazilian curator and researcher of contemporary art. He holds a Master's Degree in History of Architecture and Urbanism from FAU - USP, for which he is also a graduate. He is the adjunct curator of the 34th São Paulo Biennial (2020) and the chief curator of the Tomie Ohtake Institute, where he coordinates the Research and Curation Center, as well as co-coordinating the course programme of the Escola Entrópica, where he teaches. He was assistant curator of the 29th São Paulo Biennial (2010), he was part of the curatorial team at Rumos Artes Visuais do Itaú Cultural (2011-2013) and was adjunct curator of the 34th Panorama of Brazilian Art at MAM-SP (2015). Among other projects, he has curated: *É preciso confrontar as imagens vagas com os gestos claros* (2012), *Paulo Bruscky: Banco de Ideias* (2012), *Medos Modernos* (2014), *Estou Cá* (2016), *Leda Catunda: I love you, baby* (2016), *Osso – Exposição-apelo ao amplo direito de defesa de Rafael Braga* (2017), *Miguel Rio Branco: Wishful Thinking* (2017) and *AI-5 50 Anos - Ainda não terminou de acabar* (2018).

Kristin Barry

- kmbarry@bsu.edu
- Assistant Professor of Architecture and Applied Anthropologies Fellow, Bell State University, USA

Jelle Bouwhuis

- j.bouwhuis@gmail.com
- PhD researcher at VU Amsterdam and Curator Modern Art at Museum Arnhem, the Netherlands

Madeline Burkhardt

- madelineburkhardt@gmail.com
- Master of Arts in Museum Studies from Johns Hopkins University
- Adult Education Coordinator at Rosa Parks Museum, USA

Abbey L. R. Ellis

- alre1@leicester.ac.uk
- PhD Candidate, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester and Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK

Valeria Florenzano

- vale.florenzano@gmail.com
- Master of Law Degree, University of Siena (Italy)
- Administration officer for the Local Council of Bologna (Italy)

CD Green

- chgreen@sas.upenn.edu
- PhD Candidate at the University of Pennsylvania, USA

Lisa Kennedy

- lk168@student.le.ac.uk
- MA student on the Socially Engaged Practices in Museums and Galleries course, University of Leicester, UK
- Collections Manager at Battersea Arts Centre

Justyna Ładosz

- 2353449L@student.gla.ac.uk
- Masters student History of Art: Collecting & Provenance in an International Context, University of Glasgow, UK

Kémel Sade Martínez

- kemel.sade@uach.cl
- Director at Aysén Museums Network Project, Chile
- PhD Candidate at Universidad Nacional del Centro, Argentina

Alejandra Saladino

Alejandra Saladino is an Argentinian museologist and archaeologist who lives and works in Rio. She is Professor at the Department of Museum Studies and Processes of the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), Brazil, Professor at the Professional Master in Cultural Heritage Preservation at the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN), Brazil, and external researcher at the Cultural Heritage Management Investigation Group of the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), Spain.

Email: alejandra.saladino@unirio.br

Donata Miller

- donata.miller@sciencemuseum.ac.uk
- Worked with the London Transport Museum, Science Museum and V&A

Anamaría Rojas Múnera

- anamaria.rojas@uach.cl
- MA in Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK
- Museologist at Aysén Museums Network Project, Chile

Inês Quintanilha

- quintanilhaines@gmail.com
- PhD Candidate at Nova School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Lisbon, Portugal

Sarita Sundar

- sarita@hanno.in
- Masters in Visual Communications, National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, India
- Masters of Arts, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK
- Founder of *Hanno*, a Research, Interpretation and Design Consultancy (www.hanno.in)

Zoi Tsiviltidou

- zt30@le.ac.uk
- PhD Candidate, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK
- UNESCO Chair MA in Cultural Policy and Management

Barbara Wood

- WoodB8316@aol.com
- Doctoral Researcher , DHeritage Professional Doctorate programme University of Hertfordshire, UK
- Regional Curator (South West) National Trust (England, Wales & Northern Ireland)

Olga Zabalueva

- olga.zabalueva@liu.se
- PhD Candidate in Culture and Society (Tema Q), Department for Studies of Social Change and Culture, Linköping University, Sweden



Q&A

with Paulo Miyada

Museological Review: As a young architect, urbanist, curator and lecturer living and working in São Paulo, what are your opinions about the cultural sphere in contemporary Brazil? To what extent - from your experience as a curator - does austerity, poor funding and political turbulence have an impact on the sector?

Paulo Miyada: Taking into consideration the Brazilian cultural scene, I believe we need to bifurcate the way we analyse it. It is necessary to talk broadly about the history of Brazilian art and culture, which I believe should always be debated through a criticism of the objective form, as the literary critic Antonio Candido (1918-2017) suggested. This implies thinking about the forms and traditions within their historical, political and social context. It is within this context that the power vectors are formed that shape the structure of the art landscape; through reflection the artwork ends up crystallizing the unique concerns of a particular moment in time, adding to the explicit intentions of their creators. This debate about historicism and authorship is quite advanced in the field of literature, but I believe that this is also occurring now in the visual arts. New emphasis is being given, for instance, to acknowledge and recognise historically marginalized identities – Afro-Brazilian artists, for example – while complex historic periods such as the 1960s and 1970s are being revisited by researchers, looking at the political complexity of this period, which saw culturally progressive movements exist alongside a struggle against authoritarian political states.

It is also fundamental to discuss current artistic and cultural production, noting not only the inflections of the ongoing political conflicts, but also the parallels and convergences within the international context. In this sense, we see a sense of urgency at the moment, fuelled by ideological polarization, the decline of centre-right parties, brutal urban violence, the persecution of social movements, the wake of militias and so on. To a certain extent, this same urgency encourages initiatives of mutual support and informal collaboration among multiple participants within the art world. These initiatives can take many forms and shapes, such as the anonymous *Cólera Alegria* collective (roughly translation Joy Wrath), which produce banners and posters for protests, mostly online. Another example is the collaboration between artists, cultural producers, residents and activists at the *Ocupação 9 de Julho* (9th of July Occupation), of the Homeless Movement of the Centre of São Paulo (*Movimento Sem-Teto do Centro de São Paulo*); or even institutional involvement, such as the exhibition *AI-5 50 Years* – still hasn't ended yet (*AI-5 50 Anos ainda não terminou de acabar*), which we held at the Tomie Ohtake Institute (São Paulo), and which was able to happen thanks to the donations and collaboration of hundreds of people. This show also marked the anniversary of the 5th Institutional Act, an Act that aggravated the State violence during the military dictatorship in Brazil. On the other hand, this same urgency also appears in the structuring of artistic production in a convulsive and unequal way. It is difficult for me to identify now, apart from very specific exceptions, an aesthetic and ethical coherence specific to the current situation that the country finds itself in. Perhaps it is here that we see how a global trend works directly on a local scene: the international

career pattern of some emerging contemporary artists seems to alienate some of the most promising and critical talents from local art collectives and communities, which fostered their early maturation. Sometimes this can be reflected in a certain detachment and distancing from those who seem more apt to respond to the moment.

As a curator and researcher, I believe in the importance of discussing how much of the current political turmoil is actually the continuation of historical processes that go back to the “discovery” of Brazil. There is a thread of violence that links the slavery of indigenous and peoples of African origin to the current hate speech on the far-right. This thread also goes through the ethnic and social segregation found in the big Brazilian cities and the poor treatment of rural workers throughout the 20th century. Similarly, this thread of violence goes through the systematic genocide of Afro-descendent and indigenous population, which was

never interrupted, neither during the dictatorship, nor in the “redemocratization” period, nor even today. There is also a thread of continuity between the extractive colonial matrix of Brazil and the current heavy attack on measures to preserve the Amazon rainforest, as well continuing corruption in the politics of “favour” as characteristic of Brazilian liberal professionals, politicians and bourgeoisie. This is clearly manifested in the endemic corruption and the relative passivity of intellectuals and opinion-makers in the face of so much violence and concentration of income and power. In this regard, if we want to understand the past to reflect on the future, it is fundamental to do the homework and challenge the consensus that the current situation is exceptional. This general idea especially pleases those who want to reduce investment in culture, education and art even further, in addition to promoting the most perverse type of historical revisionism, protecting the reputation of perpetrators of

Paulo Miyada, 2016, by Patricia Araujo





Fire at the National Museum of Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro, on 2 September 2018, by Felipe Milanez

violence and indeed treating them to heroes.

Before the fire at the National Museum of Brazil, the museum already lacked the necessary funds to sustain itself. In early January 2019 the new Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro decided to dismantle the Ministry of Culture, fulfilling his election promise to cut back on public spending. What do you think about his decision? And what kind of impact might this have on the future development of museums in the country?

This is another situation in which we can observe a historical continuity rather than a historical rupture. One of the harmful consequences of the colonial history and developmental trajectory of Brazil is that long-term, socially-

concerned planning, and the need to confront and process the past, are relegated to background concerns. Consequently, those who try to encourage new ways forward receive are constantly and actively attacked.

Exceptions to this tend to be shut-down very quickly. An example of this was the military coup of 1964 and the dismantling of social initiatives such as the National Literacy Plan (Plano Nacional de Alfabetização - PNA). This was a scheme that was developed under the government of João Goulart (in office, 1961-1964) together with the University of Brasília (UNB), which was a widely respected laboratory for transdisciplinary thinking on solutions to social problems in Brazil.¹ The PNA aimed to provide literacy to over 5 million Brazilians and was arbitrarily shut down, while the UNB was

¹ The University of Brasília was idealised by Darcy Ribeiro (1922-1997), a Brazilian anthropologist, writer and educator, who wrote and researched extensively on topics related to the indigenous population of Brazil and ideas around identity in Latin America. He was a fierce advocate of the democratisation of the public education in Brazil; and Anísio Teixeira (1900-1971), a Brazilian jurist, educator and writer, who played an important role in the developing and promoting the democratisation of education in Brazil, together with Darcy Ribeiro.

the target of attacks on grounds of the revolutionary character of its educational programme, and by its proximity to the National Congress. Which invites the question: what would have become of the country if these and other initiatives had been allowed to develop in recent decades?

Most recently, since the mid-1990s we have experienced a series of initiatives to broaden democratic access to cultural spaces. They were initiatives with little to no coordination, but they contributed to other initiatives that helped to increase the number of visitors attending cultural centres and museums throughout Brazil. This also included the inauguration of cultural centres in neighbourhoods and cities that had never had such venues previously. Over the last ten years, with the growth and multiplication of visitors, and with the optimism that public, private and public-private modes of finance have helped to create, the debate about the democratization of access began to gradually evolve into a debate about the democratization of the institutions themselves. This involved new forms of direct participation for specific types of audiences, and the expansion of curatorial and cultural practices. It was precisely at that moment that a new cycle of cultural funding cuts began, combined with campaigns that challenged the necessity of the cultural sphere at all.

This has been a highly systematic attack, which has found in the fire of the National Museum its perfect allegory and its lasting damage. What has been lost is irreplaceable, and concerned histories and cultures much older than the country invented by the European colonial project.

The election of Jair Bolsonaro, whose campaign showed clear and open resentment towards the sphere of art and culture – as well as the black population, indigenous people, teachers and social movements – took this process to a new level and showed that things had to first get worse before they could improve. The closure of the Ministry of Culture, which took place as part of the merger and suppression of other ministries, has had very little impact on the national budget, but has been an incredible loss symbolically. Something

similar is happening in the State of São Paulo, where the government is in the process of promoting a ‘contingency’ plan for of the funding of culture. This will result in the dismissal of employees, the cancellation of events and activities, and the partial closure of dozens of museums and cultural centres. Gains for the state budget as consequence of these cuts will once again be negligible, since the amount of money devoted to culture was only a tiny portion of the region’s GDP.

As the history of cultural policy has always been marked by a cyclical decline, one can imagine that there will once again be a resilience and resourcefulness to continue working with little or almost nothing, at least on the part of the artists, in the name of public of art. What is lost, however, and which can never be accounted for, is the process of democratization of the cultural institutions and its curatorial practices that were only at an early stage of development. This also makes me wonder how much time will be lost until we are again able – physically, emotionally, materially – to fulfil aims for a participatory, inclusive, responsible and dialogic cultural landscape in Brazil.

Who Holds Power in Heritage and What Does That Mean for Museums?

By Barbara Wood

Abstract

Who holds power in museums? How is it used and how do shifting locations of power affect those working in the sector, researchers and visitors? This paper references previously unrecognised forms of authority that are now evident in heritage to demonstrate that power is not necessarily co located with any of the assumed forms of authority or with those regarded as holding professional knowledge. It considers this situation in relation to the wider landscape of partnerships, co creation, shared responsibilities and shared authority, concepts which are currently shaping the work of museums. It reflects on what this means in practice raising the question of whether power is being lost or just realigned. It demonstrates how a changing landscape of power has affected museums over time and provides a consideration of the contemporary situation. It also looks to the future, recognising new forms of power and the potential of empowerment through a deeper understanding of the role which museums can play as part of constructing personal, public and social identities. Ultimately it challenges the concept of who holds power in museums and how this control and influence is used.

Keywords

Power, Authority, Museums, Authenticity, Future

The Heritage Context

The practice and products of heritage are a defining characteristic of identity in Great Britain, whether national or local, civic or personal (Hewison, 1987, 2014; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Jenkins, 2016; Pearce, 1996). Heritage is employed to record and reinforce cultural and social practices of established communities and of migration and newcomer groups. The term may refer to business, products of tourism, personal record keeping, new discoveries whether of ancient remains or contemporary experience, to institutions of arts and culture and to areas of legislature and governance (Ashton and Kean, 2012; Smith, 2006; Waterton, 2010: 3, 4). Museums in particular, have been employed as a tool of nation building and continue to be a means through which governments, communities and individuals seek to create or validate new and evolving identities (Ashley, 2005;

Gentry, 2013; Jordonova, 2006; Lagerqvist, 2006; Rakic and Chambers, 2007; Smith, 2006). Within such a wide and highly debated conceptual field, issues of power are fundamental. The ownership, employment, use of and resistance to power shape the sector. The authority which aligns with the location of power will design the assets of heritage, whether buildings, landscapes, historic sites or museum collections. That power will similarly shape the experience of those who engage with heritage, as employees, as researchers and users of information or collections and as visitors. However, there are significant questions to address regarding the ownership and use of this attribute. While the assumption may be that power aligns with forms of specialist authority and knowledge in the sector, research is demonstrating that this is not the reality of practitioner experience.

The Concept of Power

In addressing the concept and play of power in museums, the sector has drawn heavily on the work of twentieth century philosophers Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre included museums in thinking which recognised the social and political construction of space (Lefebvre, 1991). In his view the museum was a means of, and space for, thinking and holding knowledge. It is therefore also a place of production – of material and of thought – and thus both a method of control and a source of power. For Foucault, the museum functioned as a heterotopia (Lord, 2006: 1, 10) and as an instrument of governmentality. He recognised the productive potential of heritage but also its use as a technique of control of nation, society and individuals and a means through which to manage the production and use of knowledge (Silva and Santos, 2012: 439).

The view of the museum as an instrument of political power and dominance is clearly borne out by the role of such institutions within the management of western European empires from the eighteenth century onwards (Swenson, 2013). Such systems continue to inform global museum networks and local relationships from UNESCO guidance to the UK Museums Accreditation scheme (Isnart, 2012; Smith, 2006). Similarly, heritage is a tool employed by individuals and pressure groups to validate belief systems. Tangible and intangible articulations of heritage are referenced by politicians of all persuasions, used to divide and to unite and by community, heritage, environmental, educational, business or other groups seeking justification or a mandate for action. Santos wrote that ‘...heritage cannot but be seen as a key element in the process of the production and reproduction of power relationships’ (Santos, 2012: 453) and with Silva, summarised that ‘Power is not just a central matter to heritage; power is generative to heritage’ (Silva and Santos, 2012: 438).

The critique and continuing dialogue regarding the place and use of power in the sector focusses primarily on the concept that it is an attribute of a specific group and that this

group will be those who hold technical knowledge and are thus invested with authority. Smith for example, in her recognition and description of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) examines relationships of power between those who provide heritage experiences and those who consume them (Smith, 2006). Larson and Urry consider the situation in terms of tourism (Larson and Urry, 2011) while Lagerqvist has recently applied a similar critique to the specific example of the Irish Heritage service (Lagerqvist, 2016).

Such discussions align with the Foucauldian approach that museums and, by extension, the heritage sector in which institutions operate, are tools of management and control. The existence and impact of power has thus long been documented in the experience provided through museums and in their social, political and cultural functions. What is less regularly and less adequately considered, is that a characteristic feature of power within heritage is that it is a continually shifting concept. This incessant relocation of the ownership of power has a fundamental effect on the material assets of heritage, the collections of museums and the experience of those who engage with them.

The Concept of Power in Museums

Power is at play in four areas for museums. The foundation of institutions and organisations, the formation, selection and care of collections (buildings and objects), the operational systems in use (including their effect on staff and volunteers) and the experiences created (for all kinds of users). Rautenberg notes how public institutions are involved in ‘heritagisation’ and the rise and influence of different ‘regimes’ of heritage which may be imposed by government at all levels or by civil society, but which also regularly coexist with each other (Rautenberg, 2012: 514). Such ‘coexistence’ is reflected in the complexity of purpose and production associated with museums. The multiplicity of activity may be complementary and coeval or discordant and difficult. Over time, organisational purpose can be seen responding to the movement of power within or around an

organisation. The visibly changing direction of museums from primarily collections for display, to increasingly active sites of learning, to centres of community focus, producers of experiences, to participants in political agendas of social inclusion and wellbeing track not only changing funders, developing societal aspirations and cultural expectations. They also reflect the shifts of power related to management and direction which initiate such change.

If museums are ‘keepers of a collective memory...’ (Lagerqvist, 2006: 54) and ‘...the act of displaying is an act of power ...’ (Ashley, 2005: 8) there are questions to be asked regarding who has that power and the associated authority. The origins of British museums have a relationship with the establishment and rule of empire for example. The creation of collections and establishment of many institutions reflected the commanding position and perspective of a colonising country (for example Karp and Levine, 1991; Smith, 2006; Swenson, 2013). This position of power was echoed in the processes of acquisition and the selection of materials which formed the core of many early museums, both national and regional (plymhearts.org/pcmag/collections/world-cultures for example). Moves in the twentieth century which sought to counteract this and reflect more accurately multiple experiences of heritage are similarly well documented and debated (for example Grabow and Walker, 2016; Hewison, 1987; Karp and Levine, 1991). Lagerqvist articulated the need for ‘...an awareness of the history of museums ... in order to have a critical assessment of present day ideologies and museum practices.’ (Lagerqvist, 2006: 53). This is critical because, as with other manifestations of heritage, museums have been founded, shaped and subsequently reformed to reflect not only the changing interests and the needs of different times, but also the interests and requirements of those who hold power.

In his discussion of Foucault’s view of museums, Hetherington notes the consistent existence of power but recognises that this is a conceptual concern which is fluid and uncertain (Hetherington, 2011: 473). Indeed, mobility

is one of the most interesting characteristics of power in heritage and particularly within museums. In a sector where knowledge and authority may be recognised in an extensive range of professional and nonprofessional contexts of which the museum is only one element, questions arise regarding where power should align or where it has been acquired. In discussing the feelings of loss that gives rise to the museological instruments of ‘honouring and preserving’ Bendix notes how such preservation also requires ‘selection’ but does not address the increasingly nebulous issue of who would have power to make such decisions in 21st century museums (Bendix, 2008: 254). The ‘crisis of accumulation’ described by Harrison (Harrison, 2013) in relation to collections perhaps illuminates the loss of confidence and decisive action related to collections management as power moves from traditional locations in museums to new situations – community groups, volunteers, visitors or funders. ‘In the post-modern museum all these steps would be open to negotiation by many parties...’ (Ashley, 2005: 8).

Beyond the power which shapes the collections there are also issues embedded in operational structures, functions and outputs such as exhibitions and public programmes. These are spaces in which power through the acquisition and management of culture may be commodified and attained by public visitors or by non-specialist managerial staff (Bourdieu, 2010; MacLeod, 2010: 5). Authority and power may be earned or recognised by association with museums in the case of politicians, community representatives or funding authorities (Gray and McCall, 2018). The power held by academic or other partners, local communities, user groups, volunteers or even specific individual users may be evident in the environment and experiences offered (Ashley, 2005: 7) and in the operational processes of the organisation.

Gray and McCall have considered museums in relation to the model of bureaucracies. Their work considers how this form of operation affects ‘...questions of value, authority, legitimacy and ownership.’ (Gray and McCall, 2018: 127). They recognise not only the impact of power in

relation to the specialist functions of museums but also the effect on working practice. They identify the link between the operation of a bureaucracy and the legitimisation of authority through the employment and acceptance of legal-rational forms of authority as defined by Weber (Waters and Waters 2015). Their summary states that a core feature of a bureaucracy is that it is 'staffed by specialists [and]... managed with hierarchical patterns of control' (ibid 127).

There is no shortage of debate in relation to the ownership and use of power in the wider heritage sector or in museums. However, with the exception of some work considering the situation of museum staff such as that by Gray and McCall (ibid), the critique is largely focussed on the outputs of heritage (Ashley, 2005) or on the tourist experience at historic sites (MacLeod, 2010; Larsen and Urry, 2011; Smith, 2006). They tend to consider how such articulations of heritage work are affected by the social, cultural, institutional and personal contexts within which they are developed and delivered. Rubio discusses the processes and conditions through which objects are endowed with 'forms of meaning, value and power' (Rubio, 2016: 59). An example of the exercise of power by certain individuals and institutions. Rickly-Boyd explores the implementation and effect of power (Rickly-Boyd, 2015). There is debate concerned with the authenticity of such products and with the kind of experience created for service users (for example Jones, 2009). Like others, Kurtz focusses on the impact of power in terms of the experience for the general visitor (Kurtz, 2010). While this use of power and control has been much debated there are other concerns about power in heritage. Notably the question of whether decision making remains connected to the locations of specialist knowledge and the authority that would legitimise the use of power. In an era when the ownership of museum operations has moved significantly from core functions of care and conservation of collections and there are many vested interests in the delivery of heritage, who holds the power of decision making for museums?

The Concept of 'Authority'

Kurtz defined four 'modes of power' used to manage or influence the presentation and interpretation of heritage (Kurtz, 2010: 220). Manipulation, seduction, persuasion and authority. Of these, only authority is an attribute rather than an action. As with the attribute of power, multiple forms of authority are at work in museums. These are sometimes based on knowledge or specialist understanding but are equally as likely to be acquired on the basis of political, management or practical responsibility or allocated via 'community' mandates or the authority of 'first hand' experience (Adair et al, 2011; Ashton and Hamilton, 2012: 35; Waters and Waters, 2015). The three core forms of authority identified by Weber and subsequently extended by other scholars (for example Wendt, 2018) have provided a comprehensive basis for the study of this concept including an exploration of the relationship between authority and power. The research of this author has recently assessed further forms of authority evident which are specifically identifiable within museums and heritage. Additions are proposed which include a category identified as 'Management responsibility'. This form may be held in combination with other categories such as Weber's Traditional, Rational-Legal or Charismatic forms but the separate identification recognises the situation experienced by many museum staff, whereby the power which most strongly influences their work, may be the preserve of those without extensive or specialist knowledge of the sector.

The authority to manage, direct and even sustain the work of museums is in many cases located with those who hold responsibility for the resourcing of activity, for supporting services such as commercial operations, for public programmes or for the practicalities of visitor services. It is also a concept which shifts as sectoral interests change. The connoisseurs and elite groups who held authoritative positions in museums in past centuries have long since been replaced by the professional roles of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The hegemony of a professional and often academic elite subsequently displaced by the 'authoritative'

voices of social historians and community heritage workers of the twentieth century. For the 21st century, an intention to embrace a 'shared authority' (Adair et al, 2011; Frisch, 1990) will inevitably result in new dynamics of power.

Are Power and Authority Co-located?

Ashley describes the changing sense of power and the rise of 'alternative' forms which mirror the recognition of different forms of authority for museums (Ashley, 2005: 7-8). The extended categories of authority identified by this author reflect the multiplicity and diversity of heritage in a postmodern era. What this has also demonstrated is that the possession of authority, in any form, does not necessarily result in an acquisition of power. The authoritative voice of a subject specialist for example may be valued in professional debate or by exhibition visitors but may have no agency in a discussion regarding museum management processes. A skilled craftworker demonstrating at an open-air museum is in an authoritative position as they converse with visitors but may be uninvolved in the creation of the programmes which they deliver. Gray and McCall reference the regular adaption required of museums to retain their alignment with the policies of local government and how the ownership and management of power are at play in all areas of museum operation (Gray and MacCall, 2018: 129). The hierarchical structures which manage the minutiae of staff activities, the need to continually reassess activity and purpose in order to deliver the required agendas result in 'struggles over control of exhibitions and galleries' (ibid) and in feelings of disempowerment, stress and anxiety for the staff, whether paid or volunteer. There is a continuing divergence between forms of authority which are based in specialist knowledge and experience and those which are not. Adequate recognition and critique of the authority at work in relation to museums is not always easy as diversifying forms are generally seen only as positive although not without difficulties. The realisation that there is no automatic correlation with power is a significant question. Difficulties arise because authority is frequently

confused with power, but these are demonstrably different features. Many forms of authority will be in operation, but they may be entirely powerless beyond specific situations. Power in museums operates independently of both the states of authority and knowledge.

The assumption may be that power is thus with managers and funders. In fact, it is often split, with power centres at strategic level (primarily Weber's Traditional, Rational-Legal authorities and also Political authority as defined by Wendt 2018) but also with 'grass roots' (Ashely, 2005: 14; MacLeod, 2010: 13) (Knowledge-based, community authorities as defined by Ashton and Hamilton, 2012: 13 for example). What this means is that although authorities of different forms manifest throughout all levels, there is no automatic association with power. Specialist museum staff may have agency only through persuasion or manipulation (Kurtz, 2010) for example, and their specialist authority may have no agency in power relationships.

The Application of Power, Museums and Authenticity

In discussing the use of historical material Black notes that '...developments and reassessments are the result of political shifts and pressures...' which then affect public use and interest (Black, 2010: 2). Rautenberg similarly considered the use of museum experiences and heritage resources as a tool of public policy (Rautenberg, 2012: 521). There are impacts of this. In a discussion considering the role of heritage and museums as part of tourism and regeneration strategies he noted '...how heritage has been stereotyped and mythicised in order to be used for public policies and to contribute to building new identities.' (ibid 517).

Gray and McCall describe how using the bureaucracy of power, access to material and research subjects can be controlled and managed (2018: 132). While the potential for 'shared authority' to diversify the power centres within museums exists, it is the case that those forms of authority where power has been lost, have significantly reduced potential to manage or influence activity this might include

for example the loss of specialist curators or limited access for curatorial staff to management discussions in a local authority. Alternatively where power is gained, it may privilege associated activity, generated from the core assets or work of the museum. The 'Renaissance in the Regions' programme provided significant resource for outreach work for example (Re:source 2001) while the focus of the 'Heritage Lottery Fund' provides for heritage projects and public outputs rather than operational costs.

If museums are 'keepers of a collective memory...' (Lagerqvist, 2006: 54) then this shared memory will be affected by who has power to decide what should be kept. Museum making is a selective process from the collections created to the exhibitions offered. There is rarely concern from visitors regarding the effect that this ownership may have on their experience or the material that they see but there is evidence of a greater recognition of the constructed nature of heritage in experiences such as historic sites or open-air museums where 'What seems more important is that the various apparatuses and techniques by which the heritage experiences are created are made apparent so that the consumer feels empowered to make a judgement about the factuality (or otherwise) of the experience that is presented to them.' (Harrison, 2013: 88). Visitors understand their part in this activity and the inherent limitations. Larson and Urry for example have discussed '...the fluid power geometries constituting performances of gazing.' and the '...series of performative practices...' which constitute heritage tourism (Larson and Urry, 2011: 1111, 1115).

In contrast, museums are seen as trusted sources of information and 'real' things (MacArthur, 2011). However, while there has been considerable work regarding the power and appeal of original objects the related concept of authenticity of experience is yet to be fully explored. It is clear that users accept the compromised reality of activities such as marching with Roman legions or cooking in kitchens of historic houses, but this is because they have chosen to participate in this construction. In museum contexts, the expectation

may be that the experience or information offered will be comprehensive and uncompromised, if it is also assumed that relevant knowledge, the legitimisation of authority and the power to deliver the experience coexist. However, given the separation and disconnected operation of these concepts in museums this is not necessarily the case.

Changing Locations of Power

Kurtz describes the need to understand who authorises official narratives and what that control looks like (Kurtz, 2010: 220). The work of heritage in this sense can be understood as the legitimisation of the ideology of a central power, a concept summarised in the definition and description of the AHD initially by Laura Jane Smith (Smith, 2006). While Smith originally took the historic house as her case study, the premise of an AHD is clearly relevant and applicable to the traditional museum context. However, the notion of a standard AHD is compromised by the recognition that power, knowledge and authority are concepts permanently in flux dependent upon circumstances. AHD's are in continual production. They are as likely to be formed by community heritage groups as by the National Trust as Smith described or a government funded national museum.

Museums continually 'reinvent themselves'. The current ownership of power and the loss of 'authoritative certainty' impacts on audiences with '...more uniformity as museums hedge their bets by covering all possibilities' (Ashley, 2005: 15 quoting Hein, 2000: 142). If it is those with power rather than knowledge who structure and deliver heritage, there will be a subsequent impact on the experience for audiences. Crew and Sims illustrated the need for accuracy and the importance of basing interpretation and thus the museum experience, in 'extensive documentation' (Crew and Sims, 1991: 71). They recognised the responsibility which comes with the control exercised by exhibition teams. As museums dilute the boundaries to their work which may have managed or marginalised a diversity of experiences and voices in the past, there is no certainty that all who participate in

museum activity will acknowledge the power that they hold or the effect of its employment.

Extending or sharing power is a difficult process. Foueski recognises the challenges in a critique which describes how museums slip easily in to choosing community representatives who they feel they can work with. It is also difficult to do this effectively without at some point leading to a sense of disempowerment and tension for participants (Foueski, 2010: 185-6). There is a similar dialogue underway in relation to the sharing of authority (Adair et al, 2011). Clearly the material with which museums are concerned is relevant to a multiplicity of users, particularly when seen as part of public services or as collections held on behalf of society. But there are questions to be debated regarding not only the purpose but also the validity of all expressions of power in museums. Shifts in power are not necessarily a result of the acknowledgement of a relevant form of authority or particular knowledge, but instead derives from factors external to the core functions of museums. Change regularly follows the cycle of council elections for local authority museums for example, outreach and learning found a far greater power through the 'Renaissance in the Regions' initiative as noted above, while the increasing marketisation of museums in the early 21st century has arguably privileged the role of 'visitor experience' and supporting services.

Taking a similar position to the description of the AHD by Smith, MacLeod suggests that grass roots is the opposite form of power to nation-state (MacLeod, 2010: 3, 10). Their premise postulates a single 'top down' source of power in heritage. This is demonstrably not the case. Power clearly exists in a range of contexts. The 'grass roots' power of a community group or volunteer staff member can be as useful, difficult, divisive or directional as the power of government. It is simply another manifestation of power. The question is whether there is either rationale or benefit to the transferring of power. Dispersed, disorganised or unqualified power is disruptive and exclusionary in all contexts. Rather it may be more productive to acknowledge and understand the

power which different voices and experiences bring within the fundamentally contested state of heritage (Foueski, 2010: 188-9).

New Forms and Location of Power and Models for the Future

Macdonald described the challenges of identity and purpose of museums and the many initiatives far beyond the traditional expectation of a museum that are expected of them (Macdonald, 1999: 2). She describes museums as 'contested terrains' noting their social and historical locations and summarising that 'the museum does not exist.' (ibid 9, 4). Rather than consider museums primarily as centres or tools of power, there is potential to take Gallie's description of 'contested concepts' as a more fitting model. In this way it is possible to accept the concept of museums and the output – which is 'museums' – as an 'Essentially Contested Concept' (Gallie, 1956). If this is the case it will also allow 'inevitably ...[for]...endless disputes about their proper use on the part of their users.' (Ibid 169) and indeed will require that '...its own use is contested by those of other parties' (Ibid 172).

While Ashley describes opportunities and ambitions for Canadian museums which would see a more equitable and adaptable model of power in operation, she also recognises that such changes may simply be another shift in a continually moving landscape. '...the abandonment of the grand narrative and its replacement by multiple narratives...' (Ashley, 2005: 14) will move the location of power in a similar way to the reality of the remaking of stories and presentations in other areas of heritage which essentially remake and embed different authorised discourses and replace one tyranny with another.

Funding in England for example has directed museum work to focus progressively on collecting, research, learning, entertainment, social inclusion, mental health and wellbeing, social justice and even 'the happy museum' (<http://happymuseumproject.org/> Downloaded 6th January 2018). Lagerqvist has deconstructed the case of the Irish State

Heritage Service to demonstrate that heritage is a strategic resource of governments and institutions and a process entirely responsive to contemporary situations. Her conclusion in this example is that a loss of power associated with the provision of resources has shifted ownership and operation of heritage to communities and individuals and away from organisations resulting in an 'opening up of the AHD' (Lagerqvist, 2016: 71).

The Balance of Power

Is the power at work in museums legitimate? Current holders of power are often in positions that are hard to challenge. Perceived to be at the top are funders, politicians and those who manage resources. Grassroots or bottom up power located with users, visitors, volunteers and community historians is equally effective although the difficulty here is that they are often unrecognised as holders of power and may thus remain free from not only challenge but also responsibility. Museum workers, are directed by both top and the bottom. While they may be deemed to have authority, they may have extremely limited agency for action.

Silva and Santos argue that while Foucault may have seen museums as part of the exercise of power which he categorised as 'Codes of Conduct' in reality '...the making of heritage is marked by friction, interference, contestation, resistance and compromise.' (Silva and Santos, 2012: 439). While they note the '...interplay of power relations and political ideologies that [are] carried out at the macro-level of administrative structures and at the micro-level of expert practices, and [which are] never barren of the weight of emotion.' They equally reference that '...heritage can work as a multiplier of power, particularly of individual political power.' (ibid 440). This needs to be recognised, managed and open to question as to whether it is in the right location and connected to the most appropriate roles. Ashley summarised this continuing but not necessarily heard, professional discussion, noting the potential for a '...move away from the presentation with its implication of vested authority, towards

multi-cultural exchange in a public space with community dialogue and ongoing construction of meaning.' (Ashley, 2005: 8).

However, she also notes the challenge that this would bring to existing authorities and established working practice and the attitudes which knowingly or unconsciously embed exclusion.

Conclusion

The acquisition and use of knowledge is an increasingly diverse process. Different views and experiences are valued and respected and the concept of shared authority is finding a strong place particularly within research and collections management. Gray and McCall identify technical and professional qualifications as a means with which to counter political activity and the status (standing) which is held by elected politicians (Gray and McCall, 2018: 131) however, the reality is that there are conflicting situations of power within museums. Thus, there is a dialogue which is concerned with the construction of museum functions and the content of the resources which they create. New forms of power are emerging within this and there is a deeper recognition of the cultural and personal histories which influence heritage activity. This debate is however, frequently focussed on the purely curatorial aspects of museum functions. While the roles and agendas of specialist staff are subject to regular critique, this is an examination of only the most visible of museum functions. The current debate fails to address a more fundamental issue. While there have been justifiable and welcome ambitions to diversify and democratise the function and purpose of the museum, this has often resulted only in the move of the power to manage and direct away from those who hold specialist authorities. Instead power has been invested not in a sharing of knowledge, authority and responsibility between curators and external partners but instead, relocated to roles which remain within the museum but may be resource driven, managerial or concerned only with transitory experiences for example related to public

programming. While the intention may have been to democratise, in reality power has moved to locations which are opaque, unchallenged and in the most difficult situations, may jeopardise the core functions and purpose of the museum. There can be no assumption that power is co located with either knowledge or authority in museums. In fact, the ongoing and increasing divergence of these agents is part of the crisis of purpose and confidence of action which sees museums at the mercy of the push and pull of influences beyond the sector and which contributes to institutional and personal anxiety within it.

The flux of power needs to be understood and made transparent. It is those who hold power – in whatever form – who need to be visible and responsible.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Professor Sarah Lloyd, Professor Constantine Sandis, and the staff of the DHeritage Professional Doctorate programme, University of Hertfordshire.

Bibliography

- Adair, B., Filene, B. and Koloski, L. (eds.) (2011). *Letting go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*. Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press.
- Ashley, S. (2005). 'State Authority and the Public Sphere: Ideas on the Changing Role of the Museum as a Canadian Social Institution', *Museum and Society* 3(1): 5-17.
- Ashton, P. and Hamilton, P. (2009). 'Connecting with History. Australians and their Past', in Ashton, P. and Kean, H. (eds.) *People and their Pasts. Public History Today*: 23-41. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bendix, R. (2008). 'Heritage between economy and politics. An assessment from the perspective of cultural anthropology', in Smith, L.J. and Akagawa, N. (eds.) *Intangible Heritage*: 253-269. London, Routledge.
- Black, J. (2010). *Using History*. London, Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bourdieu, P. (2010). *Distinction A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London, Routledge.
- Crew, S.R. and Sims, J. (1991). 'Locating authenticity: Fragments of a dialogue', in Karp, I. and Levine, S.D. (eds.) *Exhibiting cultures. The poetics and politics of museum display*: 159-175. Washington and London, Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Fouseki, K. (2010). "'Community voices, curatorial choices': community consultation for the 1807 exhibitions", *Museum and Society* 8(3): 180-192.
- Frisch, M. (1990). *A Shared Authority: Essays on the craft and meaning of oral and public history*. Albany, State University of New York Press.
- Gallie, W.B. (1956). 'Essentially Contested Concepts', in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* NS 56 (1955-1956): 167-198. Oxford, Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4544562> (Accessed 15 December 2018)
- Gentry, K. (2013). 'History, Heritage and Localism', *Policy Studies* 34(5-6): 508-522.
- Grabow, S. and Walker, J. (2016). 'Inclusivity and Multivocality in Socio-Political Archaeologies and Culture Heritage Management: Reflections, Trends, and Tensions', *Heritage and Society* 9(1): 25-56.
- Gray, C. and McCall, V. (2018). 'Analysing the Adjectival Museum: Exploring the bureaucratic nature of museums and the implications for researchers and the research process', *Museum and Society* 16(2): 124-137.
- Harrison, R. (2013). 'Forgetting to remember, remembering to forget: late modern heritage practices, sustainability and the 'crisis' of accumulation of the past', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19(6): 579-595.
- Herzfeld, M. (2015). 'Heritage and the Right to the City: when securing the past creates insecurity in the present', *Heritage and Society* 8(1): 3-23.
- Hetherington, G. (2011). 'Foucault, the museum and the diagram', *The Sociological Review* 59(3): 457-475.
- Hewison, R. (1987). *The Heritage Industry. Britain in a climate of decline*. London, Methuen.
- Hewison, R. (2014). *Cultural Capital. The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain*. London and New York, Verso.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1992). *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London, Routledge.
- Isnart, C. (2012). 'The Mayor, the ancestors and the chapel: clientelism, emotion and heritagisation in southern France', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. 18(5): 479-494.
- Jenkins, F. (2016). *Keeping their Marbles. How the treasures of the past ended up in museums...and why they should stay there*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Jones, S. (2009). 'Experiencing authenticity at heritage sites: some implications for heritage management and conservation', *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 11(2): 133-147.
- Jordanova, L. (2006). *History in Practice*. 2nd Ed. London, Bloomsbury.
- Karp, I. and Lavine, S.O. (eds.) (1991). *Exhibiting Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington and London, Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Kurtz, M. (2010). 'Heritage and Tourism', in West, S. (ed.) *Understanding Heritage in Practice*: 205-239. Manchester, Manchester University Press and The Open University.
- Lagerqvist, C. (2006). 'Empowerment and anger: learning how to share ownership of the museum', *Museum and Society* 4(2): 52-68.
- Lagerqvist, M. (2016). 'Reverberations of a Crisis: The Practical and Ideological Reworkings of Irish State Heritage Work in Economic Crisis and Austerity', *Heritage and Society* 9(1): 57-75.
- Larson, J. and Urry, J. (2011). 'Gazing and Performing', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29: 1110-1125.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford, Blackwell.
- Lord, B. (2006). 'Foucault's museum: difference, representation, and genealogy', *Museum and Society* 4(1): 1-14.
- MacArthur, M. (2011). 'Get Real! The role of Objects in the Digital Age', in Adair, B., Filene, B. and Koloski, L. (eds.) *Letting go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*: 56-67. Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press.
- MacLeod, D.V.L. (2010). 'Power, culture and the production of heritage', in MacLeod, D.V.L. and Carrier, J.G. (eds.) *Tourism, Power and Culture: Anthropological Insights*. Bristol, Channel View Publications Ltd.
- Macdonald, S. (1999). 'Theorizing museums: an introduction' in Macdonald, S. and Fyfe, G. (eds.) *Theorizing Museums*: 1-18. Oxford, Blackwell.
- Pearce, S. (1996). *Archaeological Curatorship*. Leicester, Leicester University Press.
- Rakic, T. and Chambers, D. (2007). 'World Heritage: Exploring the tension

between the National and the 'Universal', *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 2(3): 45-219.

- Rautenberg, M. (2012). 'Industrial heritage, regeneration, of cities and public policies in the 1990's: elements of a French/British comparison', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 18(5): 513-525.
- Re:source, (2001). *Renaissance in the Regions A new vision for England's museums*. The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. Available at: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=12190> (Accessed 6 January 2018).
- Rickly-Boyd, J.M. (2015). "It's supposed to be 1863, but it's really not": inside the representation and communication of heritage at a pioneer village', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21(9): 889-904.
- Rubio, F.D. (2016). 'On the discrepancy between objects and things: An ecological approach', *Journal of Material Culture* 21(1): 59-86.
- Santos, P.M. (2012). 'The power of knowledge: tourism and the production of heritage in Porto's old city', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 18(5): 444-458.
- Silva, L. and Santos, P.M. (2012). 'Ethnographies of heritage and power', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 18(5): 437-443.
- Smith, L.J. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*. London and New York, Routledge.
- Swenson, A. (2013). *The Rise of Heritage. Preserving the Past in France, Germany and England, 1789-1914*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Waters, T. and Waters, D. (eds.) (2015). *Webers Rationalism and Modern Society: New Translations on Politics, Bureaucracy and Social Stratification*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Waterton, E. (2010). *Politics, Policy and the Discourses of Heritage in Britain*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wendt, F. (2018). *Authority*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Willems, W.J.H. (2014). 'The Future of World Heritage and the Emergence of Transnational Heritage Regimes', *Heritage and Society* 7(2): 105-120.



Natural History Disavowed: Confronting Colonial Legacies in the *Musée des Confluences*

By CD Green

Abstract

In 2007, the Musée d'Histoire naturelle-Guimet in Lyon, France closed its doors in the midst of plans to construct a grand, new building rebranded as the Musée des Confluences. This rebranding explicitly rejected using the term “natural history.” The term cannot be found in the museum name, its exhibits, or its programs. In disavowing the legacy of their museum and its collections as “natural history,” what is the museum rejecting? This paper explores this disavowal and its implications, especially as a method of decolonizing the museum. I argue that while the Musée des Confluences tries to redefine the displays of a natural history, they unwittingly reiterate many of the problematic colonial presumptions seemingly inherent to the foundationally colonial institution that is the museum. Moreover, their reticence to explicitly address the legacies of natural history museums in their exhibits represents an aporia in which disassociation is desired but impossible to attain.

Keywords

Decolonizing, Natural History, France, Disavowal, Museum

In 2007, the Musée d'Histoire naturelle-Guimet in Lyon, France closed its doors in the midst of plans to construct a grand, new building for its collections, and other collections spread throughout the city. This new museum was not only supposed to solve all the space and conservation issues typical of archaic museums but also provided an opportunity to rebrand the museum and its messages (Musée des Confluences 2009). At this point, post-colonial critiques of museums (Bennett 1995; Boyd 1999; Chakrabarty 2002; Fine-Dare 2002), perhaps especially those of natural history museums (Bennett 2004; Colwell 2017; Haas 1990), were well-established and figured prominently in museum the redesigned display of cultural collections. Thus, a special opportunity was presented in Lyon: the chance to design a new museum that rejected its negative legacies in favor of a new, utopic vision for what (former) natural history museums could become.

The result was a stunning new building that opened

in 2014 at the southern tip of the Presqu'île near downtown. However, nowhere in this utopic vision for the new museum could you find reference to ‘natural history.’ Now called the Musée des Confluences, after its location on the confluence of the Rhône and the Saône, as well as the confluences of ‘science and culture’ (Musée des Confluences 2009, 2010), the museum explicitly rejects the association with ‘natural history.’ In disavowing the legacy of their museum and its collections as ‘natural history,’ what is the museum addressing and to what effect? This paper explores this disavowal and its implications, especially as a method of decolonizing the museum. I analyze three of the four permanent exhibits from the standpoint of a visitor, looking at their narratives and their layouts. The unanalyzed exhibit, Eternités, has been cut for space and for myriad other critiques that should perhaps take primacy in the analysis of the way sacred practices and beliefs of death should be portrayed. Ultimately, regarding the exhibits analyzed in this paper, I argue that while the

Musée des Confluences tries to redefine the displays of a natural history collection, they unwittingly reiterate many of the problematic colonial presumptions and forms seemingly inherent to the museum as an institutional form. Their disavowal of the negative associations inherent to the natural history museum falls short because the disavowal is of the term “natural history,” not necessarily of the institutional performances of the natural history museum.

Colonial Legacies of ‘Natural History’

As a discipline, natural history can go back to Pliny the Elder, who wrote an encyclopedia around 78 AD called ‘*Historia Naturalis*’ (Doody 2010). The discipline emerged as the broad study of the natural world, especially with an eye towards how to manipulate its elements. Prominent figures of the Enlightenment, like Francis Bacon (2016), Isaac Newton (Buchwald & Cohen, 2001), and Carl Linnaeus (1964), established theoretical and observational propositions regarding the natural world. This project of establishing natural histories sought to categorize observable difference such that discrete typologies for the natural world could be organized (Bennett 1995; Stocking 1985). Accordingly, natural history museums emerged to display these scientific advances, presenting to their publics these typological categories. In effect, natural history as a discipline developed as part of the Enlightenment project of comprehensively organizing knowledge of the world, and especially of the world into relative categories. Museums of the discipline provided collections upon which research comparisons could be made and the results displayed for public consumption (Bennett 1995, 2004; Brown 1992).

Concurrently, museums were emerging around several other disciplinary fields. In a popular article written for *Science* in 1896, George Brown Goode describes six content-types of museums¹: Museums of Art, Historical Museums,

Anthropological Museums, Natural History Museums, Technological Museums, and Commercial Museums (154). In his article, Goode describes how certain disciplines overlap with others, having some shared material or content interests. For example, ‘[e]very museum of art and every archaeological museum is also a museum of history’ (155). In this way, museums, like the academic disciplines upon which they are based, have intersecting interests, but can be defined as distinctly disciplinary in their contents and exhibits. In his description of prototypical natural history museums, Goode situates zoologic, botanic, geologic collections as the ideal types of the natural history museum form (157). Despite this, Goode does seem to indicate that natural history museums can and do include ethnographic and archaeological collections. ‘Museums of Natural History and Anthropology meet on common ground in Man. In practice the former usually treats of man in his relations to other animals, the latter of man in his relations to other men’ (157). Here distinct, but inclusive, disciplines have emerged. Interestingly, the American Museum of Natural History is listed underneath the ‘Anthropological Museums’ category because ‘the collections...are arranged ethnographically’ (156)². Goode indicates that though ethnographic and archaeological collections might tend to be ‘anthropological’ or ‘archaeological’ (or even ‘historical’), they *can be* natural historical insofar as they are situated in relation to other animals.

Museum scholar critiques of natural history museums are not necessarily focused on the exhibition of cultural objects but in the disproportionate display of Indigenous material culture in these museums. This is in contrast to the dearth of material culture of the West and any ‘civilized’ societies (Bennett 2004; Lonetree 2012). Tony Bennett, among many others, identifies this as an effect of the colonial project which was premised upon gaining knowledge/power of and over colonized populations (Bennett

1 Goode also provides five scalar-types in a second category: ‘National Museums; Local, Provincial or City Museums;’ ‘College and School Museums;’ ‘Professional or Class Museums;’ ‘Museums or Cabinets for special research owned by societies or individuals.’

2 It is unclear what Goode means by ‘organized ethnographically;’ whether this had to do with a relation of areas to cultures or followed a typological model usually reserved for ethnographic displays.

1995, 2004). To Bennett, natural history was inherently a project of colonialism, as categorical knowledge of the world was necessary to manipulate it. In effect, nation-states with the most productive scientists of natural history might best be able to understand the world and its value to capitalists and nation-states alike (Bennett 2004). The institutional organization of this knowledge in the form of the natural history museum took an explanatory approach to showing the world: here is our mysterious natural world and the things we've collected to understand it. By including cultures, almost exclusively *other* cultures, these social groups became a part of the same natural world that was to be understood, controlled, and exploited (Bennett 2004).

Moreover, evolutionary paradigms that were used in explaining how transitions between archaic forms to contemporary forms of nature occurred were variously applied to cultural groups (often Indigenous) represented in natural history museums (Ames 1992; Lonetree 2012; Scott 2007). Even as evolutionary explanations for social difference fell out of favor after decades of critiques and the ethnic atrocities of World War II, evolution remained at least an implicit explanation for why these cultural materials were in natural history museums to begin with (Scott 2007: 33). This became a problematic aspect of natural history museums' collections—what can you do with a collection founded upon racist principles? Some natural history museums, like both the Franklin Institute and the Academy of Natural Sciences in

Philadelphia, made the extreme move of ridding themselves of their ethnographic and archaeological collections in order to brand themselves in the emerging 'science museum' paradigm.³ Most others could not, or would not, break up their collections, and so were faced with inventing new and innovative ways to display cultural objects in a natural history context. Few museums would have the opportunity that presented itself in Lyon, to completely reinvent the institution in a brand-new building with a brand-new name. This was the Musée d'Histoire naturelle-Guimet's opportunity to disavow its associations with racist histories and invent a new mode of display that would be more equitably representative of society.

Disavowal in the Musée des Confluences

For the purposes of this analysis, disavowal⁴ is a conscious recognition of a quality from which the individual (or in this case, institution) wishes to disassociate. This particularly draws upon Sibylle Fischer's book *Modernity Disavowed* which claims that 'the concept of disavowal requires us to identify what is being disavowed, by whom, and for what reason' (Fischer 2004). To disavow, then, is to reiterate a stereotype of the thing that is being disavowed. This is fundamentally a different concept than silences, which have often been a focus of museum critiques (e.g., Bruchac, 2014; Crossland, 2017; Trouillot, 2015) in that disavowals are both conscious *and* strategic. Silences, while often strategic, can be unconscious. Disavowals are 'more a strategy...than

3 In fact, at the earliest stages of the process, the proposed plan was to leave the ethnological collections at their old building and the new building would be devoted to the 'natural sciences' (Musée des Confluences, 2019a). However, according to staff members, this plan was abandoned due to the condition of the old building and the desire for a grand (and expensive) new museum which needed the collections undivided to justify the cost.

4 The term disavowal has two separate, but somewhat overlapping, academic traditions: psychoanalytic (especially Freud and Lacan) and phenomenological (especially Sartre and Fanon). In the psychoanalytic tradition, disavowal has to do with a denial, early in life, when the (male) individual first recognizes his mother's lack of a penis. Attributing her as fully human requires a disavowal of this lack and a continued assumption she, in fact, has a penis (Freud 1927). For Freud, this recognition is both conscious and unconscious. Conscious in the disavowal, or the belief of an alternative reality, but unconscious in its acceptance of the truth such that the alternative reality is necessary (Freud 1999). Lacan denies this unconscious aspect saying both sides are conscious, and that the awareness of what is being rejected is a crucial component of the disavowal (Lacan 1994). Sartre includes disavowal as an important component of his concepts of freedom, especially for people that are oppressed (Sartre, 1943, 1944). In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre explains the difference between authentic and inauthentic Jews as the difference between avowing and disavowing stereotypes, regardless of the stereotype's applicability to the individual (see pages 65-102). Fanon rejects the Sartre's assumptions of complete freedom to avow and disavow stereotypical identities, especially because black people are forced to accept stereotypes on the basis of people recognizing their external features (Fanon 1952). However, Fanon also claims that a disavowal of white masks—or a dialectic relation of blackness to whiteness—is the means by which black communities can liberate themselves, even if he is perhaps pessimistic about the ability of certain communities to attain this liberation (Vergès 1997).

a state of mind, and it is productive in that it brings forth further stories, screens, and fantasies that hide from view what must not be seen' (Fischer 2004: 38). The claim this paper makes is that the Musée d'Histoire naturelle-Guimet is conscious of the critiques of natural history museums and strategically disavowing the term to disassociate itself from the stereotype. In *Decolonizing Museums*, Amy Lonetree exposes this stereotype, citing the long and tragic history of museum practices surrounding the collection of Native American material culture and human remains (2012: 10-16). It seems clear that the Musée des Confluences was meant to be decolonized, in some respects, in order to both emphasize this disassociation and perform a new model.

Decolonization has emerged as a priority for conscientious museums and Indigenous communities alike (Smith, 2012). Addressing the negative legacies of museums, especially the inequality of display and racist collecting

practices, has become necessary for dispossessed and represented communities to heal. This process, for Lonetree, is one that converts museums from 'sites of oppression' to 'places that matter' (167-173). In the context of the tribally-oriented museums upon which she focuses, Lonetree shows the importance of healing for the Native communities themselves (123-167). This becomes especially important in museums because of their colonial, racist, and violent legacies. Museums, conventionally, are sites of oppression—by and for the colonizers (Ames, 1992; Boast, 2011). However, Lonetree sees abundant opportunity for museums to become places of healing. This requires explicit rejection of these problematic legacies and a commitment to validating contemporary communities and their grievances with museums.

It is unclear the degree to which the Musée des Confluences' rejection of "natural history" connotations is an effort in decolonization. What is clear is that decolonization is



Figure. 1
Musée du Confluences, 2018, by the Author



Figure. 2
To the left is science and to the right is belief, 2018, by the Author

an emphasis in the redesign of the museum, and likely played some—and I would wager a large—part in the disavowal of natural history. However, the lack of clarity is largely born of the complete elision of the term “natural history” in any of the exhibit texts, online materials, or publications. This establishes a fundamental tension as a visitor roams the exhibits: they are on one hand being sold a decolonizing rebrand but on the other hand this rebrand is not explicitly aligned with any decolonizing agenda. In this sense, the Musée des Confluences denies an explicit deconstruction of the colonial hierarchies upon which they are founded as a means of taking responsibility—both for the institutional past and for its obligations to the future in correcting the past.

Ultimately, the Musée takes a more passive approach in its disavowal, rejecting forms and practices implicitly rather than explicitly. This is nowhere more obvious than in its striking new architectural form. The new building, designed by the highly regarded Viennese company Coop

Himmelb(l)au, has very unconventional look—immediately rejecting the looks of traditional natural history museums in Romantic or Neo-Classical styles like the Muséum d’histoire naturelle in La Rochelle, Muséum d’histoire naturelle in Nantes, the Palais Longchamp in Marseille, and the Muséum national d’histoire naturelle in Paris. Said to resemble a ‘brain cloud,’ the architecture was meant to embody the collapse of ‘science’ and ‘culture’ into one architectural theme (Musée des Confluences 2010). This disavowal immediately seems to be a disassociation with the classic legacies of natural history, especially in museum form. It’s post-modern form perhaps defies the expectations one might have when they traditionally enter a museum. These rejections of both the traditional name and traditional museum space sets the scene to, according to the director Michel Côté,

...reflect on the presentation and representation of the Other, emphasizing the dynamism of societies, their evolution,



Figure. 3
The beginning of the exhibit focused on Indigenous cultures, 2018, by the Author

their stakes and their contemporaneity. Indeed, the Musée des Confluences pays particular attention to the current reality of non-European societies to better appreciate their transformation and evolution. If societies change, museums must recognize this change. (Caruana et al. 2008)

To Côté, creating a modern building helps to emphasize the modernity of the communities they are representing. Although he reiterates a few problematic legacies of colonialism, namely the “Other” and social evolution, Côté seems committed to a degree to a decolonization that is about validating contemporary communities. (Figure. 1)

Inside the museum, there are no exhibits on the first floor. The second floor displays three temporary exhibitions, all done in-house, on special topics often more in-line with conventional natural history museum topics—like collecting expeditions, poisons, particular Indigenous cultures, etc. The permanent exhibits, which can be found on the third floor,

take a different approach. They are organized in four separate rooms around four very deep and broad themes: Origins, Species, Societies, and Eternities. These concepts are meant to equally and equitably incorporate both their ethnographic and scientific collections in the same exhibit space. The point, similar to the goals espoused by Good in 1896, seems to be to display humans as animals. In this way, the disavowal of the title ‘natural history’ in the name of the museum does not mean it has rejected the institutional form and principles of natural history museums. This seems to indicate that the museum and its designers found that the core tenets of the natural history paradigm were not significantly problematic such that its project should be disavowed, only that the baggage the associated with the title—natural history—should be.

What follows in the next section are descriptions of three of the four permanent galleries. The gallery on Eternities was not included for two reasons: (1) to avoid insensitively discussing ancestors or rites to which only certain privileged

persons should have access and (2) to consciously address more important, community-oriented critiques at a later date if sufficient permissions are granted by those communities. The descriptions of the other three galleries below include a brief summary of the layout, with an eye towards understanding the intent of the museum. Criticism is largely saved for the next section, in which the effectiveness of the intention to disavow the negative legacies is considered.

Origines

In the first gallery accessible from the stairs and elevators, guests are introduced to 'Origins: Stories of the World.' (Figure. 2) The gallery is divided into two main narratives. On the left-hand side of the gallery, the tale of evolution, the origin of our species, and the scientific 'tree of life.' On the right-hand side of the gallery, taking almost no open floor space but wrapped along the inner wall of the linear, U-shaped gallery are 'stories about the origins of life.' This narrative tracks some Indigenous origin stories as they relate to the collections of the museum. In fact, many contemporary pieces were commissioned with aboriginal Australian artists to tell these stories themselves via their art (Caruana et al. 2008). This inclusivity gives the gallery a decidedly post-colonial feel. Indigenous origin stories are treated as nearly equivalent to scientific understandings of human origins. Squaring up with the problem that Indigenous cultures are only shown *as* nature by providing Indigenous explanations *for* nature has a strong effect. It represents an attempt to situate Western and Indigenous ontologies that have historically been treated asymmetrically, and it does so with an emphasis on the contemporaneity of Indigenous beliefs. The inherent premise of treating scientific ontologies as 'truth' and Indigenous as 'untruth,' perhaps at best, leads to hegemonic, hierarchical thinking that marks Indigenous peoples as less developed or perhaps less smart. This makes the representation of Indigeneity in the Origins permanent exhibit a poignant example of decolonizing exhibits and displays.

Espèces

In the adjacent gallery (Figure. 3), titled Species: The Web of Life, visitors are welcomed by a wall of ancient mummified cats and relatively recently stuffed birds, seemingly indicating the various interests humans have had in animals over time. Then visitors are introduced to objects coming from aboriginal Australian, Inuit, and Indigenous Amazonian communities, highlighting the various (but somewhat analogous) relationships these communities have with animals in the living and the spiritual domains. Emphasis is again placed on the equivalent ontological planes of these relationships, understandings, and rationalities. For the aboriginal Australians, the museum claims that special, 'totemic' relationships are formed via the spiritual dreamtime realm in which individuals are deeply implicated in the well-being of all humans and animals included in the totemic group. The Inuit – here the museum adopts its explanatory voice – have a person-to-person relationship with animals, which have fully equivalent moral and spiritual qualities to humans. For the Amazonians represented, they believed (past-tense explicitly in this section) humans and animals had recent shared ancestors, and thus animals have equivalent 'souls.' The rest of the exhibit mainly features a wide collection of animal species, arrayed in artistic, typological displays. Near the end there is another small collection of African masks and figurines next to display of early 20th century medical tools which credits the scientific experiments for which the tools were used as the harbinger of contemporary scientific awareness. It is a jarring meta-commentary of human ingenuity juxtaposed against the more typological and explanatory displays of Indigeneity. (Figure. 4)

The seeming intent of these re-presentations of the Indigenous communities is to avoid having visitors relate Indigenous peoples to animals by focusing on the roles animals play for these communities. It seems here that the main tenet from Origins carries over, that different ontologies regarding the natural world should be understood and



Figure. 4
African masks representing sociality and Western science representing ingenuity, 2018, by the Author

equivalently treated. In this case, most of the exhibit presents more traditional animal typologies with more traditional types of natural history interpretation. However, by prefacing the exhibit with these different ontologies, it seems clear that the museum is attempting to disavow the blind presumptions of our own ontologies by first familiarizing visitors with other ways of seeing these typological displays.

Sociétés

Across from the Species exhibit (Figure. 5), is the one permanent gallery that nearly exclusively focuses on culture, called Societies: Human Theatre. This space is divided into three themed sections: Organize, Exchange, and Create. To the left is Organize, which has a tremendous diversity of objects, including historical East Asian materials and more contemporary aboriginal Australian art. The center section, Exchange, also features a wide variety of objects that were traded, valuable, or products of ideological exchange, including kula rings, African shields, and potlach ceremony

materials. Finally, to the right is the Create section which features technological innovations, especially of the 19th and 20th centuries. In between the Organize and Exchange sections is a video-interactive on justice, asking visitors to engage with how they may react to many difficult hypothetical scenarios realistically, rather than theoretically. This interactive challenges visitors to consider how they might personally fall short of endorsing the kind of world they believe they want to see, showing statistics of those visitors that admit in the interactive they have said something that is racist or that they have not reported violence they witnessed. The exhibit is a powerful statement on ethics and suggests some pragmatic considerations toward changing habits or tendencies.

In what ironically comes off as a more traditional natural history gallery (more on that in the next section), the justice interactive stands out as a disavowal of a version of natural history that is oriented towards past-ness and descriptiveness, or possibly towards a conventionally sterilized scientific understanding. Instead, the Musée



Figure. 5
The first two sections of the gallery focused in large part on Indigenous cultures, 2018, by the Author

des Confluences seeks to incorporate varying degrees of complexity, pragmatism, and social justice into their narratives. Interestingly, the justice interactive does not include objects, and in this way might be seen as a particularly generative disavowal. Both the medium and the message of the interactive reject conventional museum engagements (though, this has obviously changed significantly in the past 25 years) by personally engaging via a social media-type approach. It is not necessarily an innovative approach, but it is one that disavows conventional museum engagements. Certainly, the museum is attempting to decolonize, though the effectiveness of that process can be debated—and will be below. The premise of this decolonial process for the Musée des Confluences seems to be the equivalent treatment of different ontologies. In doing so, many of the evolutionary, hierarchical presumptions are deconstructed in a very productive way. Despite these well-intentioned considerations, the museum's re-presentations will always have durable colonialisms (Stoler, 2016) that are tethered to the museum-form. The next section considered

how these re-presentations may have fell short of the colonial legacies of the natural history museum, highlighting the implicitly avowed colonialisms reiterated in the new museum.

Durable Colonialisms

In name, the Musée des Confluences is not a natural history museum. However, in design, the museum reifies the traditional missions of the natural history museum, as mentioned above. In order to be an effective disavowal, the institution must disassociate itself in word and in action. To reject the title of 'a racist' but to act racist, is still to be racist. Disavowals are effective when performed both in words and in deeds, and the museum strongly performs its disavowal in words. Unfortunately, the museum falls well short of this disassociation in deeds, making it ripe for post- and anti-colonial critique. This section evaluates the exhibits mentioned above for their durable colonialisms.

While Origins does a laudable job in reorienting the relationships between scientific and non-Western accounts of



Figure. 6
Western innovation is exclusively the focus of this section, 2018, by the Author

the origins of life, its treatment of the evolutionary and non-Western takes are far from commensurate. Initially visitors are introduced to the parallel trajectories—on the left is ‘Our Origins of Human Primates’ and on the right is ‘Stories about the Origins of Life.’ The scientific trajectory on the left frames its narratives in the parameters of ‘truth.’ These are not subjective ‘stories,’ like the non-Western beliefs, but truths to be learned and accepted. Consistently, especially in *Origins* and *Species*, interpretive texts recall ‘beliefs,’ ‘stories,’ ‘thoughts,’ etc. regarding Indigenous ontologies. In promotional materials found on the website the dichotomy between the paths were defined as ‘science and myth’ (Musée des Confluences 2019b). Indigenous and scientific beliefs, while parallel in the space, are not otherwise equivalently treated. This makes the Musée des Confluences complicit with one of the very legacies they clearly made great efforts to avoid.

In *Species*, there is a different kind of problem. The first set of displays were Indigenous cultures in an exhibit

called ‘Species,’ potentially associating each community with a lower form of speciation of humanity. This is doubly affirmed when you go from Indigenous cultures to huge typological displays of animals. While it seems the museum meant for the Indigenous ontologies to frame relationships with animal species, and at the same time deconstruct our privileged place in the natural world in Western ontologies, the effect is that these Indigenous cultures are being typologized in similar ways as the animals that follow them. Not only is this a problematic typologization, but it invites conventional temporal disjunctures associated with the still pervasive social evolutionary paradigm. While the Indigenous representations occur at the beginning of the linear exhibit (see Figure. 3), the only Western display comes near the end (see Figure. 4), potentially reifying visitors’ evolutionary presumptions rather than integrating Western society as the same specie and temporality as the represented Indigenous groups. It is clear in this context that the disavowal of natural history allowed the museum to take a novel approach, but the confines of their

iconic association with the natural history museum imaginary left the museum in a situation in which it perhaps seems more colonial than some of their predecessors.

This problem was reiterated again in the Societies gallery (Figure. 6), in which Indigenous communities were represented in the Organize and Exchange sections, but not in the Create section that highlighted innovation and scientific advancement. The Create section features toasters, cars, a mechanical loom, and a large assortment of telephones.⁵ The overall effect is that Indigenous communities can find ways to organize and perform exchanges but are not particularly creative or innovative. The focus on the 19th and 20th century technological innovations is both inherently exclusive and dangerously evolutionary. In a gallery in which many tend to start left-to-right, the visitors may find themselves beginning their gallery tour with aboriginal Australian art on the far-left wall and ending with Western scientific innovation to the right. The evolutionary presumptions here, while seemingly accidental, are easy to uptake for visitors. And while the exhibit is not intended to be temporally linear in any way, the institution's iconic relationship to natural history museums (which often have temporally linear exhibit designs) makes it impossible to avoid such associations.

Conclusion

In disavowing natural history, the Musée des Confluences has seemingly made efforts to disassociate from racist, colonial legacies of natural history museums. They have done so by attempting to equivalently treat Indigenous ontologies, present Indigenous peoples as contemporary, and promote pragmatic means to achieve a just society. In this context, disavowing natural history provides opportunities to distance the new museum from problematic legacies. However, the success of this disavowal depends upon a rejection of both the word and the deed. Disavowal of the term without a marked difference in exhibition narratives that are otherwise conventional in natural history museums often

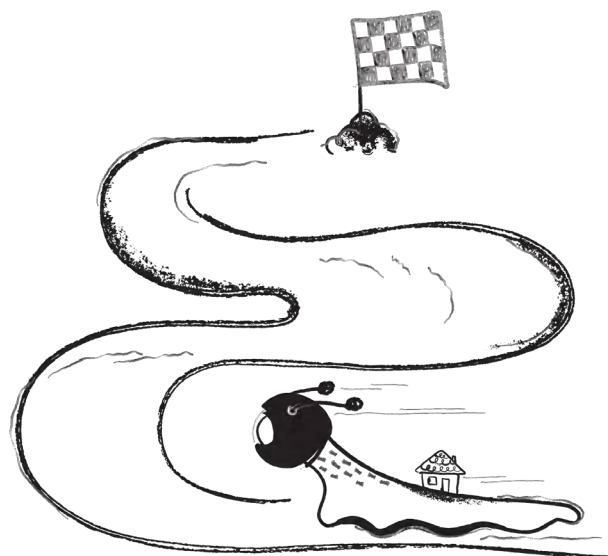
makes this decolonizing approach ring false. So many of the negative legacies of natural history museums are not unique to the word or category of "natural history," they are embodied forms of museum performance (Butler, 1990; Duncan, 1995). They are ways the museum communicates and narratives the museum tells. To sufficiently disavow these legacies, the Musée des Confluences must reject these embodied forms, as well as the description itself. Accordingly, the disavowal seems to fall far short of its decolonizing goal.

Effectively disavowing the negative legacies of natural history museums perhaps requires more explicit, metacommentary situating the new institution relative to this problematic form. In doing so, the museum has the opportunity to reconfigure what natural history means by deconstructing the problematic histories of the term. This is what Lonetree is calling for in decolonizing museums. The museums cannot disavow without recognizing their problematic histories, largely because they are founded upon them. Moreover, the healing that is necessary for the aggrieved communities comes from museums sufficiently, and explicitly, addressing the legacies of violence upon which they are founded. The violences have not just been in the collecting of the materials, but in the re-collecting of the materials *each time* they are interpreted and reinterpreted. These recollections represent new citational norms that are both authorized by and authorizing of public imaginaries of such things as indigeneity, race, and natural history. In this way, disavowals might be seen as a mechanism of the privileged, as only aggrieved communities ultimately suffer from the reiteration of the terms and their material forms. Disavowal of natural history, without sufficiently addressing its violent legacies, is a disavowal of responsibility for suffering, as much as it is an endorsement of Indigenous ontologies. It is as much a disavowal of obligations to heal, as much as it a narrative of survival. For natural history museums like the Musée des Confluence, healing cannot come by disavowing the histories of pain.

⁵ Oddly, this exhibit also includes a large collection of geodes, which doesn't seem to have any reason to be there.

Bibliography

- Ames, M. M. (1992). *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*. Vancouver, UBC Press.
- Bacon, F. (2016). *New Atlantis and The Great Instauration* (2nd Edition; J. Weinberger, Ed.). Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bennett, T. (1995). *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London and New York, Routledge.
- Bennett, T. (2004). *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution Museums Colonialism*. London, Routledge.
- Boast, R. (2011). 'Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited'. *Museum Anthropology* 34(1): 56-70.
- Boyd, W. L. (1999). 'Museums as Centers of Controversy'. *Daedalus* 128(3): 185-228.
- Brown, L. R. (1992). The Emerson Museum. *Representations* 40(Autumn): 57-80.
- Bruchac, M. M. (2014). 'My Sisters Will Not Speak: Boas, Hunt, and the Ethnographic Silencing of First Nations Women'. *Curator: The Museum Journal* 57(2): 153-171.
- Buchwald, J. Z., & Cohen, I. B. (Eds.). (2001). *Isaac Newton's Natural Philosophy*. Cambridge, MIT Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London, Routledge.
- Caruana, W., De Lary Healy, J., Glowczewski, B., Grundmann, P., Jacob, S., & Morvan, A. (2008). *Aborigènes: Collections australiennes contemporaines du musée des Confluences*. Lyon, FAGE éditions.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2002). Museums in Late Democracies. *Humanities Research* 9(1): 5-12.
- Colwell, C. (2017). *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits: Inside the Fight to Reclaim Native America's Culture*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Crossland, Z. (2017). 'The Agency of the Dead' in Enfield, N. and Kockelman, P. (eds.) *Distributed Agency*: 111. Oxford, Oxford Scholarship Online.
- Doody, A. (2010). *Pliny's Encyclopedia: The Reception of the Natural History*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Duncan, C. (1995). 'The Art Museum as Ritual' in *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (pp. 7-20). London, Routledge.
- Fanon, F. (1952). *Black Skin, White Masks* (New ed). London, Pluto-Press.
- Fine-Dare, K. S. (2002). *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (1st ed.). Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press.
- Fischer, S. (2004). *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. Durham and London Duke, University Press.
- Freud, S. (1927). 'Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes'. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 8, 133-142.
- Freud, S. (1999). 'Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence' in Strachey, J. (eds.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXIII (1937-1939): Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works* (Vol. XXIII, pp. 271-278). New York, Vintage.
- Haas, J. (1990). 'Repatriation at the Field Museum'. *Museum Anthropology* 14(3), 16-18.
- Lacan, J. (1994). *Le séminaire, Livre IV: La relation d'objet et les structures freudiennes*. (J.-A. Miller, eds.). Paris, Seuil.
- Linné, C. von. (1964). *Systema naturæ* (Facsimile of the 1st Edition; M. S. J. Engle-Ledeboer & H. Engel, eds.). Nieuwkoop, De Graaf.
- Lonetree, A. (2012). *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press.
- Musée des Confluences. (2009, May 3). *50 Questions / 50 Answers*. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20090503074205/http://www.museedesconfluences.fr/musee/faq.php> (Accessed 9 January 2019).
- Musée des Confluences. (2010, December). *Le Musée des Confluences Une ambition partagée. Département du Rhône*. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20130128144210/http://www.museedesconfluences.fr/documents/confluences_12p.pdf (Accessed 9 January 2019)
- Musée des Confluences. (2019a, January 10). *histoire*. Available at: <http://www.museedesconfluences.fr/fr/lhistoire> (Accessed 10 January 2019).
- Musée des Confluences. (2019b, January 10). *Origines, les récits du monde*. Available at: from <http://www.museedesconfluences.fr/fr/node/351> (Accessed 10 January 2019).
- Sartre, J.-P. (1943). *Being and Nothingness*. (H. E. Barnes, Trans.). New York, Washington Square Press.
- Sartre, J.-P. (1944). *Anti-Semite and Jew*. (G. J. Becker, Trans.). New York, Schocken Books.
- Scott, M. (2007). *Rethinking Evolution in the Museum: Envisioning African Origins*. London, Routledge.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2nd ed.). London, Zed Books.
- Stocking, G. W. (ed.). (1985). *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*. Madison, Wis, University of Wisconsin Press.
- Stoler, A. L. (2016). *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*. Durham and London, Duke University Press.
- Trouillot, M.-R. (2015). *Silencing the past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston and Massachusetts, Beacon Press.
- Vergès, F. (1997). 'Creole Skin, Black Mask: Fanon and Disavowal'. *Critical Inquiry* 23(3), 578-595.



Decolonise Art History, Decolonise Art Museums!

By Jelle Bouwhuis

Abstract

The call for decolonising in the fields of culture studies has gained impetus, especially through numerous publications from and interviews with the circle around Walter Dignolo. In this article I look specifically into decolonising the art museum. For this I take for granted, also based on my experience as a curator, that like museums in general art museums are struggling with issues of cultural diversity and inclusivity. This struggle is rooted in fundamental frictions in which Art History plays a role. I will discuss such epistemic friction through an analysis of some characteristic art historical categories and their corresponding museological classifications. Normalized categories such as Asian Art, Islamic Art, and Contemporary Art appear neutral, however, they are colonially imbricated terms and as such serve as unacknowledged political qualifiers. These frictions, I argue, produce an epistemic deadlock that problematizes the very possibility of a genuine museum policy of inclusivity. Is it possible to delink art historical and museological classifications from their colonial past and if so, what are other options?

Keywords

Decoloniality, Art Museum, Islamic Art, Contemporary Art, Global Art History

Is it possible to decolonize art history? The plea for decoloniality gains currency in a context of current events ranging from #metoo to Black Lives Matter, the acknowledgement of indigenism and First Peoples' rights and movements for gender and colour inclusivity by societal institutions, including museums.¹ Several recent publications have brought the discussion on decolonising into the purview of art institutions, such as *Decolonising Art Institutions*, *Decolonising Museums* and, in French, *Decolonisons les arts!* (Kolb and Richter, 2017; *L'Internationale*, 2015; Cukierman, Dambury and Vergès, 2018). Drawing on these discussions, this essay explores what decolonising art history, that is, the discipline of art history, and especially the art history produced and disseminated by museums, might look like. There are no succinct conclusions to bring to the table, but following

this urge to decolonise, it seems necessary to address some pertinent issues of coloniality that are particular to art history.

Modernity/Decoloniality

Decoloniality is a term related to thinkers such as the late Peruvian sociologist and humanist thinker Aníbal Quijano (1930-2018) who coined the phrase 'Coloniality of Power' (Quijano, 2000). Coloniality is conceived as a continuation of colonial violence through other means. The term, and its claim have continued to be argued for in the 2000s and 2010s, most prominently by the Argentine semiotician Walter Dignolo.² Indeed, it is Dignolo who is now best known in the discourse around coloniality, and who continues to lecture extensively. Other key figures now active are Nelson Maldonado-Torres in the United States, Madina Tlostanova in Russia, and Rolando

¹ The Inclusive Museum Research Network was founded in 2008 and organizes international conferences annually, see: <https://onmuseums.com/>.

² Other useful introductions to decoloniality are: Bhambra, G. (2014). 'Postcolonial and Decolonial Reconstructions.' *Connected Sociologies*: 117-140. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472544377.ch-006> (Bhambra here includes postcolonial thinkers such as Edward Said); Ali, S.M. (2016). *An Introduction to Islamic Decoloniality*. Birmingham, Impact Hub, 8 October 2016. https://www.academia.edu/29032711/An_Introduction_to_Islamic_Decoloniality (accessed 28 January 2019).

Vázquez in the Netherlands. Cumulatively, they circulate a steady output of ideas, through texts and interviews that are abundantly available online.³ This creates a sense of urgency around the need for a decoloniality movement in academia.

For Mignolo, coloniality is the dark side of modernity. The ‘rhetoric’ of modernity, and its continuing promises of salvation, is inextricably intertwined with the ‘logic’ of coloniality. The latter is the ‘ongoing, hidden process of expropriation, exploitation, pollution, and corruption that underlies the narrative of modernity promoted by institutions and actors belonging to corporations, industrialized nation-states, museums, and research institutions.’ (Mignolo and Vázquez, 2016). In terms of museums, one can think of narratives of national or human progress based on objects acquired through colonialist intervention and theft, or wealth accrued more generally through the means of colonial power and its legacies.⁴ The lack of a diverse cultural workforce and the sector’s subsequent audience outreach is also a result of cultural marginalization and an erasure rooted in what Mignolo calls ‘the colonial matrix of power’. To practice decoloniality, modernity itself needs to be subjected to what Mignolo calls ‘delinking.’ That is, to delink claims, concepts, and epistemologies grounded in the intentions of modernity and politics of colonialism. This delinking includes the concept of aesthetics, which is ultimately a European philosophical, and therefore provincial, concept endowed with categorical, universalising claims about beauty (Chakrabarty, 2000). The decolonialists counter this with the concept of AestheSis. AestheSis does not prioritize the material or the visual over other agencies of beauty. It is intercultural, political and embraces perspectives from the Global South (Lockward, Vázquez, et al., 2011). The decolonialists emphasise the undue, out-dated dominance of Eurocentrism – the

epistemological hegemony, or universalism, that arose in the colonial age in Europe, and that continues to fundamentally shape the criteria and modes of thinking we operate by today (Grosfoguel, 2007).

Art History, Global and World Art History

Classical art history would certainly not pass the decoloniality test. Art history as an academic discipline originated in nineteenth century colonial Europe. It is biased towards Europe still, in its lingering set of colonialist tropes and historical canons that continue to go unchanged (Brzynski, 2007). Classical art history prioritises materiality and the visual aspects of the objects it considers through reproductions and detached displays of objects in museums. By valuing and emphasising aesthetics, it avoids any acknowledgment of its colonial roots and framing. Instead, it hides its Eurocentrism behind claims of universalism. In other words, classical art history is normalised coloniality, a sophisticated science that has constructed strict protocols that distract one from its limitations as a discipline, especially in comparison with the much broader concept of AestheSis.

For example in academic education, an introduction to art history continues to prioritise the Renaissance. Although more room is gradually made for other surveys that centre on Asian Art, Islamic Art and so forth, the classical one remains normative (Kerin and Lepage, 2016). One can question whether such classifications are doing more harm than good to begin with, as they are also born from an Eurocentric colonial art history.⁵ This brings into focus the underlying essentialism of such classifications. Islamic art for instance, solely through its name, carries with it the idea of a monolithic and static religious culture, a civilization somewhere in the past, outside of modernity that inversely, serves to consolidate the idea of

3 For example, see: Maldonado-Torres, N. (2016). ‘Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality.’ *Foundation Frantz Fanon*, October 23, 2016. Available at: <http://frantzfanonfoundation-fondationfrantzfanon.com/article2360.html> (Accessed 28 January 2019).

4 See for instance Bennett, T. (2004). *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism*. Abingdon and New York, Routledge.

5 As per Asian art: Conn, S. (2010). ‘Where is the East.’ In *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press: 86-137. For Islamic Art as a European colonial concept, see: Blair, S. and Bloom, J. (2003). ‘The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field.’ *The Art Bulletin* 85 (1): 152-84.

Western (Christian) superiority.

Art history itself, however, has not been standing still. Amidst the manifold new directions and propositions of the previous three decades, the discipline has seen two major currents that counter classical art history. New Art History, which emerged in the 1980s, shifted the focus of study from the coherence and continuity among artworks themselves, to power structures; the social, financial and institutional contexts in which artworks and their mutual coherence gain prominence. In Visual Culture Studies art becomes just one aspect of a much broader theoretical field of enquiry dealing with visibility and visual expression. These currents have acquired academic legitimacy, although it might be argued that their efforts now operate in parallel to a continued classical art history.

In the framework of decolonial thought, two recent trajectories within art history need some special attention. A group of art historians has assembled under the name settler-colonial art history to express a consciousness of the settler-colonial Eurocentric bias of classical art history. Scholars such as Damian Skinner and Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll aim to widen the demographic scope of art history, through developing new methodologies responding to indigenous concepts of art that have survived colonialism. As such, they cross over into an epistemology hitherto reserved for anthropologists. The problematics of the anthropological discipline lie outside my discussion, but it is worth noting in brief that the distinction between anthropology and art history served to delineate between culture and folklore, and between art and craft. The settler-colonial art historians make

explicit that their work targets the five larger nations that were closely entangled with British colonial expansionism, where art history continues to contain aporias: Canada, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Dynamics of colonialism persist here, they argue, and so their art historical work seeks to respond to this.⁶

An arguably more impactful body of scholarship related to the subject of decolonising has emerged in the form of world or global art history.⁷ This work aims at widening the scope of the discipline by including art histories from anywhere in the world and relativising long-established art canons. It not only makes the Global South a dignified subject of art history but also a dignified supplier of contemporary art and art theory. World art history enhances the interest in migratory art and aesthetics, and has given New Art History more élan through sharing a focus on art historiography.

World art history is fast becoming an acknowledged specialism in the field of art historical study. Yet it comes with contradictions. For one, the consistent study of world art history – that is, a putting together of art from various ages and various regions of the world in some comprehensible discursive concept – is historically rooted in German Kunstgeschichte around 1900 (Pfisterer, 2008). Many larger art museums are the manifestation of this endeavour to assemble and universalise art and artefacts from many parts of the globe under one umbrella.⁸ This universalising aspiration perpetuates an Enlightenment-informed aesthetics and retains the roots of a Euro-American approach, if not its intentions (and the colonality thereof). Despite this, world art history has gained new momentum with the

6 And: 'One of the challenges for settler-colonial art history is to address the complexities posed by migrant and diasporic communities, and to engage with settler-colonialism as a historical formation that produces specific articulations of racialized identities,' see: "About the Project," *Settler-Colonial Art History*, <http://settler-colonial.strikingly.com>.

7 See, for instance: Zijlmans, K. and W. van Damme (eds.) (2008). *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*. Amsterdam, Valiz; Casid, J. and A. D'Souza (eds.) (2014). *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*. Williamstown, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute; DaCosta Kaufmann, T., C. Dossin and B. Joyeux-Prunel (eds.) (2016). *Circulations in the Global History of Art*. Abingdon and New York, Routledge, alongside collections of essays issued from the (now defunct) Global Art Museum led by Hans Belting under the aegis of the ZKM Centre for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany, and Elkins, J. (ed.) (2007). *Is Art History Global?* Abingdon and New York, Routledge.

8 This is true for instance for European museums such as the British Museum, the Louvre or the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. However these do not strictly qualify as art museums, whereas in the United States such museums emphatically call themselves art museums, like The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Art Institute of Chicago.

burgeoning of post-colonial discourses and globally thriving art biennials. A more recent development in world art history is more promising, in its efforts to dig into the notion of connectedness or circulations. The main question posed here is: why do historians and art historians traditionally prioritize place over mobility? Circulations signal a deeper academic investment in the mobility of things, materials, ideas, and peoples that together produce art and artefacts (DaCosta, Dossin and Joyeux-Prunel, 2016). In studying mobility, the spatial distances and implications of foreignness retained in classical art historical categories and methodologies might be transcended.

Art Historiography and the Museum

Needless to say, such a practice of art history is in competition with conventional canon-based art history. The formation of an art canon is the result of processes of power relations, that lead to the exclusion of most artworks in favour of just a few, and the hiding of the process of construction itself (Langfeld, 2018). Yet, as art historiographer Gregor Langfeld argues, any effort to expand or multiply the canon at the same time emphasises the exceptionality of the conventional canon. Langfeld studied early twentieth century German Expressionism and how this art was canonised after the Second World War in an (over)reaction to the previous suppression and persecution of it under Nazism. He pleads for the importance of the role of art historiography in art history. By focussing on how canons have developed, their role in constructing (historical or socio-cultural) value can be made relative to others. This implies a thorough questioning of the mechanisms that lead to the sacralisation of art and that

conceal the socio-historic conditions under which canonisation takes shape (Langfeld, 2018: 5-6). Taking cues from Pierre Bourdieu and Marcel Mauss before him, Langfeld draws a parallel between art history and the work of the magician. Audiences collectively overlook the power of deception of the magician at work. Much the same happens in how art history has concealed the conditions of production and canonisation.

Langfeld addresses this issue in an article in the *Journal of Art Historiography*, a journal that is characteristic of the analytical if not deconstructive perspective of New Art History. Yet in this specific analysis of the issue of canon formation, he leaves out the role of the art museum in the processes of sacralisation and canonisation of art. Alongside art history as an academic discipline, the art museum is the place to preserve, acquire, present, cherish and, in short, sacralise the artwork. It is the end station of circulation, so to speak. Surely the art museum is thus a place where art history is prominently displayed. But this art history is always at the service of the objects it keeps. Everyone wants to know how the magician does the trick, but hardly anyone attempts to unveil the magic, except perhaps a few aspiring magicians. So too, people visit an art museum for the art, not for the desacralisation of it, except, perhaps, the art historiographer and the decolonial activist.

Art museums are the most widespread, visible, and most numerous visited centres of dissemination of art history to wider audiences and the public. Art history is an important factor in the rhetoric of establishing their institutional authority.⁹ This use of art history is distinct from the more inclusive or critical efforts of art historiography that engages with latent colonial and modern power structures.

⁹ For the Museum of Modern Art this is analyzed by Mary Anna Leigh, diss. *Building the Image of Modern Art. The Rhetoric of Two Museums and the Representation and Canonization of Modern Art (1935-1975): The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Museum of Modern Art in New York*. Amsterdam, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2008). Available at: <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/13362/Front.pdf?sequence=5> (Accessed 12 May 2019).

The analysis of the public role of the museum lies elsewhere, in museum studies for instance.¹⁰ Presentations or even acquisitions can be informed by art historiography; exhibitions concentrating on the role of individual collectors might be a good example here. But art historiography is principally a textual approach to art, whereas historical conceptions of art lie in the register of the material and the visual. Modes of presenting the material and the visual, rather than their critical construction, thus continue to dominate.

The implementation of historiography into the public realm by the museum itself would also imply a disentanglement of specific and often colliding interests of departments and individual curators inside the institution. Based on my tenure as a curator in a major modern art museum I have experienced how hard it is to transcend or surpass art-historical disciplines and curatorial habits, more so even than the boundaries of their specific departmental regulations, requirements, and administration.¹¹ The main shared interest among museum staff is to collect more objects. To put these in an art historical narrative is regarded as the specific expertise of the museum, and hence collecting functions as its existential safeguard. The making of critical art historiographical exhibitions tends to involve the consultation of outsiders with a certain stature, so that the project can become a marketable event, and one distinct from the museum's routine task of collecting.¹² In this matter, museums do not differ from any other institution: they are here to stay.

It is exactly in this conjunction of institutional

logic and art history that categorisation, classification and essentialism become an important nexus that sustains canons and museological conventions. According to the eminent art historian Claire Farago, one of the first things that institutions need to adjust as a decolonial gesture is: '[...] to seek the sources of lingering assumptions of geographical determinism and racial or ethnic essentialism in our own current accounts, in order to weed them out, expunge them.' (2017: 57). This is not going to be easy, for some major reasons.

Cultures of Accumulation

Museums focus on accumulation. In the decolonial perspective, colonialism is the twin brother of accumulation (Quijano, 2000).¹³ It is certainly contradictory to free circulation. Naturally, works might circulate within a museum itself and works might circulate among museums. But by far the larger parts of collections sit safely in storage while new acquisitions continue to enter museums – and this goes on perpetually. Aside from the canonical works shown semi-permanently in collection displays, the majority of a museum's collection will actually never make a public appearance at all, or at best only once. Museums do consider deaccessioning, that is, the removal of parts of their collection that are never displayed. If deaccessioning takes place, however, it tends to involve merely the transfer of objects from one museum to another, which does not exactly put things back in circulation. In an interesting essay commissioned by two large funding bodies for the arts in the United Kingdom, David Cannadine

10 See for instance Bennett, T. (2004). *Pasts Beyond Memory. Evolution, Museums, Colonialism*. Abingdon and New York, Routledge; Macdonald, S. (Ed.) (2006). *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishing; Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000). *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. London and New York, Routledge; Duncan, C. (1995). *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*. London, Taylor & Francis; Sherman, D. and Rogoff, I. (Eds.) (1994). *Museum Culture. Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*. London, Routledge. There are perspectives from insiders as well, usually gearing towards the reaffirmation of the museum's public authority, such as: Cuno, J. (Ed.) (2006). *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*. Princeton, Princeton University Press; Janes, R. (2009). *Museums in a Troubled World, Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse?* London, Routledge; Ten Thije, S. (2016). *The Emancipated Museum*. Amsterdam, Mondriaan Fund.

11 Bouwhuis, J. (2018). 'How Far How Near: A Global Assemblage in the Modern Art Museum.' In S. Dornhof, B. Hopfener, B. Lutz and N. Buurman (Eds.). *Situating Global Art: Topologies – Temporalities – Trajectories*. Bielefeld, Transcript-Verlag: 167-190. This is a reflection on my own experience with making an art-historiographic exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

12 An interesting and early example is the exhibition Hans Haacke – Upstairs: Viewing Matter, at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (NL), 1996. I discuss two recent projects at the end of this essay.

13 This opinion is of course more widespread. See for the concept of liberalism as the main incentive for colonialism in the British Empire: Bell, D. (2016). *Reordering the World. Essays on Liberalism and Empire*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

presents deaccessioning as a feasible solution to the issue of accumulation in museums (2018). In reality, deaccessioning has proven to be utterly troublesome and frequently unfeasible, certainly for public museums. Deaccessioning is a non-existent practice, an *idée fixe*. Instead, a continuous expansion of collections safeguards the institution's principal public argument for realising building extensions on the (arguably false) premise of enabling more visibility for the objects it accumulates. And in these extensions lies a guarantee for further accumulation, financial exploitation and the performance of authority for which art history is instrumentalised.

Although the museum's art historical classifications endow collections with a scholarly aura, they are often based on particular constructions of private interests. This is as true for tycoons scouring China or other Asian regions for (derelict) religious objects as for those shopping around in the now globally dispersed markets for contemporary art. Donations are made to add to established categories (Asian Art, Contemporary Art, etcetera). In this sense, museums are subject to what John Elsner and Roger Cardinal have coined 'cultures of collecting' (1994). If the native can be said to be the 'source community' of the anthropology or history museum, then the private collector has that same role at the art museum. Art museums are held hostage by redundant epistemic frameworks handed down and kept firmly in place by their own selective historiography and source community.

To give an example, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has a collection of Asian Art, which was enriched in 2013 with a beautiful pavilion dedicated to this collection.¹⁴ The classification of Asian Art is problematic to begin with. Where is Asia? When is Asia? Obviously, the collection is used as the self-explanatory proof of such a classification. The classification

itself is a normalised, seemingly neutral denominator that obscures specific spatial and temporal exclusions. Asian Art often omits Western Asia. In museums, this region is usually the domain of either Ancient Near Eastern Art or Islamic Art. Thus, Asian Art is normatively purified, geographically speaking of Western Asia, and religiously speaking not from religion itself, but from one religion specifically, namely Islam. The Rijksmuseum has a dedicated section for Islamic Art. This section is stowed away in one vitrine somewhere at the far end of the museum's 'Special Collections'. There are more aberrations. For instance, Asian Art at the Rijksmuseum includes contemporary Japanese kimonos, but completely fails to include any contemporary artists. All of this will make sense to us once we are trained in the culture of collecting that surrounds, and indeed constructs, Asian Art.¹⁵ Then it perhaps makes sense that Asian aesthetics is not so much situated in geographical Asia but in some mystified and purified past exclusively adapted to the taste and connoisseurship of Euro-American collectors, an aesthetics subsequently transferred to the public realm as 'true'. This is Asia, according to the museum that still seems unaware of Edward Said's vital criticism of such orientalism more than forty years ago.¹⁶

The Art-Historical Other

The museum's art history is meant to highlight the art objects it possesses, or wants to possess. This is what art historian Donald Preziosi alludes to concerning the ambiguous nature of art history: on the one hand 'the object's meaning or significance is perpetually deferred across a network of associations defined by formal or thematic relationships' while on the other hand 'it is invariably foregrounded as unique and irreplaceable, as singular and non-reproducible.' (Preziosi, 2006: 53). Although this does not seem true for world art

14 It is compiled and owned by the Royal Asian Art Society of the Netherlands. After being hosted by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam from 1932 to 1952, their collection has since found a permanent home and patronage at the Rijksmuseum.

15 The museum's website gives a glimpse of the culture of Asian Art collecting and the competitive atmosphere it is in: 'The Rijksmuseum is the only museum in the Netherlands that collects Asian *art* – ethnology museums tend to concentrate more on culture.' (italics by the Rijksmuseum). See: <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/works-of-art/asian-art>

16 It is important to realize that Indonesia, a (Islamic) region that supplied a large part of the Asian (Hindu) art collection now kept at the Dutch national Rijksmuseum, was under Dutch (Christian) colonial rule for most of the 19th century and up until 1945.

history or any art history expanding on the notion of circulation, this foregrounding on uniqueness becomes especially manifest in the art museum. Some objects become even more unique within the classifications carved out for them. Within these classifications, that are already hierarchical, individual objects are subjected to internal hierarchies as well. This structural logic is taken as self-explicit and natural.

Preziosi contends that for art history this requires a belief in the power of objects comparable to a belief in the Eucharist. Art history is a 'discipline of the self' – the European, Christian self. According to Preziosi art historical discourse rarely discusses 'the (silent) contrast between European "progress" in the arts in contradistinction to the coincident "decline" of Europe's principal other in early modern times, the (comparably multinational and multi-ethnic) world of Islam.' (Preziosi, 2005, 81-2). This of course is especially true when considering normative art history, which is full of objects related to Christianity quite neutrally termed 'Renaissance', 'Baroque', 'Romanticism' and so forth, yet entirely omits any that are related to Islam. Whilst Preziosi clearly argues against the illusionary neutrality of art history as a universal discipline, he does not unpack the full implications of this for categories such as Islamic Art. Like Asian Art, it is full of internal contradictions. The term designates religious content or function, whereas most objects collected under this category have little or nothing to do with religion at all, unlike Asian Art, in which Buddhas and Hindu deities dominate. Like Asian Art, it is mainly valorised in the past. It is 'denied a coevalness with the art of European modernity.' (Flood, 2007).¹⁷ Whenever Islamic art from after 1800 is discussed, that is after the demise of the Ottoman Empire, it is typically from the realm of anthropology and anthropological museums (Shatanawi, 2015).

The Eurocentrism of the art historical category notwithstanding, Islamic Art is thriving on the Arabian Peninsula. The Gulf region has developed into an avid collector of Islamic Art and applies a contemporised framework for it as well.¹⁸ This seems opportune for regimes that boast an image of a pan-Islamic world. The European, orientalist category of Islamic Art is conveniently appropriated for that end and it seems hardly questioned why one cherishes an epistemic relic from a normative, Eurocentric art history. But of course this episteme was a political frame from the very beginning. A frame that conveniently draws Islam into the realm of art history yet keeps it at a distance by relegating it into the sphere of religion and pre-modernity, whereas classical art history is hardly ever cast as typically Christian. It is presumed to be modern and secular, and thus universal.

Regarding this, it is interesting to read between the lines of a paper that Neil MacGregor presented at Harvard University in the early 2000s, not long after 9/11. MacGregor was at the time Director of the National Gallery in London and would soon take up the prestigious post of Director of the British Museum. He describes the National Gallery as a popular place due to the ease of understanding of its artworks, something he explains by highlighting the sentiments that these works trigger. While hinting at the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001, he uses incitements of devotion and consolation to explain the popularity of individual works (MacGregor, 2006). Deceitfully encouraging the 'different meanings and truths' in the understanding of artworks he actually leads his audiences into what the critical anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler has characterized as 'the messy space between reason and sentiment': an explanation exclusively geared towards a Christian theological understanding (2010: 39).

17 With this 'denial of coevalness' Flood alludes to an important publication on this issue: Fabian, J. (1983). *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York, Columbia University Press. See for a further expansion of the epistemological issues with Islamic Art: Shalem, A. (2012). 'What do we mean when we say 'Islamic art'? A plea for a critical rewriting of the history of the arts of Islam.' *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 :1-18. Available at: <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/shalem.pdf> (Accessed 13 May 2019.)

18 The Sharjah Art Museum and the Mathaf – Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha for instance are platforms for contemporary art in the context of Islamic Art, by showing work from artists living and working wherever Islam is a living religion (thus, almost anywhere) but who do not make religious art. Dubai based organization Art Jameel organizes annually the Jameel Art Prize for contemporary art inspired by Islamic Art, in collaboration with the V&A in London.

What is presented as reason is actually culturally-grounded sentiment, and what is presented as cultural inclusivity is actually theologically exclusivity. Subsequently, his opinion of the National Gallery's devotion to the public comes at the cost of a categorical exclusion, or xenophobia, especially in light of London's post-colonial demographics.

An example such as this makes it quite unimaginable how museological art history can enable or support the idea of the inclusive museum. MacGregor's lecture in a series addressing 'art museums and the public trust' is exemplary of the abuse of a normative Eurocentric (Christian) bias of art history. It reminds us that when we talk about decolonising, we should not lose sight of the counter-possibility of recolonising the discipline and subsequently the world outside. Art museums and their source community continue to have stakes in and hold power over art history looks. As unruly a discipline as art history is, it is an easy plaything in the hands of power.

Conclusions

Can this be countered at all? Addressing the position of art historians, Rolando Vázquez suggests that they need to explain their situatedness. From which context is your art history constructed, in whose authority are you working, for the benefit of whom? Such explanations will create a certain humility, as opposed to the 'arrogant' or 'ignorant ignorance' of positions that continue to deny coloniality (Vázquez, 2019). Such arrogance however seems not only the product of the art historian, who is subservient to the institution of the museum, the public face of their discipline. The institution adds complex advocacy to this matrix. What is needed is not humility but the zest of the decolonial activist. Perhaps we should even think of collective organizing here, not as colleagues within institutions, but as art historians in resistance to the coloniality of the institutions we serve and against the exclusionary practices of categorisation and their aporias.

For the time being, we have to take recourse to

artist interventions to find decolonial gestures. The collection display *The Making of Modern Art* in the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, might be cited as one of these. This presentation was realized in collaboration with the Museum of American Art, which in its turn is a concept by Yugoslavian-born and self-proclaimed 'former artist' Goran Djordjević (b. 1950), who works under various pseudonyms, including Walter Benjamin. In this presentation, artworks from the museum's collection are treated as documentary material in a larger narrative about the construction of Modern Art by museums, such as the Museum of Modern Art, collectors, critics, art historians and politicians over the course of the twentieth century. Each of these actors, the exhibition suggests, was interested in the marginalisation of specific politics, i.e. colonial and communist, as an art historical subject. In the presentation, on show until 2021, originals and copies of more or less canonical art works, including Mondrians, are exhibited interchangeably without further ado, implying that the average museum visitor cannot possibly discern the one from the other (despite my 'expertise', neither could I). As such, it not only desacralises the foundational logic of uniqueness behind the canon, but also questions the cult of the artist genius, the category of Modern Art and the idea of an a-political, 'neutral' art history in general. Although in itself not decolonial, this presentation demonstrates that a critical practice of art historiography in the museum can still retain something of the magic Gregor Langfeld refers to.

Another example is the exhibition *Speech Acts* in Manchester Art Gallery, compiled from various city collections in Manchester under the aegis of Black Artists & Modernism, led by artist Sonia Boyce and the University of the Arts in London. *Speech Acts* is 'an invitation to engage with the juxtaposition of works considered "collection highlights" with those rendered invisible or viewed through the narrow lenses of biography and difference.' (Boyce, 2018). In this exhibition, the formerly invisible works are shown on equal footing to those long considered canonical by dint of history. So doing, the canonical becomes relativised, and specifically rooted

in histories of (racial, colonial) power. Simultaneously, and just as vitally, works that have historically been less visible were presented outside of their constraining categorisation as other, minority or cultural. What is interesting is of course the shift, albeit temporarily, of the museum's source community. In this case the focus was on black artists marginalized in the museal matrix of coloniality and power.

The shift from a semi-private to a communal approach in museum work is perhaps the best promise for a decolonial future. Who is to decide which community gets in will become a focus of conflict and contestation, whereas the question who is to represent which community will bring to the fore that even art history has always been a political project to begin with.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Mary Sherman (Boston) and Renee Volkers (Utrecht) for commenting on the first drafts of this essay, and Sophie Mak-Schram (Leiden) for additional comments and editing.

Bibliography

- Boyce, S. (2018). *Foreword to Speech Acts: Reflection - Imagination – Repetition*. (Exhibition catalogue). Manchester, Manchester Art Gallery. Available at: <http://manchesterartgallery.org/exhibitions-and-events/exhibition/speech-acts/> (Accessed 12 May 2019).
- Brzyski, A. (Ed) (2007). *Partisan Canons*. Durham, Duke University Press.
- Cannadine, D. (2018). *Why Collect? A Report on Museum Collecting Today*. London, Art Fund. Available at: <https://www.artfund.org/assets/downloads/why-collect-report.pdf> (Accessed 12 May 2019).
- Chakrabarty, D. (2000). *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Cukierman, L., Dambury, G. and Vergès, F. (Eds.) (2018). *Décolonisons les arts!* Paris, L'Arche.
- DaCosta Kaufmann, T., Dossin, C. and Joyeux-Prunel, B. (Eds.) (2016). *Circulations in the Global History of Art*. Abingdon and New York, Routledge.
- Elsner, J. and Cardinal, R. (Eds.) (1994). *The Cultures of Collecting*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- Farago, C. (2017). 'Cutting and Sharing the "Global Pie": Why History Matters to Discussions of Contemporary "Global Art".' *OnCurating* 35: 56-60.
- Flood, F.B. (2007). 'From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art.' In E. Mansfeld (Ed.), *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions*: 31-53. London, Routledge.
- Grosfoguel, R. (2007). 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn. Beyond political-economy paradigms.' *Cultural Studies* 21 (2-3): 211-223.
- Kerin, M.R. and Lepage, A. (2016). 'De-Centering "The" Survey: The Value of Multiple Introductory Surveys to Art History.' *Art History Pedagogy & Practice* 1: 1-15. Available at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp/vol1/iss1/3/> (Accessed 12 May 2019).
- Kolb, R. and Richter, D. (Eds.) (2017). 'Decolonizing Art Institutions.' *OnCurating* 35. Available at: <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-35.html#.W8B0Ei-YN8c> (Accessed 12 May 2019).
- Langfeld, G. (2018). 'The canon in art history: concepts and approaches.' *Journal of Art Historiography* 19: 1-18. Available at: <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/langfeld.pdf> (Accessed 12 May 2019).
- L'Internationale Online (2015) *Decolonizing Museums*. Ghent, L'Internationale Online. Available at: <http://www.internationaleonline.org/media/files/02-decolonisingmuseums-1.pdf> (Accessed 12 May 2019).
- Lockward, A., Vázquez, R., et al. (2011). 'Decolonial Aesthetics (I).' *TDI + Transnational Decolonial Institute*. Available at: <https://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/decolonial-aesthetics/> (Accessed 12 May 2019).
- MacGregor, N. (2002). 'A Pentecost in Trafalgar Square.' (transcript of lecture as part of the Harvard Program for Art Museum Directors, 2001-2002.) In J. Cuno (Ed.) (2006). *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*: 27-48. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Mignolo, W. and Vázquez, R. (2013). 'Decolonial Aesthetics: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings.' *Social Text*. Available at: https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aesthetics-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/ (Accessed 13 May 2019).
- Pfisterer, U. (2008). 'Origins and Principles of World Art History - 1900 (and 2000).' In K. Zijlman and W. van Damme (Eds.), *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*: 69-89. Amsterdam, Valiz.
- Preziosi, D. (2006). 'Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible.' In S. Macdonald (Ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies*: 50-63. Oxford, Blackwell Publishing.
- Preziosi, D. (2005). *In the Aftermath of Art: Ethics, Aesthetics, Politics*. London, Routledge.
- Quijano, A. (2000). 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America.' *International Sociology* 15 (2): 215-232. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>
- Shatanawi, M. (2015). *Islam in the Tropenmuseum*. Volendam, LM Publishers.
- Stoler, A. L. (2010). *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*: 39. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Vázquez, R. (2019). Public conversation organized by Article magazine at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. 24 April 2019.

'It's the Right Who Belong in a Museum': Radical Popular Movements in the Museum Context

By Olga Zabalueva

Abstract

Are museums political institutions? This question draws the attention of academic researchers as well as the broader public. In Sweden, where cultural institutions, even if state-funded, are officially autonomous from the 'political sphere', the discussion around museums, heritage and politics keeps emerging in traditional media, social networks, political communications, and academic debate.

Using analytical perspectives borrowed both from the political sciences and from the memory studies field, this article addresses the role of popular movements in Swedish museum practice and the emerging project of museum for migration and democracy (Museum of Movements) in Malmö as a possible arena for trying out a new form of museum as a civil society institution.

Keywords

Democracy, Migration, Popular Movements, Neo-nationalism, Agonism

Museums have traditionally had a specific role in the process of knowledge production and power redistribution within societies, not least by empowering certain groups and discourses and making them visible. This paper focuses on a museum planned from scratch, the Museum of Movements in Malmö, Sweden (introduced in 2016 as a National Museum for Democracy and Migration project). The project aims to address a broad spectrum of subjects, including migration, human rights, popular movements and civil society-based activism. The future institution is planned to be a safe and credible public space which can engender discussions around difficult issues, and which will operate on democratic principles and values.

There is, however, a deep controversy in the future museum concept as an open and inclusive platform: Should the scope of popular movements include, in addition to human rights activists, neo-nationalist movements or protesters against abortion? Should the museum for democracy and migration talk about non-democratic developments in

Swedish society? Is there a risk of empowering one side at the expense of the other?

To answer these questions, the paper addresses both media coverage of the Museum of Movements project and the broader public discussion in Swedish newspapers on the nature of cultural heritage. This discussion took several turns in the 2000s (Bernsand and Narvselius, 2018), ending up in often heavily-polarised debates, the most recent of which took place in the so-called 'Museum Debate' of 2016-2017 (*Museidebatten*, 2017; see also Gustavsson, 2018). Existing examples of the interplay between radical social movements and Swedish cultural institutions complement the material for analysis.

Museums and Museology in the 21st Century

Museums have been subject to change since their very emergence, and the ways we talk and write about museums have changed as well. The diversity and heterogeneity of the field have attracted attention from

scholars in all possible disciplines, forming the field called museum studies or museology.

The more recent museum studies literature discusses museum politics (Gray, 2015), ethics (Marstine, Dodd and Jones, 2015) and activism (Janes and Sandell, 2019) – all of which are focused on the essential question: What is the purpose of the museum?

One of the established notions in the disciplinary discourse which is related to the democratic approach is ‘contact zones’ (Clifford, 1997). This idea - of ‘reciprocity and continual renegotiation’ (Message, 2009, p. 127) - is often used both in literature and in museum practice concerning the engagement of community (cf. Johansson, 2015; Message, 2015; for the key works overview see Boast, 2011, p. 59). The ‘contact zones’ make it possible to perform cultural encounters between people from separate social, cultural and even temporal worlds; they enable porosity of the boundaries and the hybridization of the meaning production in the in-between space. They have, however, the downside discussed by anthropologist Robin Boast in the critical article *Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited* (2011). Boast argues that due to the asymmetry in power relations within the ‘contact zone’, a museum can become a place of neocolonial violence through the ‘leftovers of colonial competences’ that lie in the core of this institution: collecting, exhibiting, educating (p. 65). The problem, according to critics of the contact zone idea, lies with a disproportion of power and control between diverse stakeholders and museum professionals where the latter, enabled with authority and expertise, are solely responsible deciding upon both the objects and the subjects in the knowledge production processes.

Kylie Message in *Contentious Politics and Museums as Contact Zones* (2015) discusses such critique in the context of the relationship between museums and social movements and includes the performative aspect: as the inherent asymmetry of power relations in cultural institutions engenders protest campaigns and movements, the institutions themselves are being affected and can change their practices in an answer

to activism. Museums, therefore, can act not only as ‘contact zones’ in the terms of providing a space where encounters from different social and cultural worlds are made possible. They can also become agents of one of these worlds (e.g. the one responsible for the knowledge production in the global contemporary) and engage with other actors in the contested space of ‘contact zone’. This would mean to acknowledge that museums have agendas.

This point does not revoke the importance of highlighting the power asymmetry which is built into the cultural institutions as sites ‘in and for the center’ (Boast, 2011, p. 67). Nevertheless, it allows museums certain independence to act reflectively and reflexively (Butler, 2015), not as neutral (or even powerless) providers of space for dialogue but as responsible actors willing to argue for their own standpoint and consider other opinions as well. A museum of the 21st century can become an activist itself, alongside with the collections, building and staff.

Museologist Anna Leshchenko (2016) suggested the term ‘conscious museum’ as a specific know-how for museums in approaching their visitors. The new reading of the ‘contact zone’ concept could develop this further and include the whole institution with its practices, not only exhibitions and education. ‘Consciousness’ here implies awareness, among other things, of the downsides and disbalances inherent to museum structures, and willingness to take action for a change. Essential features of this approach are responsibility and ethical considerations: one aspect of this is highlighted by Boast concerning the neo-colonial relationship between museums and communities that are ‘given voice’; museum scholar Bernadette Lynch calls this kind of relations ‘empowerment-lite’ (2014). Richard Sandell, Jocelyn Dodd, and Ceri Jones are suggesting the ‘trading zone’ instead of ‘contact zone’ concept (2017) as a way to challenge this inherent inequality. ‘Trading zone’ concept suggests that ‘individuals with different forms of expertise and experience can come together to explore a particular issue or problem, and seek a resolution or a way forward in a collaborative,

respectful and *equitable* way' (as quoted in Janes and Sandell, 2019, p. 12). The main idea here is that lived experience can be as valuable as academic knowledge.

One of the issues which engender the 'contact zone' criticism is connected to the idea of institutional neutrality as the *sine qua non* condition of knowledge production. In his fundamental work *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference* (2007), museum studies scholar Richard Sandell argues that 'museums of all kinds – including those that make the strongest claims to neutrality – embody particular moral standpoints' (p. 196). This statement points out the problematic development within the museum as a (possible) democratic institution: by acting as a neutral 'contact zone' under the banner of freedom of expression, a museum might empower the undemocratic movements by providing them with a space to act. On the other hand, 'silencing' such voices would also mean empowering them in yet another way: by giving them visibility by 'oppression' and an argument against their political opponents. The advocates for institutional neutrality as we will see, for example, in the Swedish 'Museum debate', warn against museums turning into propaganda devices (Gustavsson, 2018). However, there is a difference between 'indoctrination' and 'standing for certain values'. Given the segment of literature which studies museums as institutions of power conceived for the 'cultural governance' of populace (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Bennett, 1995; Smith, 2006), one can ask if museums are 'shying away' from addressing politicised issues by using the assumption of institutional neutrality as a shield? Does framing a normative discourse for the majority really mean not being political or biased?

Museum Politics in Media

The relationship between museums (or heritage in a broader sense) and power is being consecutively addressed in the museum literature (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Bennett, 1995; Smith, 2006; Gray, 2015; Bennett *et al.*, 2017). However,

the nature of this relationship seems to be somewhat elusive for popular imagination.

The 'Museum Debate' (Svenska Dagbladet, 2017) unsheathed in Swedish media space a sore spot from the museums' inner worlds: the underestimated role of experts (from the experts' point of view) and expertise in front of the dynamic and ever-changing issues of current politics, management and exhibition trends. It was started by the writer and journalist Ola Wong with two articles in September 2016: *Government is turning museums into propaganda centres* (2016b) and *Bah Kuhnke's cultural policy is a threat to cultural heritage* (2016a)¹ in which he alleged the incumbent Swedish minister of Culture Alice Bah Kuhnke and her ministry were focusing too much on diversity, identity politics and 'normative criticism' in museums at the expense of objective knowledge and conservation of objects. The public discussion continued throughout 2017 and polarized Swedish museum professionals and heritage workers. Among other things, Wong implied that Swedish museums are being controlled by the current political discourse of 'political correctness' and that this kind of controlling mechanism could turn museums into instruments of nationalistic propaganda in the event of far-right majority in the Swedish Parliament after the next elections.

This statement has two obvious presumptions in it, apart from being somewhat denunciatory (as Swedish cultural institutions are obliged to be independent from politics by law). First, the change in the official political lexicon of the United States after the 2016 elections did not provoke US museums, for example, to conform immediately to anti-immigration discourse. On the contrary, many museums became sites for resistance and activism stimulated by the political situation in the country (on protest art and museum neutrality see, for example, Williams, 2017, p. 74). Secondly, Wong relates to the idea that museums 'by nature' are neutral scholarly hubs that produce objective and uncontested knowledge (cf. similar critique in Bernsand and Narvselius,

¹ All the translations from Swedish are made by author.

2018, pp. 70–71).

Though the initial argument from Wong and his fellow thinkers concerned the administrative changes in the Swedish Museums of World Cultures, the debate has expanded to the whole museum and cultural policy field. It became the manifestation of museum anxieties and at the same time exposed entanglements between political and cultural fields in Sweden – ironically, the very connection that the debate’s initiator proclaimed non-inherent to museums.

The debate is not unique for the Swedish context: the discussion on whether museums can act politically unfolds in different parts of the globe. In August 2017 the hashtag #MuseumsAreNotNeutral was launched in social media by Mike Murawski from the Portland Art Museum together with artist LaTanya Autry (Murawski, 2017). On January 20th, 2018, this hashtag was used by the artists Shia LaBeouf, Nastja Säde Rönkkö and Luke Turner, whose installation HEWILLNOTDIVIDE.US was shut down a year earlier, in February 2017, after several weeks due to the inappropriate behaviour of the installation’s attendants (Anderson, 2018). The politically loaded installation was exhibited at the property of Museum of the Moving Image in New York and became an object for ‘trolling’, threats and violent behaviour. The shutdown was declared to be done out of concern for the safety of visitors, staff and the community (Williams, 2017, p. 74); however, the museum’s indecisiveness and the lack of articulated reaction produced the discussion on the ‘myth of institutional neutrality’ (Anderson, 2018). Such cases highlight the importance of the debate around museums’ purposes and political ground in global perspective.

Museum of Movements: ‘non-political’ Political Project

In 2015, the municipal politicians of the Southern Swedish city of Malmö gave an assignment to the city’s Culture Department to investigate the conditions for establishing a new National Museum on Democracy and Migration. The significance of the chosen place cannot be underestimated. The city of Malmö, located on the southern

edge of Scandinavian peninsula and since 2000 connected to Copenhagen by Öresund bridge, has historically served as the ‘gateway of Sweden’ and a transit city for all kind of migrations. The City Council invests efforts into promoting a socially sustainable city with core values such as diversity, inclusion, and democratic participation (*Destinationen Malmö: Riktlinjer för ramberättelse*, 2015). Given the role of ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ immigration sentiments in both Sweden and Denmark (Hedetoft, 2006), placing a ‘national operator in cultural sector’ with a specific commission in democracy and migration issues (Elg, 2019, p. 468) into the boundary Öresund region is by no means a politically loaded gesture. The idea of establishing a state-funded museum of immigration in Malmö was brought up initially in 2006, but ‘the proposal did not spark any public debate and an immigration museum never materialized’ (Johansson, 2014, p. 124). The idea was suggested by the Swedish Minister for Higher Education and Research Lars Leijonborg in the article *Let’s create a Museum of Immigrants in Malmö* (2006). The phrasing survived this first suggestion and, at the beginning of 2015, reappeared in the same newspaper *Sydsvenskan* along with a declaration that the first ‘museum of immigration’ could be built in Malmö in 2017-2018 (Häggström, 2015). It was stated that the initiative behind the suggestion stemmed from the real estate company *Diligentia* that owned the land in the Western Harbour area of Malmö; and that the same idea simultaneously (and independently) was voiced by Malmö politicians. *Diligentia*, according to the article, was intending to build Malmö’s own Ellis Island Museum which would serve as a kind of cultural hub for the newly constructed neighbourhood. This can be traced as far back as June 2014, when one of the leading Swedish business newspapers published an editorial entitled *Build an Ellis Island in Malmö* (Nilsson, 2014). The author envisioned Sweden as a multicultural state, ‘where people from other countries can come and stay for a longer or shorter time, or even for the whole life; a sort of New York but in the woods’ (ibid.). The positive image of (multicultural) Sweden, therefore, was one of the main points in the focus. As the

Malmö politicians got the Ellis Island narrative from this 2014 article (Nils Karlsson, personal communication, 2018-04-04) it is possible to assume that the real estate company did the same.

The focus on 'immigration', however, was problematised by ethnographer and museum professional Dragan Nikolić in the same *Sydsvenskan* newspaper where he has written an article *Do not raise political points in my name* (2015). Nikolić pointed out a controversy between the City Council's policy aimed at celebrating diversity and multiculturalism on the one side, and, on the other, extreme homogeneity among Malmö City's officials, most of whom do not have 'other' background than Swedish. In responses to this article (Karlsson, 2015; Thomé and Johansson, 2015), the notion of 'immigration' has transformed into 'migration' and 'democracy', which has also appeared as an important part of the future museum's focus. According to Malmö politician Nils Karlsson, two components of the future museum were the result of collaboration between two political parties: the Swedish Green party (*Miljöpartiet*) and Karlsson himself were promoting the 'Ellis Island' narrative, whereas the Social Democratic party argued for the labour movements and the prominent history of the fight for worker's rights in Malmö during the 20th century (Nils Karlsson, personal communication, 2018-04-04).

In September 2015, the Swedish government declared support for the project and allocated a budget for a feasibility study for such a museum, conducted by the city's Culture Department. It was initially titled *Museum of Immigrants* in media (Pedersen, 2015); however, this was changed in February 2016 (Gillberg, 2016) to *Migration Museum*, echoing another 'migration issue' that was taking place in Sweden at that time – a European 'refugee crisis' in late 2015.

In 2015, according to the Swedish Migration Board, the country received more asylum applications than ever before (Migrationsverket, 2017). The 'refugee crisis' engendered strong reactions in media and society, ranging

from the restrictive legislative measures (such as identity control on the Öresund bridge between Denmark and Sweden, introduced in November 2015 as an exception from the Schengen Border Code) to passionate engagement of volunteers and NGOs helping newly arrived refugees (Nikolić, 2017).

In the course of the feasibility study, a focus of the planned museum has shifted from the rather broad notions of 'democracy' and 'migration' to the even broader term 'movement', which, nevertheless, can serve as an umbrella concept for both. Consequently, popular movements, NGOs and activism came under the spotlight both as prospective subjects and participants of the study. The feasibility study included conversations held across the country between 2016 and 2017 with more than 160 organizations and 630 individuals; the international conference *Museums in Time of Migration and Mobility* (2016, Malmö University); study visits to similar institutions abroad and a comprehensive cultural analytical research.

The final report, called the *Museum of Movements* (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017), was presented to the Swedish Ministry of Culture in May 2017 and was supported by the Swedish Government which provided funding to open a 'startup museum space' in 2018-2019.

The important part of the Museum of Movements project is trying out different methods for collaboration and inclusion (Elg, 2019). The idea behind this 'startup' is to establish a collaborative practice as the main way for the future museum's functioning, 'to secure a critical and open discussion to be ongoing also in the daily practice of the future museum' (ibid.). Furthermore, the concept of 'contact zone' is already entrenched in the project as a 'good museum practice' (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017, p. 23).

The political importance of the project was also debated in Swedish media and brought out some points in the public conception of what museums are. For example, a concern was expressed by the right-wing Swedish Democrats party that such a museum will become 'a political instrument

for multiculturalism and will promote further high immigration rates to Sweden' (Sverigedemokraterna, 2017). From the other side of the political spectrum, the socialist writer Staffan Jacobson states in his blog that 'it's not the left but the right that belongs in a museum' (Jacobson, 2017), implying scepticism that the local activist movements will be actually welcome (and feel welcome) to take part in the project. These opinion pieces alongside with the media debate on 'museum for immigrants' described above have included the project in a broader context of discussing Swedish museum and cultural heritage policies (aforementioned *Museum Debate*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2017).

Immersed in the political power relations from the very beginning, the Museum of Movements has already established its own agency and become, even if virtually, a place for public dialogue. The initial commissioners of the museum project, however, are seemingly standing on the point of museums' neutrality: one of the City Council's politicians characterized it as 'the least political museum there is' (Nils Karlsson, personal communication, 2018-04-04). He added though that 'of course there is a political component, by having a museum for movements or museum for migration you are kind of saying that the movement of people is a good thing' (ibid).

Being 'the least political museum', the Museum of Movements nevertheless is claiming a place in the political spectrum. What kind of movements will be the focus of this future museum?

Movements in the Museum: Political Mobilisation in the Swedish Context

Representing radical popular movements in a museum means appealing directly to current conflicts and polarisations in society. If the issue of 'migration' can play out as connected to heritage, diversity and multiple identity, the case of exhibiting political protest can question a moral standpoint of cultural institutions.

In Sweden, national socialist movements have

existed since the 1930s and have influenced contemporary far-right populist movements (for the history of Nazism in Sweden see Heléne Lööw's trilogy, 1998, 2004, 2015). The neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement is allowed to perform marches and demonstrations due to freedom of speech and expression in Sweden and other Nordic countries (it was, however, banned in Finland in 2017 – 2018) and has even run as a political party for the Swedish Parliament in 2018. The mobilisation of the counter-movements in Sweden, however, is also very strong. The imagery of anti-fascist resistance is embodied in Hans Runesson's photograph *A Woman Hitting a Neo-Nazi With Her Handbag* (1985) as well as in David Lagerlöf's picture of the Swedish activist Tess Asplund defying the march of far-right Swedish Resistance Movement in 2016 (Crouch, 2016).

Both types of activism are intimately connected to the issue of cultural heritage. The narrative of the civil rights movements answer the Swedish idea of cosmopolitanism and progressiveness as a moral quality (Andersson, 2009), where Sweden is framed as one of the most modern countries in the world, a 'left-wing utopia' (ibid., p. 233) which is always at the forefront of civil rights activism (cf. Jezierska and Towns, 2018). This narrative has also become a subject for museum exhibitions. One such example is the touring exhibition *100% Fight – The History of Sweden* displayed at the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm in 2018. The exhibition touches upon a broad range of issues from early-twentieth-century suffrage and the right over one's own body, to hostile movements in society and the right to asylum. The exhibition's poster presents the photograph of Asplund rising her fist in defiance – and, simultaneously, moves the neo-Nazis' figures to the background of the image, performing a simple but powerful visual manipulation. (Figure. 1)

The exhibition has also become a subject for the continuation of the *Museum Debate* (Wong, 2018) where the same author, Ola Wong, has claimed that the museum invigorated right-wing populist sentiment by hosting the exhibition due to its complexity, multivocality, didactical tone



Figure. 1
The exhibition poster of *100% Fight – The History of Sweden* at the Swedish History Museum entrance, 2018, by the Author

and focus on minorities and identity politics.

This is not the first time the Swedish History Museum's exhibitions have ended up in political and media polemics. Swedish museum researcher Fredrik Svanberg in his and Charlotte Hyltén-Cavallius' book *The Beloved Museum: Swedish museums of cultural history as culture producers and community builders* (2016) analyses the reaction of Swedish nationalists on Internet forums to the contemporary cultural heritage agenda. For example, the exhibition *Vikings* at the Swedish History Museum in 2013 has also caused upset among Swedish nationalists and was called the 'anti-Swedish propaganda' (p. 25). Svanberg argues that the ultra-nationalist 'uses of history' from different Swedish web-based communities have something in common: most of them are applying historical narratives to categorise 'us' and the 'others'; history and heritage for them exists in a homogeneous continuity from 'our ancestors' to 'us'; all the opposite viewpoints are claimed 'revisionism' and the employment of conspiracy theories is huge; and the most used 'knowledge authority' for the discussants is usually the Swedish Wikipedia pages (Svanberg and Hyltén-Cavallius, 2016, pp. 65–66). The contemporary trends and fears are also represented in these historical or heritage-based debates: for example, the 'politically correct' reading of Swedish history as a multicultural narrative claimed to be the outcome of 'Islamisation' (ibid., p. 50). Archaeologist Björn Magnusson Staaf points out that cultural heritage is being used by the right-wing political parties as a powerful instrument (2010), whereas other actors bemoan the lack of historical continuity in Swedish heritage discourse which provokes nationalists (Bernsand and Narvselius, 2018, p. 74).

The uses (and abuses) of heritage, therefore, are a common issue in and around Swedish cultural institutions, and the discussions on 'politicising' museums are active on the whole range of the political spectrum. Swedish ethnologist Barbro Klein pinpoints that the word 'cultural heritage' flooded the country's political discourse in the 1990s, when it was 'readily appropriated by members of the government

and the parliament to describe some of the most positive and morally praiseworthy forms of social action in a democratic society' (Klein, 2008, p. 153). Appealing to 'heritage' was treated as something uncontroversial and taken for granted; and in the 'heritage' and 'museum' media debates of the 2000s it is still used as such. 'Heritage' becomes instrumental both for the nationalistic movements and for their antagonists due to an uncritical approach to the notion itself. Museum researcher Laurajane Smith suggested for such uses the term *Authorized Heritage Discourse* (AHD), which 'focuses attention on... material objects, sites, places and/or landscapes that current generations "must" care for, protect and revere so that they may be passed to nebulous future generations for their "education", and to forge a sense of common identity based on the past' (Smith, 2006, p. 29). Anyhow, as Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell argue in their *Museum Activism* reader (2019), posterity has already arrived. Museums as civil society organisations cannot withdraw from the current political situations and agendas, they have 'the opportunity and the obligation to question the way in which society is manipulated and governed' (p. 6).

The political struggle which finds its way into museum displays and the museum-centred media debate is yet to move further to the very core of museum work: to the collections departments and museum management. It is hard to argue that 'heritage practitioners are required to adopt an overt political agenda in defining which groups and interests they seek to support and those they challenge' (Schadla-Hall, 2004; cited in Smith, 2006, p. 38); but the important part of this is acknowledging these agendas and one's own moral standpoint. The Museum of Movements project could be a pioneer in the field exactly because it does not exist yet as a cultural institution and can form its own internal policies without taking anything for granted. Yet, what kind of model can it adopt?

Museum as Agonistic Space

What is the connection between museums and

democracy? As museum historian Steven Conn puts it, 'museums have become among the last places where the public can come and behave as a public' (2010, p. 231). Peter Dahlgren and Joke Hermes in their chapter on citizenship and culture in the *International Handbook of Museum Studies* (2015) introduce museums as spaces where cultural citizenship can be performed and highlight the problematic divide between museums as 'quintessential' institutions of modernity and their public (and in more general sense, between 'the knowledge class' and 'ordinary people', p. 132). The unequal power relations bring us back to the 'contact zone' asymmetry: are museums the place to 'teach' citizenship? (Or, even, 'proper' version of citizenship?)

The relationship between museums and democracy was touched upon by the Belgian political philosopher Chantal Mouffe (2010), whose concepts of 'radical democracy' and 'agonism' becomes instrumental in the work of memory studies scholars Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen (2016). Radical democracy 'underscores the contextual nature of identity and subject positions, and views political struggle as shaped by ever shifting contingencies' (Dahlgren and Hermes, 2015, p. 120). The political conflicts in this kind of model are not being neutralised by the necessary consensus but are negotiated with respect for the democratic rules; 'agonism' in politics also recognizes emotions and passions as 'an integral part of political confrontation' – which can possibly neutralise the risk 'that they may be appropriated by intolerant and undemocratic movements' (Bull and Hansen, 2016, p. 393).

Bull and Hansen describe two modes of memory that can be found in the practices of collective identification. First one is 'antagonistic memory' which relates to the building of nation-state historical narratives. In this mode, the focus is on the definition of 'us' and 'others', whereas heritage is perceived as something monumental and canonical in its continuity. The second mode, that of 'ethical' or 'cosmopolitan memory' emphasises the abstract nature of 'good' and 'evil' and is focused on the suffering of the victims – as in commemoration of the Holocaust. This mode is 'characterized by reflexivity,

regret and mourning' (Bull and Hansen, 2016, p. 390) and is connected to the processes of globalisation and 'second modernity'. Following Mouffe's critique of cosmopolitanism, Bull and Hansen argue that the recent rise of far-right and neo-nationalist movements in Europe and elsewhere highlights the shortcomings of cosmopolitanism as an ethical-political project. Due to the interconnected nature of today's world, these movements are also becoming transnational and produce new antagonisms between 'us' and 'them'.

By suggesting the third mode of memory – that of 'agonism' – the researchers aim to introduce individual agency into the practices of remembrance and commence a dialogue that would not be focused on consensus but will take passions and emotions into account. The 'agonistic memory', according to Bull and Hansen, would not 'shy away from addressing politicized representations of past conflicts' (ibid., p. 400). The important part of this practice is acknowledging the context-related nature of the difficult past and considering the socio-political struggles of the time. Bernadette Lynch in her critical text on 'empowerment-lite' practices in museums also advocates for displaying political confrontations in the museums instead of avoiding them (2014, p. 77).

This approach, however, demands a lot from museum professionals if they are going to allow agonism into the exhibition halls (and, moreover, in decision-making entities). First, acknowledgment of the institutional genealogy and the current prevailing memory mode will be needed. Furthermore, a special effort in resisting the impulses to simplify complex issues and either to conflate them into the abstract notions of 'good' and 'evil' or to demonise one side of the conflict in the contrast to the imaginary community of 'us'. The multivocality can lead to the longing for one, even if authoritative voice, that will also explain and simplify difficult matters (as in the case with the *100% Fight* exhibition and its media coverage). This trend was also coined by Clelia Pozzi, one of the scholars of the research project *MeLa - European Museums in an age of migrations* as an inclination towards 'the hegemonic containment of multiculturalism, the exhibition

of a cultural difference that ultimately re-instates the power disequilibrium that generated it in the first place' (2013, p. 11).

There is a certain risk of such development in the Museum of Movements project, which is conceived politically as the place 'where people can visit and learn about their history or other people's history in a modern way' (Nils Karlsson, personal communication, 2018-04-04) – suggesting that there is a certain *modern* way to learn. The view of museum as 'Ideological State Apparatus' (Pozzi, 2013), therefore, is still in the picture at this early project stage. A key to tackling this challenge can be found in the words of one of the feasibility study's participants: 'Screw consensus! Dare to discuss without losing respect' (Fieldnotes, dialogue meeting 2018-03-13). What plays the most important role here is not only the diversity of opinions but the process of discussion and a reflection on one's standpoint.

The appropriation of the agonistic approach can be useful for museums, especially the ones of culture and history and the ones that Kylie Message calls 'the agenda museums' (museums 'built out of and [which] promote direct engagement between culture and politics across grassroots and formal levels', 2015, p. 275). The possible pitfall here, however, is demonstrated by the *HEWILLNOTDIVIDE.US* case, where the museum as institution could not manage to take a stance against hate speech and obscene behaviour towards the artistic installation (Anderson, 2018).

Richard Sandell proposes a 'position of fairness' in relation to visitors, material, contexts and 'those whose human rights are at issue' that can be adopted by museums instead of 'aiming for objectivity and neutrality' (2007, p. 196). One might add, that fairness in relation to the institution itself, its staff, structure and inner mechanics is also essential as it allows to bring in the reflexivity and the acknowledgement of the asymmetrical power relations (Boast, 2011).

Nina Simon in her recent book calls museums places 'of passion and public service' (2016). Activism, after all, is also a sort of passion and constructs complex emotional

connections between different groups and individuals. In this sense, the Museum of Movements is already there as an actor, connecting museum professionals and community representatives, academic researchers and cultural administration, national minorities and Malmö citizens, refugees and activists, or even far-right advocates and anti-immigration lobbyists.

Being an actor, however, is not enough. As the future museum addresses the contested topics that can engender conflicts, it is not only agency but responsibility and awareness of one's (empowered) position in the current debate which becomes essential.

Bibliography

- Anderson, K. E. (2018). *Neutrality, narratives and neo-Nazis: Examining HEWILLNOTDIVIDE.US* by LaBeouf, Rönkkö & Turner, Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/@kelsonanderson/neutrality-narratives-and-neo-nazis-examining-hewillnotdivide-us-by-labeouf-rönkkö-turner-88743956729> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Andersson, J. (2009). 'Nordic nostalgia and Nordic light: The Swedish model as Utopia 1930-2007', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 34(3): 229-245.
- Bennett, T. (1995). *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London & New York, Routledge.
- Bennett, T. et al. (2017). *Collecting, Ordering, Governing: Anthropology, Museums and Liberal Government*. Durham and London, Duke University Press.
- Bernsand, N. and Narvselius, E. (2018). 'Cultural heritage in Sweden in the 2000s: Contexts, debates, paradoxes', *Politeja* 1(52): 57-94.
- Boast, R. (2011). 'Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited', *Museum Anthropology* 34(1): 56-70.
- Bull, A. C. and Hansen, H. L. (2016). 'On agonistic memory', *Memory Studies* 9(4): 390-404.
- Butler, S. R. (2015). 'Reflexive Museology: Lost and Found', in Witcomb, A. and Message, K. (eds) *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*: 159-182. Chichester, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Clifford, J. (1997). 'Museums as Contact Zones', in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*: 188-219. Cambridge, Mass. and London, Harvard University Press.
- Conn, S. (2010). *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Crouch, D. (2016). 'Woman who defied 300 neo-Nazis at Swedish rally speaks of anger', *The Guardian*, 4 May. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/04/woman-defied-neo-nazis-sweden-tess-asplund-viral-photograph> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Dahlgren, P. and Hermes, J. (2015). 'The Democratic Horizons of the Museum: Citizenship and Culture', in Witcomb, A. and Message, K. (eds) *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*: 117-138. Chichester, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- *Destinationen Malmö: Riktlinjer för ramberättelse* (2015). Available at: <http://www.malmotown.com/om-oss/destinationsvarumarket/> (Accessed 19 May 2019).

- Elg, F. (2019). 'The Museum of Movements', in Brunnstöm, P and Claesson, R. (eds) *Creating the city. Identity, memory and participation*: 459-471. Malmö, Malmö University.
- Gillberg, J. (2016). 'Så ska Malmö få sitt migrationsmuseum', *Sydsvenskan*, 13 February. Available at: <https://www.sydsvenskan.se/2016-02-13/sa-ska-malmo-fa-sitt-migrationsmuseum> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Gray, C. (2015). *The Politics of Museums*. London, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gustavsson, K. (2018) 'Debatter och verkligheter: Kulturpolitik, maktutövning och museivardag på båda sidor sundet', *Gränslös: Tidskrift för studier av Öresundsregionens historia, kultur och samhällsliv* 9: 20-33.
- Hedetoft, U. (2006). *Multiculturalism in Denmark and Sweden*, DIIS Brief. Available at: http://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/46285/hedetoft_multiculturalism_dk_sweden.pdf (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1992). *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London & New York, Routledge.
- Häggström, B. (2015). 'Första museet om invandring', *Sydsvenskan* 25 January. Available at: <https://www.sydsvenskan.se/2015-01-25/forsta-museet-om-invandring> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Jacobson, S. (2017). *Krönika 28-29/3 2017. Högern passar bäst på muséet!* Available at: <https://anarchyisorder.wordpress.com/2017/03/27/kronika-28-293-2017-hogern-passar-bast-pa-museet/> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Janes, R. R. and Sandell, R. (eds) (2019). *Museum Activism*. New York, Routledge.
- Jezierska, K. and Towns, A. (2018). 'Taming feminism? The place of gender equality in the "Progressive Sweden" brand', *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 14: 55-63.
- Johansson, C. (2014). 'The Museum in a Multicultural Setting: The case of Malmö Museums', in Gouriévidis, L. (ed.) *Museums and Migration: History, Memory and Politics*: 122–137. London & New York, Routledge.
- Johansson, C. (2015). *Museums, Migration and Cultural Diversity: Swedish Museums in Tune with the Times?* Innsbruk, StudienVerlag.
- Karlsson, N. (2015). 'Migrationsmuseum inte ett zoo', *Sydsvenskan*, 24 February. Available at: <https://www.sydsvenskan.se/2015-02-24/migrationsmuseum-inte-ett-zoo> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Klein, B. (2008). 'Cultural heritage, cultural diversity and museums in Sweden: some critical reflections', in Goodnow, K. and Akman, H. (eds) *Scandinavian museums and cultural diversity*: 151–160. Oxford, Berghahn Books.
- Kulturförvaltningen (2017). *Rörelsernas museum: Förstudie om ett nationellt demokrati- och migrationsmuseum i Malmö*. Malmö. Available at: https://malmo.se/download/18.4cc94c3815be8cd0d0b7f9/1494332979947/Ro%r%C3%A4lsernasMuseum_Low.pdf (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Leijonborg, L. (2006). 'Skapa Invandrarnas museum i Malmö', *Sydsvenskan*, 24 August. Available at: <https://www.sydsvenskan.se/2006-08-23/skapa-invandrarnas-museum-i-malmo> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Leshchenko, A. (2016). 'Conscious museum', in 39th ICOFOM annual symposium "The Predatory Museum". Available at: https://www.academia.edu/34330774/Conscious_museum (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Lynch, B. (2014). "'Whose cake is it anyway?": Museums, civil society and the changing reality of public engagement', in Gouriévidis, L. (ed.) *Museums and Migration: History, Memory, Politics*: 67–80. London & New York, Routledge.
- Löw, H. (1998). *Nazismen i Sverige 1980-1999: den rasistiska undergroundrörelsen: musiken, myterna, riterna*. Stockholm, Ordfront.
- Löw, H. (2004). *Nazismen i Sverige 1924-1979: pionjärerna, partierna, propagandan*. Stockholm, Ordfront.
- Löw, H. (2015). *Nazismen i Sverige 2000-2014*. Stockholm, Ordfront.
- Magnusson Staaf, B. (2010). 'Kontroll över kulturarvet SD:s medel för att nå makt', *Dagens Nyheter*, 3 October. Available at: <https://www.dn.se/debatt/kontroll-over-kulturarvet-sds-medel-for-att-na-makt/> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Marstine, J., Dodd, J. and Jones, C. (2015). 'Reconceptualizing Museum Ethics for the Twenty-First Century: A View from the Field', in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Practice*: 69-96. Oxford, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Message, K. (2009). 'Museum studies: borderwork, genealogy, revolution', *Museum and Society* 7(2): 125-132.
- Message, K. (2015). 'Contentious Politics and Museums as Contact Zones', in Witcomb, A. and Message, K. (eds) *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*: 253-281. Oxford, John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Migrationsverket (2017). *Högsta antalet asylbeslut hittills*. Available at: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Nyhetsarkiv/Nyhetsarkiv-2017/2017-01-01-Hogsta-antalet-asylbeslut-hittills.html> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Mouffe, C. (2010). 'Museums as Agonistic Space', *Artforum* 48(10): 326-330.
- Murawski, M. (2017). *Museums are not neutral, Art Museum Teaching: A Forum for Reflecting on Practice*. Available at: <https://artmuseumteaching.com/2017/08/31/museums-are-not-neutral/> (Accessed 1 May 2018).
- *Museidebatten* (2017). *Svenska Dagbladet*. Available at: <https://www.svd.se/om/museidebatten>. (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Nikolić, D. (2015). 'Samla inte politiska poäng i mitt namn: Nationellt invandarmuseum i Västra hamnen kritiserar', *Sydsvenskan*, 19 February. Available at: <https://www.sydsvenskan.se/2015-02-19/samla-inte-politiska-poang-i-mitt-namn> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Nikolić, D. (2017). 'The future is ours: The collaborative emergency ethnography of migration in Malmö in 2015', in Johansson, C. and Bevelander, P. (eds) *Museums in a time of migration: Rethinking museums' roles, representations, collections, and collaborations*: 197-222. Lund, Nordic Academic Press.
- Nilsson, P. (2014). 'Ledare: Bygg ett Ellis Island i Malmö', *Dagens Industri*, 23 June. Available at: <https://www.di.se/artiklar/2014/6/23/ledare-bygg-ett-ellis-island-i-malmo/> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Pedersen, H. (2015). 'Regeringen backar upp invandarmuseum', *Sydsvenskan*, 14 September. Available at: <https://www.sydsvenskan.se/2015-09-14/regeringen-backar-upp-invandarmuseum> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Pozzi, C. (2013). 'Museums as Agonistic Spaces', in *European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the Framework*: 7-15. Milano, Politecnico di Milano.
- Sandell, R. (2007). *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*. London & New York, Routledge.
- Sandell, R., Dodd, J. and Jones, C. (2017). 'Trading Zones: Collaborative Ventures in Disability History', in Hamilton, P and Gardner, J. B. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Public History*: 87-104. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Simon, N. (2016). *The Art of Relevance*. Santa Cruz, Museum 2.0.
- Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*. London, Routledge.
- Svanberg, F. and Hyllén-Cavallius, C. (2016). *Älskade museum: svenska kulturhistoriska museer som kulturproducenter och samhällsbyggare*. Lund, Nordic Academic Press.
- Sverigedemokraterna (2017). *Reservation: Förstudie om inrättande av ett demokrati- och migrationsmuseum i Malmö*. Available at: <https://malmo.sd.se/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2017/04/Kommunstyrelsen-2017-03-29-Reservation-Förstudie-om-inrättande-av-ett-demokrati-och-migrationsmuseum-i-Malmö.doc> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Thomé, H. and Johansson, R. (2015). 'Vi vill ha ett demokratimuseum – inte ett invandarmuseum', *Sydsvenskan*, 3 March. Available at: <https://www.sydsvenskan.se/2015-03-03/vi-vill-ha-ett-demokratimuseum--inte-ett-invandarmuseum> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Williams, M. E. (2017). 'A Noble Balancing Act: Museums, Political Activism and Protest Art', *Museum International* 69(3-4): 66-75.
- Wong, O. (2016a). 'Bah Kuhnkes kulturpolitik hotar kulturarvet', *Svenska*

Dagbladet, 28 September. Available at: <https://www.svd.se/bah-kuhnkes-kulturpolitik-hotar-kulturarvet> (Accessed 19 May 2019).

– Wong, O. (2016b). 'Regeringen förvandlar museer till propagandacentraler', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 8 September. Available at: <https://www.svd.se/regeringen-forvandlar-museer-till-propagandacentraler> (Accessed 19 May 2019).

– Wong, O. (2018). 'Historiska museets utställning gör jobbet åt SD', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 7 June. Available at: <https://www.svd.se/utställning-pa-historiska-museet-gor-jobbet-at-sd> (Accessed 19 May 2019).



Exhibition Review: The Norwegian Fisheries Museum: Industry, Power, and Ecology

By Zoi Tsiviltidou

Introducing the Norwegian Fisheries Museum

In light of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda by the United Nations (2015), museums are challenged to contribute to the transformation of our world with an agenda whose impact and advocacy reach people locally, nationally and internationally. Namely, the Global Network of Water Museums and several natural history, ethnographic, maritime and science museums around the globe design exhibitions, learning programs and community projects to raise awareness of ecological issues such as life on land and life below water to ensure sustainable lifestyles in harmony with nature. Stepping out of the Norwegian Fisheries Museum in Bergen, my thoughts were consumed by issues about our environmental footprint on oceans, fish farming and the museum's role as an agent of social change.

The Norwegian Fisheries Museum is located in Sandviken a few miles from the city centre and the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Bryggen by the harbour of Bergen. The museum has four exhibition halls with a collection of fishing vessel machinery, small scale models of boats, authentic objects and audio-visual artefacts about the aquaculture. The galleries inform us about ocean governance and fish farming, reflecting on a convergence of developments in the field at large that have impacted life below and above water; and they form the representational context for probing into the tradition of the fishery industry in western Norway and impact on ecology from the Iron Age and Viking Age up to the present. For a 1000 years Bergen has made a living from the sea. Today Bergen is a leader in the fields of research, aquaculture, transport, oil and gas. In this sense, the museum builds on the evidential nature and aesthetic value of the

collection to transpose the objects into dialectical constructs of the history and the social and environmental aspects of the industry, using interactive displays with video panels (Figure. 1) and hands-on activities and games (Figure. 2).

Down into a World under Water

In the south, the Norwegian coast faces the North Sea and Skagerrak that goes east from Lindesnes. Directly north of the North Sea lies the Norwegian Sea, which stretches all the way to North Cape, where it meets the Barents Sea. The differences between these seas in terms of their depths and currents affect the animals and plants that live there, which vary greatly. The amount of human activity and its impact on the ecosystem is an important distinction between the north and the south. Notably, Hardangerfjorden is Norway's second longest fjord and the third longest in the world with branches on both sides of the Folgefonna peninsula, which is home to the Folgefonna glacier. Hardangerfjorden has more fish farms than any other fjord in the world, and its 100 licensed facilities produce almost 70,000 tonnes of salmon a year. It comes as no surprise that the large number of fish farms populating the area is being blamed for the difficulties facing wild salmon in the fjord.

Up to the Ultimate Catch

Weaving the thread from the 1850s and following a chronological order up to the present day this exhibition hall presents the oldest traces of settlement in Norway, which are situated high up in the present landscape, to expose the changes to the coastline since the end of the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago. The Lofoten fisheries drew people from all



Figure. 1
An interactive video panel, 2018, by the Author



Figure. 2
A fishing-simulation game with magnets, 2018, by the Author

over Norway and set the foundations for the development of shipping and the fishery industry. The objects are treated as reflections of a changing narrative attentive to the dilemmas locals faced across different historical periods (Figure. 3) and geographical regions along the coastline. Emphasis is paid on how the make-up of the ecosystem changed in the 1970s, explaining that the Atlantic salmon was the basis for the expansion of fish farming ventures.

Of particular interest is the 'Quotas, capital and love' film, which adds to the museum narrative the versatile polyphony of the life stories of three generations of fishermen from Bulandet. The three fishermen talk at the same time projected on three screens, creating an unusual and intimate interaction between the viewer and what is going on in the film. The film constitutes a critique on the job requirements and current state of the market. It made me think about the implications of getting our food from the ocean. Fishing quotas are still higher than those recommended and the industry still catches above those quotas (SAPEA, 2017). Researchers recommend increased utilisation of wastes in traditional capture fisheries, fishing of new wild species, farming of organisms that extract their nutrients directly from the water or require feed such as macro-algae, and an integrated multi-trophic aquaculture approach to ocean food harvesting (SAPEA, 2017). I wonder whether the museum narrative should have touched upon these research findings to prompt an in-depth dialogue with the audience.

Through Our Common Resources

The third exhibition hall presents the unsettling tale of fishing and the fight for ocean resources that problematises the intricacies of the life of the fishermen and the impact on the environment. The objects draw a direct line from the challenges of the past to the crises of today. Through interactive displays the visitor can reflect critically on how animals and plants adapted to the dynamic exchange of water between the fjord and the sea and the seasonal changes in temperature and salinity; and on how best to preserve the

watercourses and their ecosystems whilst respectful to the great diversity of riparian and aquatic species. The hands-on display *Find the connection! It takes two!* (Figure. 4) is an open invitation to collaborate with a partner to lighten up the display and complete the narrative. This is a direct commentary on the importance of cooperation at individual, national and international levels, as the visitor cannot engage with the objects unless she collaborates with someone else.

Over the Bridge to the Ocean Opportunities

While seal hunting, after its golden age, had to bow to international protests, the largest fish farming companies are in Bergen, and are growing rapidly. This exhibition hall questions how the city will develop on that regard, how existing, strengthened or new governance arrangements can help ensure the sustainable harvest of increased marine production in a way that maximises the benefits for future generations, and how museums could generate and advance change in ocean governance. The visitor comes in to interrogate these provocative questions, examining the relationship between marine heritage preservation and the fishery industry without neglecting the parameter of the export trade.

Of particular interest is the 'Fin City' display (Figure. 5) sponsored by the Leroy company. Herein, the visitor is invited to create an avatar and take part in each stage of the salmon production process by standing at the head of the fjord, making sure the salmon fry grow up strong and healthy, feeding the salmon in their enclosures, sorting the fish at the processing plant and selling seafood to the whole world. The activities are informative, engaging and to the point. Nonetheless, one cannot leave without reflecting on the role of sponsorship in the exhibition design. The fact that knowledge about the process is constructed by the visitor should not shy us away from the fact that each story is told for an audience. I exited the hall empowered with factual information about the decision-making involved in this process but puzzled by the dominant simplistic perceptions of what the salmon

production process is and means. How much does the content overlap with the self-directed meaning-making and how much elaborate are the stories of each avatar?

Global Perspective

Visiting the Norwegian Fisheries Museum, one understands that extracting food from the oceans the way is currently operated is not sustainable from social, economic and environmental aspects. The fish farming industry's role on climate sustainability shifted the power of decision-making from regional to national markets, upscaling the financial interest and the associated responsibility. How can Norway lead the discussions and play its part in the movement to protect the oceans and ensure a sustainable blue economy? The museum's role in raising awareness from a global ecological perspective and stimulating change comes forward stronger than ever. I left the museum provoked and challenged to critically reflect on how the fisheries industry has shaped modern day Norway, having listened to the stories of struggle and progress, not necessarily occurring in that order. Perhaps the insights from research in action and the debates on biomarine industries based on resources low in the food chain expected to take place in Ocean Week 2019 co-hosted by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology will produce some answers.

Bibliography

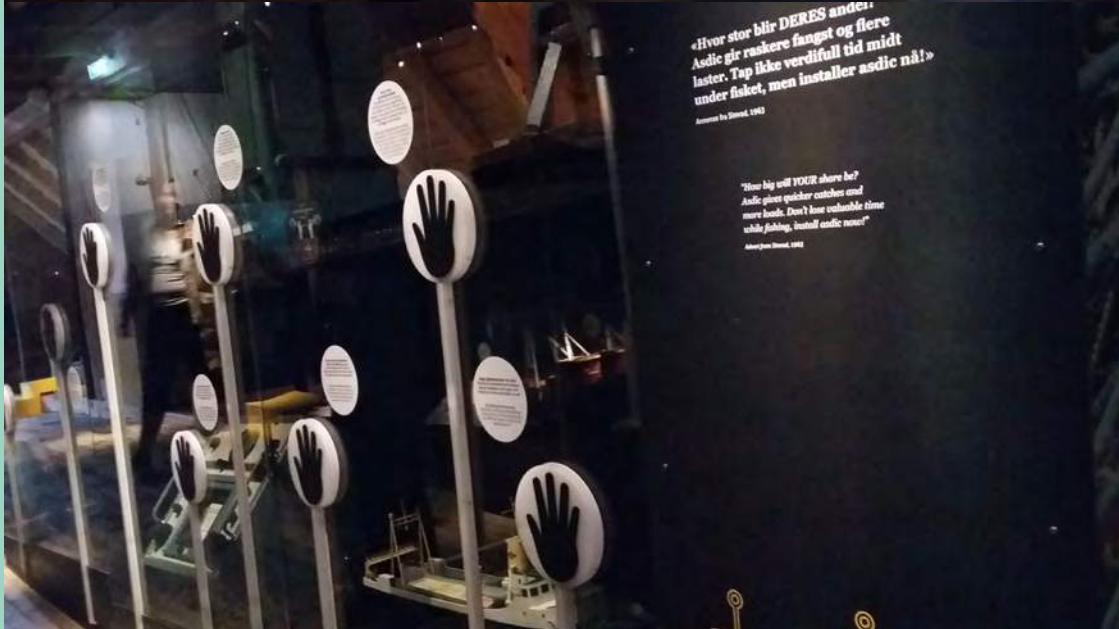
- United Nations General Assembly (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf> (Accessed 20 April 2019).
- Science Advice for Policy by European Academies (2017). *Food from the oceans: How can more food and biomass be obtained from the oceans in a way that does not deprive future generations of their benefits?*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/research/sam/pdf/sam_food-from-oceans_report.pdf (Accessed 20 April 2019).

From top to bottom

Figure. 3
The historical overview of the fishery industry, 2018, by the Author

Figure. 4
The hands-on Find the connection! It takes two! display, 2018, by the Author

Figure. 5
The state-of-the-art 'Fin City' display, 2018, by the Author



Q&A

with Alejandra Saladino

Museological Review: Even before the fire, the National Museum of Rio had suffered from poor funding, political neglect, and austerity measures for many years, causing gradual disempowerment within the institution. There are those that have argued the fire was ‘inevitable’ – can you think of any similar examples from museums in Brazil? What does powerlessness look like in a contemporary museum? How does this impact on their social role?

Alejandra Saladino: First of all, it is important to put the question in context. There is no doubt that the cultural policies of the public sector have represented a significant step forward for museums. However, there is no miracle solution; it is not possible to repair and consolidate a sector in a couple of years that has been neglected for decades. Moreover, these steps forward – I refer specifically to the encouragement of the National Museums Policy, which was launched in 2003 and structured around institutional, promotional and democratizing tools, such as notices and programs – were not uniformly applied in the museum sector. Funding for museums was diminishing as a result of the Ministry of Culture’s budget cuts. Indeed, nowadays the position of Minister of Culture has disappeared; in its place is the Secretary of the Ministry of Citizenship. There have been many debates about the complexities and problems of management in university museums, such as the National Museum (part of UFRJ’s organizational chart). This is because they are not autonomous institutions; rather, they are joined to public bodies with different objectives, demands and challenges. It should also be noted that in recent years the Ministry of Education has also suffered severe budget cuts. It

is worth remembering that in December 2016 the approval of Constitutional Amendment 95 froze the country’s public investments for the next 20 years. As early as 2017, the budget for the Ministry of Science, Technology, Innovation and Communications was reduced to R \$ 2.8 billion, less than a third of the amount destined for this Ministry in 2010, and less than half of the amount available in 2005.

Unfortunately, the National Museum of Rio is not an isolated case and it is possible to think of many similar examples. It is worth mentioning that many Brazilian museums haven’t been awarded a safety permit by the Fire Department. The Brazilian Institute of Museums (IBRAM) tries to support public museums through risk management programmes: issues of security are considered as part of the larger, strategic planning of museums, and the management of their increasingly inadequate human, financial and spatial resources. According to Law nº 11.904 / 2009 (the Statute of Museums), museums need to elaborate and execute their own strategies. However, this implies a change in institutional standards and practices that cannot happen overnight, and which require considerable energy and commitment to achieve. Indeed, trained professionals would be needed to carry out such a task. Thanks to a grant from the Ibermuseum Training Program, I took up a residency where I was able to get to know the risk management plan of the National Museum of Anthropology in Madrid, the first institution linked to the Ministry of Culture, Education and Sport of Spain that developed such action. In its implementation phase the plan was carried out with a specialized consultancy. This meant it was very simple and effective. It contained information, advice and protocol designed so that anyone (a museum official, fireman or volunteer) can act effectively in case of any emergency (fire, flood, etc.).

Regarding the issue of disempowerment in



Picture taken in 2018 by Alejandra Saladino

contemporary museums, a few points need clarifying. If we consider the question on a general level, with an emphasis on the financial dimension, I would say that museums have been forced to look for innovative management alternatives. On a social and political level, however, I realise that in some contexts museums occupy places of considerable prominence. I realise that a lack of economic power can also prompt the museum to reflect on its social role as a space for the legitimisation of official discourse and other narratives. In the 21st century museums face a crisis of identity: they need to prove their relevance to society, and to themselves, whether it be about the consumption of culture or the social processes of strengthening and repairing memories and identities.

How will this national symbol be rebuilt? In addition to funding and reconstruction of the physical building, how will the National Museum of Rio regain its reputation and the trust and support of the public?

Even as the flames had yet to be completely put

out, the fate of the museum was already being discussed by several groups. Some were saying it should be rebuilt (as if that were possible), others were saying that it should be left as a ruin and a landmark to remind us of the failure of cultural policies. As a museologist and archaeologist who worked closely with collections in the National Museum (during my masters degree in Archaeology I looked at the mortuary practices of fishermen-collectors on the south coast of Brazil, analysing their shell ornaments), it is not easy to separate emotion from critical reflection on the topic. Any decision has its limitations and risks and should therefore reflect a broad range of perspectives on the issue, including those from the scientific community, the cultural heritage institution and the public itself. So far work has been carried out on the parts of the collection that weren't destroyed by fire, and attempts to recover the rest of the collection has only just begun. The Museum has become a truly sad and horrifying archaeological site.

Regarding the issue of public trust and support in the



Fachada do museu, 2018, by Lu Brito

museum, I would like to define the different interest groups. Until the creation of the Museum of Tomorrow, the National Museum was the museum that attracted the largest number of visitors in Rio, most of whom belong to the lower social classes. However, like many institutions in the country, the museum can be seen as a victim of a contempt for education and in Brazilian culture society. Influenced by the media, people looked for someone to blame and to hold responsible for the fire, and this soon gained political overtones given the approaching government elections.

Given the considerable cuts to the education and culture budget it is not surprising that university museums aren't functioning at their best. Workers at the National Museum launched the campaign #museunacionalvive with the clear intention of demonstrating to the population that the institution consists of the people that worked there, not just the now largely-destroyed collection. Employees at the museum have already presented the results of their passion and commitment to the institution in the form of two public exhibitions. The first exhibition, which was dedicated to the

research carried out in the Antarctic by scientists working for museum, opened at the end of last year thanks to a partnership with the Cultural Center of the Casa da Moeda in Rio de Janeiro. Some of the items used in the exhibition were rescued from the rubble of the museum. The second exhibition, which opened in February 2019 at the Banco do Brasil Cultural Center in Rio de Janeiro, presented around one hundred artefacts rescued from the fire.

During the XXIVth International Congress of Ibero-American Anthropology recently held in the Azores, Brazilian historian Giane Maria de Souza said that the National Museum, which was created by the Portuguese nobility, has been forgotten by wealthier groups in contemporary Brazil, since it is an institution located in a poor-class neighborhood that produces more science and fewer events that suits their interests. Sadly, I agree with assessment.

After the fire, people from different communities started their own projects to support the museum. For example, students started to collect pictures to remember the museum, and Wikipedia asked people to submit their personal memories of the

museum. What do you think of the reaction of communities to the fire? What was the role of social media in helping to manage the museum's continuing reputation and engagement with the community?

On the role of social media, I would say that it was fundamental. Very important indeed in fact. In terms of the wider reactions within Brazil, I would say that it has been an absolute catastrophe. Unfortunately, many people are of the attitude that life goes on without the museum. Only those who are part of the museums and heritage community, in particularly the staff at the National Museum of course, continue to struggle for the museum's future, and I extend my admiration and support to them.

How did the academic community in Brazil perceive the fire? From a museological perspective, what can we learn from this tragedy, and what can we do in the future?

This situation reminds me of the title of Gabriel Garcia Marques' book *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. For decades we have been discussing the risks that come with lack of investment and support in museums and cultural heritage. But we still felt like it was an atomic bomb falling on our heads. It is a trauma from which we will never fully recover, I think. We will be able to live with the pain, to go ahead, to continue the struggle in the name of the values of the sector. We have learned that our place in the world of heritage is inescapably political. My commitment to the future remains the same as ever: striving for the values of the sector (which includes increasing budgets and hiring and training professionals), rationalizing museum management (through the implementation of objective and feasible museological plans and clearly defined priorities for the preservation and socialization of collections, the revision of the provisions and regulations that make difficult the management of good practices on museum heritage) and by encouraging the active participation of society in decision-making.

possible for the museum to transform its disempowerment into empowerment?

This question is somewhat uncomfortable, since the former Minister of Culture, who acted as an instrument of a political articulation aimed at the privatization of museums (weakening institutions in the face of political and economic interests, thus making the working regime more flexible and yet precarious for professionals, and, as a result, putting at risk the collections), referred to the fire as an "opportunity" to approve a bill to create a museum agency and endowments. I fully understand the choice of professionals of the National Museum to follow in the struggle, producing knowledge and rescuing the collection from the rubble, however, we are still in mourning. In my opinion, we must live in this mourning in order to effectively learn something from all this. Finally, again, in my opinion, the National Museum has not lost its power of creation, of production. Now, I do not know if it will be possible for Brazilian society to realize what humanity lost with the fire. I do not know if it will be possible for Brazilian citizens to successfully canvass the elected politicians for measures necessary for museums to reach their full potential.

Could the fire be turned into an opportunity? Is it

Interactions in the House of European History

By Inês Quintanilha

Abstract

The House of European History (HEH, 2017) emerges as potential aggregator of people, while aspiring to represent different communities in transnational categories, through the knowledge of a multiple but often diffuse whole. The first temporary exhibition seeks to cultivate the knowledge of the *other*. In the encounter that *Interactions* proposes, a discourse on Trading, Fighting, Negotiating and Learning is made to understand and debate how our identity is shaped.

In the light of a fragmented European community and having in mind the European policy of Europeanisation through cultural heritage, it is our aim to question what narrative of the history of a continent? Which territories of exclusion or (in) visibility can we delimit? How does the HEH participate in a broader cultural policy of Europeanisation of historical memory? And, by mapping the installation and museological content of *Interactions*: how can a museum contribute to the debate on the meaning of “being European”?

Keywords

House of European History, Interactions, Europeanisation, Memory and Museums

The House of European History

It was through a curators' competition promoted by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) in 2015 that we found in the project House of European History (HEH) an object of study that impressed by its ambitious objective: to be able to affirm itself as a museological pole of European history and simultaneously a symbol/vehicle of its identity.

The initial inauguration plan, scheduled for 2014, has suffered a significant delay. By postponing the new opening date for the end of 2016, the HEH would eventually open to the public on May 6, 2017, Europe's Day. The personal commitment of Hans-Gert Pöttering, the President of the European Parliament (January 2007-July 2009), is at the origin of the project. In 2007, the politician of German origin, elected by the Christian Democratic Union/European People's Party, justified the need for a pan-European history museum with the idea that the construction of a European identity would benefit from the diffusion and knowledge of the history of Europe:

I should like to create a locus for history and for the future where the concept of the European idea can continue to grow. I would like to suggest the founding of a “House of European History”. It should [be] a place where a memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union. (Committee of Experts, 2008: 4)

This was the first step towards a transnational project funded by the European Parliament and subordinated to it, with the expected budget being exceeded by several million euros - estimated at EUR 67 million and ending up in EUR 155 million (*Telegraph*, April 3, 2011).

In a brief methodological note, we will review the theoretical context, analyze the museological programs and

investigations carried out on the object of study, and at the same time analyze the content of the temporary exhibition, and the respective collection of qualitative and quantitative data, and explore the results obtained by applying a semi-structured, open-ended interview to Constanze Itzel, director of the HEH.

Museological Programs

In ten years between the Hans-Gert Pöttering's speech and the inauguration of the museum, its future location was discussed and two museological programs were conceived. For the design of the preliminary museological program, a Committee of Experts coordinated by Hans Walter Mutter (German historian, Chairman of the Foundation for the House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany) was appointed and composed of professionals of various nationalities and different disciplinary backgrounds who would introduce the *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History* (Committee of Experts, 2008). Divided in 116 points, the main orientation for the future museum was: (1) to identify a European memory and identity; (2) to democratise its content while making it freely available to anyone, regardless of the language; and (3) to create a collection and a documentation center with a chronologically oriented narrative. This museum collection was to start from what was identified as the 'higher culture' (Committee of Experts, 2008: 11), or the European Mediterranean roots, which were extended until the fall of the Roman Empire, the technical and cultural evolutions from the 17th and 18th centuries, the rivalries between States and Nations, the beginning of the Modern Age, and the expansions of the 19th century before focusing on the period that extends from the two great wars, when Europe collapsed socially and economically, until the rise of a new auspicious period of growth, prosperity, and integration.

A second document emerged in 2013, *Building a House of European History* (European Parliament, 2013), which was drafted by an Academic Project Team led by

the future Creative Director of the museum, the Slovenian historian, sociologist, and museum consultant, Taja Vovk van Gaal. The document was composed of the Museum's mission and tutelage, its location, the characteristics of the pre-existing building and ongoing rehabilitation, the previous studies conceived to evaluate audiences, the multilingual content of the permanent exhibition, the desired museographic and museological characteristics, and the ongoing elaboration of a collection and the particularities of project management:

The House of European History will be a resource open to the general and specialised public from across Europe and beyond. It will take its place at the heart of the visitor services policy of the European Parliament in Brussels. It will be located in an historic landscape on an important architectural site of the Belgian capital. Over time it will have a web presence, develop partnerships and cooperation, and build a cultural profile that will extend far beyond the physical boundaries of its actual location. (European Parliament, 2013: 4)

In contrast with the previous program, this document reinforced the intention of presenting 'multiple perspectives of history' (European Parliament, 2013: 24), seeking to ensure the representation of all Member States, communities, and the public. Nevertheless, there was also an attempt to decentralise and expand the area of intervention of the museum, in an intention not observed in the document prepared by the Committee of Experts. The content of the permanent exhibition, chronologically structured along the 4.800 m² of the exhibition area spread over six floors, was to be divided in six themes: (1) 'Shaping Europe' – with an introduction to the museum's objective and the identification of a common European heritage; (2) 'Europe Ascendant' – the development and progress of the 19th century and the ideas that arose from the French Revolution; (3) 'Europe Eclipsed' – the downward trajectory that would culminate in both the

World Wars; (4) 'A House Divided' – the reconstruction of a devastated and divided continent; (5) 'Breaking Boundaries' – the process of European integration; and, lastly, (6) 'Looking Ahead' – a final floor that seeks to place the visitor in the center of the discussion sphere by appealing to its reflection.

According to the two official documents, initial questions concerned the aim to be a supranational institution (Kaiser, 2014; Macdonald, 2013; Sierp, 2015) through the representation of diverse and geographically dispersed communities, the origin of the project, the particularity of the Museum's conception based on an idea rather than a collection, the little participation of the European communities (centrally and locally) and the absence of discussion, and, finally, the real content yet to be studied.

In a small glimpse of the materialization of this project and according to Andrea Mork, the HEH Content Coordinator, the formalisation of the museum particularly considered the main events and developments in European history, which have spread to various countries although in different ways. For the curator, the HEH thus aims to become a 'reservoir of European memory' in itself, a shared memory that often divided and congregated different communities:

To sum up, The House of European History will not be just a representation of the Multiplicity of national histories. It will be a "reservoir of European memory", containing experiences and interpretations in all their diversity, contrasts and contradictions. Its presentation of history will be ambivalent rather than homogeneous, critical rather than affirmative. (Mork, 2016: 221)

In the light of a fragmented European community, it is our aim to explore the representation of a European history, questioning the way this new transnational Museum transmits the knowledge of the history of a continent, its states, citizens and the so-called European Union. Which narratives and territories of exclusion or (in)visibility can

we delimit? Did *Interactions* succeed in bringing Europeans together? How does the HEH participate in a cultural policy of Europeanisation of the historical memory?

Theoretical Context

In order to deal with the unstable European context of the 1970s, where doubts were raised about economic prosperity and the need for new political references, the official speeches allude to a crisis of values and to a necessary search for a European identity, capable of giving the European project 'meaning that would go "beyond the economic, financial and material considerations"' (Calligaro, 2013: 85). It is in this context that the vast domain of cultural heritage begins to be explored symbolically and politically as a resource for renewed support of the European Union's political project and of the solidarity among Europeans. The institutionalisation of the action of the European institutions in the field of cultural heritage took place in the following decade, and, in 1984, the European Historical Monuments and Sites Fund was created. The 1990s and the Maastricht Treaty paved the way for a legal basis for cultural action within the Union, introducing community programs to promote a historical dimension of culture and artistic creation (Calligaro, 2013: 85).

It is in this context that we can refer to the Europeanisation of heritage. In the transition between the last two centuries, we have verified the concretization of cultural practices allied with the creation of supranational narratives, or meta-narratives (Remes, 2013; Rigney 2012), the materialization of a consistent policy of Europeanisation (Calligaro, 2013; Kaiser, 2014) aimed at strengthening the principles of the European Union integration. Europeanisation thus acquires a form of cultural practice that takes place in the economic and political context of the European Union, in a process generally produced by different actors in a very wide field that is called heritage. In order to promote the political involvement of citizens in favor of the European project, this heritage evolved as a pedagogical basis for a form of European education and, at the same time, a process of awakening

in Europe (Calligaro, 2013). Heritage is simultaneously presented as the form and substance of this specific Europe, in a process of political instrumentalization towards a wider integration (Bennett, 2007; Calligaro, 2013; Macdonald, 2003; Rigney, 2012; Shore, 2000).

Through the heritage context, recent projects such as Europeana (2005), EuNaMus (2010), or the New Narrative for Europe (2013) exemplify initiatives of a European dimension surrounding the memory of a common past and a narrative of post-chaos success. Europeanisation is therefore associated with initiatives promoted by the European institutions, which aim at transnational convergence and the testing of a collective memory in Europe (Kaiser, 2015). As in the constitution of nation-states in the 19th century, the production of an official narrative seeks to defend national integration (in this case, transnational) and state formation (the union of states), creating and structuring traditions, nationalizing collective memories to legitimise these states (now, the European Union), political systems, and external and internal policy goals (Kaiser, 2015). This means that memory takes place in the public debate as an effective form of personal and collective relationship with the past, placing the citizens in the centre of this debate, approaching identity and, in an opposite movement, distancing from history or, at least, from the history of great narratives (Rigney, 2012).

In the 1980s, there was an increase in the number of European museums as well as their centrality in the dissemination of this meta-narrative, in which 'identity factories' were tested (Kaiser, 2015) in a context of a sometimes diffused and disconnected European historical narrative. In this regard, and while working on the processes in which Europeanisation shapes heritage representations, Wolfram Kaiser argued:

We are interested in the extent to which processes of Europeanisation currently taking shape in different social spheres, and with different degrees of intensity, are reflected in exhibitions, influence the planning of new museums or transform their

collections; which objects are selected to represent which European history, and how these then circulate; what master narratives of the history of integration are developed and then compete for attention with each other and with existing national and regional narratives; and how the discursive and material boundaries of "Europe" are defined through museal representation. (Kaiser, 2014: 5)

Approaches to the HEH Through Its Museological Programs

From the beginning of the project, ten years passed until its inauguration. During this period, and in the absence of public debate, some studies were carried out within the academia. The first ones approached the HEH according to the document published in 2008 and elaborated on by the Commission of Experts. In her research, Anastasia Remes (2013) describes the historiographical, museological, and political context in which the HEH was conceived, while highlighting the economic and sovereign debt crisis and a European identity crisis. Remes emphasises the role that history has in this project, a reservoir in which contemporary identities are constructed, and concludes that the HEH project existed as a means to legitimise contemporary European policies. The study *Political Values in a European Museum* (Huistra, 2014), conducted by Pieter Huistra, Marijn Molema, and Daniel Wirt, is a part of this same group of investigations, in which the authors problematise the instrumentalisation of the HEH by scrutinizing values and political identities. Huistra, Molema, and Wirt characterise the museum according to its first program as a non-neutral territory, where the message is the medium between the museum and its audience. Hence, they question the place of the museum in the formation of national identity, comparing its existence to an ideological or propagandistic instrument. The authors conclude that a political ideology in favor of European integration exists in the museological program of the HEH through an idealization of a political product aiming to reproduce this normative

discourse, which is far from being objective due the selection of events and episodes. Thus, the authors consider that:

It is no wonder that the main focus of the first chapter of the Conceptual Basis is on culture. The notion of continuity rests on the stability of Europe. This stability is most easily found in some kind of a substrate underlying European history, namely European culture. (Huistra et al., 2014: 132)

While analyzing the contents of the 2008 program, the authors highlight the necessity of also considering migrations and colonization as integral and transforming aspects within the European Union, arguing that the HEH was designed as a legitimizing instrument for European integration, seeking to impose supranational narratives over national narratives, and where a common cultural identity is affirmed through the driving force of the triad: collapse, rebirth, and progress.

A second group of studies analysed both museological programs. In Veronica Settele (2015) work, given the political view that the sharing of a historical consciousness could forge a convergent European identity, She proposed checking whether the HEH introduces counter-narratives against the hegemonic narrative of integration as a success story. The author also recalls the lack of public debate surrounding the development of the project, opposing to one of the objectives of the museum: to promote greater involvement of citizens in political decisions, contributing to the construction of a more cohesive Europe. In the comparison of the two official documents, Settele additionally identifies a paradigm shift transmitted in the evolution of a full peace speech towards the emphasis on the change of borders and the oscillation between the center and periphery. As a result, in *Building a House of European History*, there is the intention to give visibility to various interpretations and multiple perspectives of history, without, though, changing their chronological presentation to the success and triumph of Europe. Thus, a timid inclusion of 'marginal voices' can be observed:

Summing up the analysis of the permanent exhibition being assembled by the HEH, I argue that regarding the Museum's representation of "marginal voices" in the context of migration and colonialism, there are substantial differences between the Conceptual Basis from 2008 and the revised concept from 2013, supplementary information on the latter being provided by the Academic Project Team. (Settele, 2015: 412)

In conclusion, Settele identifies in the HEH the attempt to create an identity factory programmed in a context of European fragmentation, a sovereign debt crisis, and the advent of the far-right nationalist parties. For the German researcher, this is done at the expense of the exclusion of those who generally have no voice, which is verified by the inexistence of counter-narratives for successful integration and generalised peace.

This second group of investigations also includes *Narrating Unity at the European Union's New History Museum* in which Tim Hilmar (2016) seeks to understand what paths exist for the construction of a cultural expression of European identity. To this end, the author uses a model of analysis that explains the formation of memory as a cultural process, an 'expressive and conceptually loosely-defined space' that '(...) enable memory agents to identify the transnational with the sacred and create an incentive to maintain a moral distance from its counterpart, the national' (Hilmar, 2016: 300). The HEH addresses the complicated relationship between the memories of Eastern Europe, which are especially traumatic in the twentieth century and placed within the centrality of the museological contents. Hilmar finds a moral principle of moderation through the permanent exhibition in this process, actively seeking to blur differences between the Nazi and Soviet regimes. In this case, Hilmar highlights the role of museography in the sense of avoiding, or alternatively putting in evidence, moral tensions that structure the framing of memory. Moreover, in Hilmar's study, the author identifies pressures for the abandonment of a conservative chronological

presentation in order to favour a narrative of integration:

Although the political independence of the two working teams is writ large in the project, there is some evidence of intervention on behalf of the politically appointed Board of Trustees with regard to diachronic consistency. The rationale of having a strictly chronological approach was dismissed “from above” to move towards a more thematic weighting, evidently in order to give the process of European integration more weight in the exhibition. (Hilmar, 2016: 317)

Ultimately, in the field of representativeness, despite the possibility of generating empathy and recognition within the objects of the collection, Hilmar (2016) points out the difference between the victims of Nazism and Stalinism, where the sense of belonging is identified in the former. Similarly, the author reports that the theme of Islam is only addressed in the last floor of the museum, an area considered to be outside the permanent exhibition. Hilmar thereby highlights the vague nature of the transnationality that is sought to represent the HEH project and the existence of a chronological line that clearly favours the thematic narrative of European integration while neglecting self-criticism and reflexivity towards colonialism and decolonization, the totalitarianism regimes other than Nazism or Communism, the relationship between Europeans and their counterparts, or the traumatic events of southern Europe. However, both authors seem to hypothesise the public’s reflection and the evolution into a conscious negotiation between centre/periphery, power/subalternity, and inclusion/exclusion upon the museum’s completion.

Interactions, the First Temporary Exhibition

The first temporary exhibition, where curators intended to explore trade, diplomatic relations, conflicts

and wars, travel, and cultural contacts, was organised into three main themes arranged in an 800 m² of exhibition area. The curators sought to invite the visitor to understand the contemporary reality ‘by engaging with the long history of cross-border contacts within Europe and the outside world’. ‘What links us to other places in Europe?’¹

The theme *Encounters* was distributed through floor -1 and addressed the concepts of trade, war, diplomacy, and knowledge. The idea that Europeans have been constantly moving and meeting across borders in order to exchange goods, fight wars, negotiate agreements, and share knowledge was developed in such a way to facilitate reflection on how and where these encounters happened, who were the actors involved and what were their experiences. In a permanent opposition of positive/dramatic aspects of European civilization, the curators narrated medieval trading networks, the Roman Empire, Greek colonization, trade routes to Asia and America, the use of money, and the first banking systems in ‘Trading’. In ‘Fighting’ they approached the Crusades at the same time as they illustrated the Turkish, the ‘30 years’ and the Napoleonic wars, not forgetting the two Great Wars, like in the permanent exhibition, and ending in the contemporary wars that raged within the Balkans in the 20th century. Concerning ‘Negotiating’ section, the curators elected the Congress of Vienna, the Peace of Westphalia, the Council of Ferrara-Florence, the League of Nations and the European Union. In ‘Learning’, the emphasis was placed on the universities, the great capitals of the arts in Rome and Paris, the European invention of the encyclopaedia in the 18th century, and the origins and creation of the museum as a place for conservation and presentation of heritage. This first sector featured the traditional disposition of written content, a lead supplemented by small texts and subtitles, audio-visuals, original objects and replicas, and interactive zones where we could find games or scenographic elements, such as a vehicle of war. The temporal and geographical hiatus verified in the narrative was extremely wide, ranging from the first five

1 Excerpts from the introductory text to Temporary Exhibition, presented on floor -1, ‘Encounters’ nucleus. (Visited 21 April 2018)

centuries before Christ to present days, and from the Greco-Roman civilization to the wars that devastated central Europe. The second theme, *Connections*, displayed in the small exhibition area of floor 0 – the ground floor in front of the main entrance – tried to locate the visitor in the centre of the exhibition. Screens for individual use where very simple details of daily lives could be shared, such as birth or hometown, the geographical origins of the family or significant others, and preferences such as travels, music, sports clubs or food, were arranged in front of a large screen. Visitor-exhibition interaction resulted in connections between European Union countries but also outside the Union, visible on a map of Europe on a big screen. While still available online, ‘Tracking my Europe’ has resulted in an original project with immediate results that can still be validated and observed today. Yet, we are unable to realise how many participants there were up till today.

Lastly, on the first floor, we found the theme *Exchange* and the challenge ‘come on in and make yourself at home’, where we could face the recreation of the interiors of European homes of various periods with a profuse scenography of kitchens, dining rooms, and rest areas. In this area, the visitor was challenged to explore the concepts of: (1) ‘Flavors’ – through recipes and various ingredients as well as fauna and flora; (2) ‘Thoughts’ – through games, artistic techniques, travel literature, toys, dance, musical instruments and fashion; and (3) ‘Dreams’ – exploring tales and legends in the heart of private life. Given the description of the various origins of food, objects, and customs, often with origins outside the European continent, the question was posed: ‘Does not this make our everyday environment much more fascinating?’

The temporary exhibition, unlike the rest of the museum, presented written content with its objects and themes, making the use of a tablet or mobile device in contrast to its essential use for the understanding of the permanent exhibition. Furthermore, the content was presented in four

languages – English, French, Dutch and German – as opposed to the 24 languages available for the permanent exhibition. Having analysed the collection and objects presented in *Interactions* through the exhibition catalogue, we realised that the group of originals and replicas, 251 objects and documents, had very different origins. From the museum’s collection, which includes donations and acquisitions, we counted 25 objects and documents while 137 pieces came from only five countries (Belgium [56], Germany [32], Italy [19], France [16], and the United Kingdom [14]). The group of countries that loaned the pieces that illustrated the temporary exhibition also included Israel, with a total of 21 pieces, mainly in ‘Fighting’. At the other extreme, countries like Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia did not contribute any objects, whereas Bulgaria, Ireland, Latvia, and Portugal had one object each in presentation.

Shaping a European Identity?

Interactions was presented on three floors and through different narratives. On the one hand, *Encounters* presented a classic exhibition layout to portray countless and distant moments in European history, contrasting texts and subtitles to original objects and documents, and scenographic elements and moving images. In a complete alteration of the museological paradigm in *Exchange*, we found another type of exhibition, less concerned with historical rigor or classic narrative, placing the visitor in a kind of everyday life familiar to everyone. Constanze Itzel pointed out ‘The limited time available for the exhibition’s development (...) resulting in a limited possibility to carry through wide-scale academic consultations.’² Using a generous number of reproductions, including works of art or documents such as Jan Van Eyck’s ‘The Andolfini Portrait’ (1434) and the pilgrimages of Bernhard Von Breydenbach Speyer (1503), the curators showed the daily lives of many Europeans not free from stereotypes, underlining cultural exchanges at constant intersection

2 Interview to the Director of the House of European History, Dr. Constanze Itzel on January 9, 2019.

and contamination. The significant use of objects and reproductions in this nucleus, such as plastic food, a canopy, wallpaper prints of flowers and others, in some way refer us to a place other than a museum, especially since, according to the ICOM definition adopted in Vienna on August 24th, 2007 (currently under review):

A museum is a non-profit (...) which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.³

The great majority of objects on display in this nucleus were not, all in all, original pieces of historical value. Thinking about replicas and reproductions not constituting a whole in relation to each other the exercise is identical. Especially in this last nucleus, one can point out the instrumentalisation of history and memory favouring, as Sharon Macdonald (2003) recalls, the sense of depoliticisation, loss of confrontation, mourning, or fear, that favours belonging. Moreover, the collection presented in the temporary exhibition was assembled to depict the narrative, to illustrate and validate the pre-conceived idea or concept and not otherwise.

Finally, let us think again about the intermediate nucleus that, connected to the virtual world, ensured a web presence and allowed interaction with the museum without a physical presence. A questionnaire disseminated to European citizens preceded this attempt to 'explore how Europeans represent the space they live in' (House of European History, 2017: 17) rehearsed in 'Tracking my Europe'. The curators sought to elaborate this interactive map to prove the effective blurring of borders between the various European countries and/or between Europe and the rest of the world.

In the same way, they intended to understand which centers and peripheries would be delimited through the answers. Effectively, the blurring of borders was verified in the interactive map, but the central European opposition vs. periphery was significantly accentuated as well. Analyzing the patterns of responses in May 2018, the HEH team concluded the existence of Eastern European orientation was '(...) probably influenced by the habits generated by the cold war decades.'⁴ Besides, as there was a strong connection between Europeans and Italian or Asian cuisine, the reference goes to 'migration and globalization as a phenomena'⁵ which seems a somewhat demanding association to us.

In 2008, the first museological program for the HEH made a brief reference to the development of temporary exhibitions without contemplating specific objectives. Five years later, as the ideas of the Academic Committee matured, a more concrete reference to the mission of temporary exhibitions was added to the new museum program:

The subject matter of the temporary exhibitions will be closely tied in to the main focus of the House of European History's mission and objectives. (...) The first phase of the building up of this collection, from 2012–14, will be focused on collecting material, on the basis of long and short-term loans, which will directly support the permanent and the first temporary exhibition: during this period, the focus will be on evidential research into relevant material in European collections (and where necessary into collections outside Europe), as well as on collecting the objects needed for the permanent and the temporary exhibition. (European Parliament, 2013: 20-42)

In the aftermath of the closing of the first temporary exhibition,

³ International Council of Museums museum definition adopted in Vienna, on August 24th, 2007. Available at: <https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>. (Accessed 13 May 2015)

⁴ Excerpt from the video 'Results on Interactions – our 1st Temporary Exhibition'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYS521qKQdU>. (Accessed 20 February 2019)

⁵ *Ibid.*

we find that, to a large extent, Constanze Itzel, Director of the museum, recently stated in an interview that *Interactions* would give priority to the:

(...) opportunity to develop our audience and provide them with a varied offer. For example, a temporary exhibition (...) could be more immersive, interactive, art-based, or even tailored for just on one part of society, such as children. By using this variety of themes and content, we can appeal to a range of audiences, including people who may not usually consider visiting a museum. Temporary exhibitions complement the content of the permanent exhibition by, for example, going further back in history, or having a deeper exploration of certain topics.⁶

It is noted, however, that the first temporary exhibition contained mostly loans from only five countries. Regardless of the themes and geographies they cover, the collection presented might not be representative of the majority of communities in the European Union. In this sense, it is not easy to think of the enlargement of audiences, participation, and interaction of new audiences, that Itzel foresaw. In the same way, the effort not to neglect the 'marginal voices' can be questioned through the lack of diversity in the provenance of the objects. Finally, as Hilmar identified, here too, the thematic weight prevails against a clear chronological orientation, in favour of the narrative of evolution through the contact with the *other*.

After the presentation of the first temporary exhibition, we verified that the idea illustrates the purposes and mission of the HEH to 'explore the nature of cross-border interactions and encounters on the European continent over time' (House of European History, 2017: 8). The curators therefore programmed the permanent dichotomy between us/others to underline the constant contamination and

exchange of all kinds, from trade to culture. Eventually, one sees positioning in defense of the European development due to the *encounters* with the *other*, relieving, at the same time the pressure of the absence of certain themes in the permanent exhibition (e.g., European science, other European conflicts rather than the World Wars). Still, attention was given in depth to the peripheries.

At a time of rupture and European disaggregation, which may culminate in the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union or the rise of nationalism and anti-immigration movements throughout Europe, the mission of this exhibition is moving. It narrates the European development based on philosophical and scientific advances or great economies through exchanges. At the same time, it highlights negative aspects of the more or less remote European past but without underlining themes such as colonization or slave trade. It was, therefore, an exhibition attentive to the most recent museological debates concerning museum activism or the non-neutral place of the museum. Though, contrary to what Włodzimierz Borodziej published in the first pages of the *Interactions* catalogue, it was not so clear to us that the exhibition 'focuses on how our identity is shaped'. It is the Director of the museum who explains the antagonism: 'The HEH team does not subscribe to the objective of shaping one European identity as it conceives identity as something multiple and changing.'⁷

Therefore, this opposition seems to point to a closed debate between the program of the Committee of Experts and the museum program developed by the Academic Project Team or the museum itself, keeping in mind the absence of citizen and external participation or an apparent disinterest, certainly failing to discuss the meaning of *being European*. However, the HEH does have a place in the politics of remembrance and Europeanisation through heritage, namely, in the emphasis placed on enrichment/evolution through the permanent contamination between activities and customs as

⁶ House of European History online portal, <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/pt/node/666>. (Accessed 10 December 2017)

⁷ Interview to the Director of the House of European History, Dr. Constanze Itzel on January 9, 2019.

opposed to destruction caused by isolation/closure.

By mapping the installation and content of the first temporary exhibition, this communication intended to debate the European project for the musealisation of a transnational history and the Europeanisation of heritage. Ultimately, this article will also be of extremely importance in the development of a doctoral program that has a wider research in the HEH.

Acknowledgements

Dr. Constanze Itzel, House of European History; European Parliament; Professor Jan Baetens; Professor Raquel Henriques da Silva; Professor Susana Martins; Professor Tiago Lima Quintanilha.

Bibliography

- Bennett, T. (2007). 'The Work of Culture'. *Cultural Sociology* 1. Sidney, Institute for Culture & Society.
- Calligaro, O. (2013). *Negotiating Europe, EU Promotion of Europeanness since the 1950s*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Calligaro, O. (2015). 'Legitimation Through Remembrance? The Changing Regimes of Historicity of European Integration'. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23:3. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2015.1054794>. (Accessed 12 January 2017).
- House of European History (2017). *Interactions. Centuries of commerce, combat and creation. Temporary Exhibition Catalogue*. Brussels, European Union.
- Committee of Experts (2008). *House of European History, Conceptual Basis for a House of European History*. Brussels, European Union. Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf. (Accessed 1 July 2015)
- European Parliament (2013). *Building a House of European History*. Luxembourg, European Union. Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/tenders/2013/20130820b/Annex_I-Building_a_House_of_European_History.pdf. ISBN 978-92-823-3983-1. (Accessed 1 July 2015)
- Gaal, T. and Dupont, C. (2012). 'The House of European History'. *Entering the Minefields: the Creation of New History Museums in Europe, EuNaMus Report 9*. Linköping, Linköping University Electronic Press. Available at: http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=083. (Accessed 12 January 2016)
- Hilmar, T. (2016). 'Narrating Unity at the European Union's New History Museum: A Cultural-Process Approach to the Study of Collective Memory'. *European Journal of Sociology* 57. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975616000114>. (Accessed 14 Jan. 2017)
- Huistra, P., Molema, M., Wirt, D. (2014). 'Political Values in a European Museum'. *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 10: 1. Available at: <http://www.jcer.net/index.php/jcer/article/view/554/454>. (Accessed 12 January 2016)
- Itzel, C. (2017). 'The House of European History – A reservoir of the diversity and complexity of the memories of Europe'. *Observing Memories, 1 - The magazine of EUROM*. Barcelona, University of Barcelona's Solidarity Foundation.
- Kaiser, W., Krakenhagen, S., Poehls, K. (2014). *Exhibiting Europe in Museums. Transnational Networks, Collections and Representations*. New York and Oxford, Berghahn.
- Kaiser, W. (2011). 'From Great Men to Ordinary Citizens? The Biographical Approach to Narrating European Integration in Museums'. *Culture Unbound*

- 3. Linköping, Linköping University Electronic Pres. Available at: <http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se>. (Accessed 6 Jan. 2017)
- Kaiser, W. (2015). 'Clash of Cultures: Two Milieus in the European Union's "A New Narrative for Europe"'. *Journal of Contemporary Studies* 23:3. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2015.1018876>. (Accessed 22 December 2015)
- Macdonald, S. (2003). 'Museums, national, postnational, and transcultural identities'. *Museums and Society* 1. Available at: <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/museumsociety/documents/volumes/mands1.pdf>. (Accessed 10 Nov. 2016)
- Macdonald, S. (2009). *Difficult Heritage, Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond*. London and New York, Routledge.
- Macdonald, S. (2013) *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today*. London, Routledge.
- Mork, A. (2016). 'Constructing the House of European History'. *European Commemoration: Locating World War I*. Stuttgart, International Relations Institute. Available at: <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-51520-9>. (Accessed 6 Jan. 2017)
- Nora, P (1989). 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire'. *Representations* 26. Available at: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0734-6018%28198921%290%3A26%3C7%3ABMAHLL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-N> (Accessed 15 Mar 2016)
- Remes, A. and Bevernage, B. (2013). 'Memory, Identity and the Supranational History Museum: The House of European History. Creating a Place for Reflection and Debate or Constructing a European Master Narrative?'. Master Thesis. Ghent, University of Ghent.
- Rigney, A. (2012). 'Transforming Memory and the European Project'. *New Literary History* 43. Baltimore, Project Muse. Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/497937>. (Accessed 6 Jan. 2017)
- Settele, V. (2015). 'Including Exclusion in European Memory? Politics of Remembrance at the House of European History'. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23:3. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2015.1018877>. (Accessed 12 Jan. 2016)
- Shore, C. (2000). *Building Europe. The Cultural Politics of European Integration*. London, Routledge.
- Sierp, A. and Wüstenberg, J. (2015). 'Linking the Local and the Transnational: Rethinking Memory Politics in Europe'. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23:3, 2015. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2015.1058244>. (Accessed 22 Dec. 2015)



Creating the Museum of Dissent: Showcasing the Changeover exhibition at the Museums Association Conference and Exhibition, Belfast 2018

By Lisa Kennedy & Donata Miller

Abstract

What is dissent and what does it look like in museums? The Museum of Dissent - a concept devised by Lisa Kennedy, Donata Miller and Emma MacNicol, a collective of curators explores the role of dissent in the museum sector, drawing from their experiences as People of Colour (POC) museum professionals and visitors. This article describes the case study of the Museum of Dissent's intervention at the Museums Association Annual Conference, Festival of Change in 2018, *Changeover*, and the discussions and reflections that emerged from that intervention.

In *Changeover*, the Museum of Dissent sought to expose delegates to the power relations working in museums through role play in a polarised 'reverse museum' gallery setting. This article aims to think further about the implications of dissent, specifically in a gallery setting, through the example of *Changeover* and the subsequent responses and discussions from delegates and Museum of Dissent members.

Keywords

Dissent, Activism, Power Relations, Exhibition, Best Practice

Introduction

The term 'dissent' is a broad term that has been used to describe a variety of different rationales and actions. It is important, then, to consider the context in which the term dissent is used and defined, in order to understand its specific application to the Museum of Dissent. During 2018, the term dissent has been increasingly referred to in the museum sector, as part of central themes for exhibitions and national conferences, such as Museums Sheffield *Received Dissent: An American Mail Art Project* (3 April – 28 July 2018), the British Museum's *I Object: Ian Hislop's search for dissent* exhibition (6 September 2018 – 20 January 2019) and the *Stages of Utopia and Dissent: 50 years on* conference organised by the Theatre and Performance Research Group at Loughborough University (May 2018).

Why is that? What are the implications of using this term in a museum context? This article will examine existing definitions of dissent, specifically in terms of how dissent relates to the broader conversation of power relations that continue to exist in museums. This article will then focus on how the connection between dissent and power relations provided the context for the creation of the Museum of Dissent collective (MoDC, see Figure. 1) and defined *The Changeover* exhibition. A reflection on the intervention will follow, with a discussion about delegates responses (in person) and online.

Exploring Dissent

The fact that the term 'dissent' features in the title of the MoDC adds to the discourse on the frequent use and reference to dissent in museum practice and exhibition



Figure. 1
The Museum of Dissent Collective (from left to right: Donata Miller, Emma MacNicol, Lisa Kennedy, Anaïs Radière and Tanaya Basu De Sarkar), 2018, by the Authors

programming. However, before one can explore what dissent looks like in museums, it is important to understand what the term ‘dissent’ means. Whilst many papers, articles and books have written about dissent across different disciplines, often authors have not provided a definition of the term itself. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2019) dissent entails having ‘a strong difference of opinion on a particular subject, especially about an official suggestion or plan or a popular belief’. From a political and philosophical stance, this challenge to ‘popular belief’ or ‘authority’ for Butler (2009: 791) ‘is not mere desisting, and it may entail much more than the punctual enunciation of a speech act or mode of comportment’. Similar to Butler in discipline, Larsen (2009: 9) suggests ‘the right to dissent...is the basis of freedom in

modern society’. Again from a political stance (although more closely related to an anti-racist social movement) The Black Panther movement expressed the power of dissent perfectly in their phrase “All power to the people” (Panther, B., & Swaim, L., 1968: 34). Within the museum sector, there are several examples of dissenting against the long-standing view that museums are neutral spaces. For instance, National Museums Liverpool (2019) clearly state within their values that they ‘do not avoid contemporary issues or controversy’. Specific contemporary societal issues such as representation and class have been the focus in which groups such as *Museum Detox* (2014) and *Museums as Muck* (2018) have been established by museum professionals who seek to steer changes within the sector regarding inequality, access, and genuine inclusive

narratives that has a direct impact on the workforce and our audiences. Based on these definitions and our experiences in museums, we pose the following definition for the term dissent in museums: an active practice that promotes and acknowledges the existence of multiple ideas, concepts and opinions about complex issues that may counter current power relations, in the form of ‘popular belief’ or the official ‘status quo’. The MoDC aims to expand this understanding of dissent practically, through action. To dissent, does not only involve action from an external party but can also occur internally, such as within the foundational structures of an institution. The MoDC ‘recognise that there is always room for improvement’ and we ‘strive to be dissentful in all our actions’ (Museum of Dissent, 2018A). The act of dissent within museums is a continuous process of making changes according to knowledge gained from various sources, such as interpretation labels, information from research projects or collaborations with the public or acquisition records. From this brief introduction of definitions of dissent means, the next section will discuss how the concept and acts of dissent can be contextualised when challenging established and ongoing power relations within museums.

Defining Power Relations

To paraphrase French and Raven, power can be understood in terms of influence, and influence in terms of change. They take a generalised view of the word change, including “ changes in behaviours, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs and values’ (1959: 260). Within museums, McGall and Gray (2013: 9) suggest that ‘power can be seen as being negotiated between different levels of the hierarchy, with control of policy implementation being a vital resource in this process’ – which serves as one example of the type of power relations in existence within museums. For Foucault (1980: 200) ‘power relations are an unequal and relatively stable relation of forces’ which ‘implies an above and a below, a difference of potentials’. Such forces have been highlighted by Hamilton and Sharma (1996: 21) as ‘historical values,

tradition, customs, precedents, habits, lack of general will to fight injustices and non-caring attitudes’.

In museums, power structures are often embodied as decision makers who select objects, highlight (or exclude) certain narratives and decide how such narratives are told. For some, existing power relations within museums are not always easy to see. If they are recognised they not be discussed with a goal to understanding why imbalances of power exist and thinking of ways to correct and improve such imbalances. By not being challenged, long-established behaviours and attitudes that reinforce imbalances of power have become part of ‘the norm’. Increasingly, however, these behaviours are being challenged. In effect, by defining power, *power relations* as a term can be better understood when used within museum studies literature, as well as identifying (or reflecting on) current power relations within museums.

The themes stated by Hamilton and Sharma were particularly influential prior to and during the development of the MoDC. This was mainly due to the collective’s experiences as both POC workers in, and visitors to, museums and cultural institutions. These experiences involved, but were not limited to, ‘being made to feel “othered”, presented with stereotypes and non-verbally told that the space does not care for [one’s] history, [one’s] facts nor [one’s] personal experiences’ (Museum of Dissent, 2018A).

Thus, Festival of Change FOC offered the opportunity for MoDC to create an intervention and be located within the broader discourse on dissent in museums during 2018. By highlighting some of these norms garnered from personal and professional experience, the MoDC sought to convey the way in which power relations are at play, specifically ‘neutral’ interpretation, the connotations of ethnographic interpretation and resistance to more inclusive practices. As a result, the *Changeover* exhibition (the MoDC’s intervention contribution to Festival of change) was a manifestation of these goals. It facilitated an interpersonal display of how different forms of dissent – in the form of overt and covert provocative actions, can counter power imbalances within museums through the

lens of a 'good' and 'bad' museum. It should be noted that the MA's call out for interventions that explored dissent was an opportunity to be part of the larger discourses of dissent in 2018. The MoDC contributes to wider themes of dissent through thorough examination of 'good' and 'bad' museum display labels, practise which will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

Dissent in Museums?

The *Bodies of Colour: Breaking with stereotypes in the wallpaper collection* exhibition at The Whitworth Gallery in Manchester (4 May 2018 - 28 April 2019) utilised wallpaper in the collection to invite conversations about race, stereotypes and ideas of superiority. Although this exhibition did not incorporate the term dissent within the title, it displayed acts of dissent and countering existing power relations, in the following ways:

1. Challenging historical values and tradition by looking inwardly at 'how imperial attitudes to people are reflected on wallpaper' (University of Manchester, 2018)
2. Including multiple voices to counter the status quo when discussing race, by bringing 'together positions and experiences within an atmosphere of respect, learning and understanding' (University of Manchester, 2018) and
3. Demonstrating action, through the form of discussion and the resulting exhibition, to challenge racist representation within the collection as an institution even though the team at the Whitworth 'don't all agree about how it should be done' (University of Manchester, 2018).

This final point suggests a level of transparency by the Whitworth on two fronts. Firstly, this points to a recognition of the difficulty in attaining consensus amongst the organisation in how to approach racist representations.

Secondly, this level of transparency goes beyond the walls of the gallery by sharing authority with the public to shape the conversation by inviting 'you to contribute to an evolving conversation' (University of Manchester, 2018).

As previously stated, the way in which the term dissent is thought of, understood and used varies from people and institutions. In assessing the implications of the use of the term dissent, the MoDC stress the importance of differentiating between referring to the term 'dissent' and enacting dissent in relation to collections and audiences. The outcomes the MoDC see dissent having entail the promotion and active undertaking of change and creating an impact to forge future developments. Therefore, for the MoDC 'it is important that inspiration leads to action rather than stagnating once we return to a comfortable environment' (Museum of Dissent, 2018A). This reinforces why dissent is understood by the MoDC as a continuous practice. The next section will explain how dissent was understood and explored in the *Changeover* exhibition curated by the MoDC at the MA Conference and Exhibition in Belfast (2018).

Creating the *Changeover* Exhibition

The *Changeover* exhibition was created in response to the 2018 MA Conference theme of *Dissent: inspiring hope, embracing change*. The MA callout encouraged both delegates and exhibitors 'to challenge traditional thinking [in order] to transform museums and society' (Museums Association, 2018). This correlated with our own goal of encouraging everyday dissent - small changes that challenge and counter established norms aforementioned, that uphold the status quo. which will impact the museum space one action at a time. Drawing from our own experiences as PoC museum professionals and visitors, the MoDC created a 'reverse museum' in order to show how acts of everyday dissent, such as including Irish Language translated text within interpretation and labels, reflecting on the location in which Festival of Change was held, impact upon museum experiences.

The *Changeover* was referred to as a 'reverse

museum’ because the exhibition space flipped constantly between the concepts of a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ museum, whilst keeping the objects the same. The bad museum focused on the unequal power relations in museums. For instance, the labels featured sexist, misspelt, strongly ethnographic and ill-researched information. The larger gallery panels boasted of the exhibition’s corporate funding, as well as also asserting the museum’s position as the authoritative voice and absolute owner of the objects. There were no thoughts of inclusivity behind the bad museum, and the mindset was firmly geared towards an attitude of superiority. It was through early conversations about current examples of within museums and how this understanding could be challenged further, this established the divide (and thus our definition) between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ museums. The MoDC understanding of the ‘good’ museum aimed to collate personal proposals and existing examples of best practice in museums in one space. This incorporated recognising the importance and active inclusion of various sources of knowledge when interpreting collections, sharing authority amongst staff and our audiences and addressing the practice of unpaid internships which relates to the lack of diversity within the sector. Similarly, components of the ‘bad’ museum stemmed from personal experiences as museum professionals and visitors, as well as being aware of critiques of museums as spaces that focus on selective narratives, lack multiple layers of inclusion and reinforce established norms.

This change between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ characterises a dichotomy between many museums in the sector. Sometimes the staff are welcoming, there is multi-layered and inclusive interpretation and the visitor (or museum ‘partner’ as suggested by Shaz Hussain at Museum Next, 2017) in positive environments such as this feels comfortable and valued by the space they are in. At other times they are made to feel as ‘other’, ‘presented with stereotypes and non-verbally told that the space does not care for their history, their facts nor their personal experiences’ (Museum of Dissent, 2018A). This was a split we tried to demonstrate to conference attendees by

having one space alternately embody both experiences. Below is an example of the MoDC bad museum interpretation:

‘Tribal tea utensil with medicinal tea leaves. This peculiar utensil is used by the natives of the Great British Isles. Known colloquially as a ‘tea cup’, the accompanying tea leaves are of particular importance to the natives of the isles and cause the nation to be at a constant tipping point. There is relentless civil unrest between the PG tips clan and the Yorksiyre tea tribe, as the two groups fight to be healers of the land. The idol of the PG tips clan is often depicted as a sock puppet monkey.’ (Museum of Dissent, 2018B)

In the good museum, colonialist perspectives were flipped on their head. Respect for representation was considered from the beginning. For example, there was bilingual English-Gaelic interpretation of the object labels to represent our presence in Northern Ireland. Non-neutral interpretation featured where appropriate, with objects such as the tea cup explaining the links between the beverage, world trade and colonialism (see below in English and Gaelic). Artists respected for the content and skill of their work, rather than encouraging tokenistic representation in the space.

‘Tea Cup and Saucer with assorted tea bags’ England

This tea cup is from the north of England, where PG Tips and Yorkshire Tea teabags are two of the region’s most popular teas. Although tea drinking is often considered an essential part of contemporary British culture, it is shaped entirely by global trade. Originally a luxury product, Chinese tea was originally imported to Britain by the colonial East India Company. However, by the 19th century, most black tea in Britain came from British tea cultivation in colonial India and Sri Lanka, and this is the most common type of tea we still drink today.

‘Taechupán agus fochupán le málaí tae éagsúla’

Sasana

Is ó thuaisceart Shasana an taechupán seo, áit a bhfuil málaí tae *PG Tips* agus *Yorkshire Tea* ar dhá cheann de na taenna is mó a bhfuil tóir orthu. Cé go meastar an t-ólachán tae a bheith ina chuid ríthábhachtach de chultúr comhaimseartha na Breataine, tá sé faoi thionchar iomlán na trádála domhanda. I dtús ama ba tháirge fíorghálanta a bhí sa tae Síneach agus ba é Comhlacht na hIndiacha Thoir de chuid choilíneacht na Breataine a d'iompórtáil go dtí an Bhreatain ar dtús é. Ach faoin 19ú céad ba ó shaothrú tae na Breataine i gcoilíneachtaí na hIndia agus Shrí Lanca a tháinig formhór an tae dhuibh sa Bhreatain, agus is é an cineál sin tae is coitianta a ólaimid fós inniu.' [Translation provided by Absolute Translation LTD, 2018]. (Museum of Dissent, 2018C).

Beyond object representation in the 'good' and 'bad' museums, it was important to MoDC that conference attendees also had diverse experiences as visitors to the *Changeover* exhibition. As part of that change between 'good' and 'bad', the MoDC decided to shift the social norms and power relations that exist within museums. This was an important element of the *Changeover* exhibition – as the MoDC alternately displayed hostility and friendliness to introduce the theme of dissent to delegates and thus '[challenge] the status quo around ethnicity, gender, disability [and] class (Museums Association, 2018).

In the 'bad' museum, the MoDC pushed visitors to feel uncomfortable and powerless in the gallery setting. For some this feeling would be familiar, whilst for others this would be their first real taste of an unpredictable museum environment. We facilitated this by roleplaying as biased staff members, to counter the assumptions that museums are neutral spaces. The staff roles included the positions of: Security guard/Gallery assistant, Curator and Intern. Attitudes of the bad museum staff included: expressing prejudice and

ignorance towards the objects, acting in position of power over the visitors (by undermining belittling their experiences) and foregrounding their authority. The Curator role required staff to notify visitors of their biased opinions whilst emphasising their own self-importance (see Figure. 2).

The Security guard/ Gallery assistant role portrayed distrust in the visitors and delegates were told sharply and frequently not to touch the objects, whilst being watched intently in the space. This was emphasised by the vintage 'Do not touch' museum sign which was at the centre of the table, as seen in Figure. 3.

In the bad museum the unpaid/underpaid intern was assigned to guard one area of the museum and not given the opportunity to input their ideas nor challenge themselves in the role. These characters aimed to display a theatrical exaggeration of the layers of power relations at play within museums.

In contrast to the 'bad' museum, the 'good' museum aimed to honestly discuss the dominant power relations of museums with delegates. This included conversations regarding privilege, pay, career professional development and barriers to entry within the museum sector. The staff of the good museum actively sought to create an atmosphere of relaxation rather than invigilation in the gallery. Large panels and table risers were used in order to adhere to exhibitions accessibility standards. The Royal National Institute for the Blind and National Museums of Scotland 'Exhibitions for all guide' was closely consulted as part of the creation process.

At the end of the participant's *Changeover* experience, staff members held short conversations with the delegates, seeking to:

1. Compare their time in the *Changeover* exhibition space to their own experiences in museums.
2. Reflect on how the experience made them feel
3. Think of ways to incorporate everyday dissent into their own practises.



Figure. 2
Tanaya Basu De Sarkar speaking with MA delegates, playing the role of the Curator
of the Changeover exhibition, 2018, by the Author



Figure. 3
An image of the 'Do not touch' museum sign which was at the centre of the display
table, within the Changeover exhibition, 2018, by the Author



Figure. 4
A Selection of delegates pledges pinned on the Wall of Dissent at the Changeover exhibition, 2018, by the Author

The final part of the delegate experience at the *Changeover* exhibition was to share these reflections if they felt comfortable doing so. They were free to share their answers privately (writing, reflecting, discussion) or publicly through writing a dissenting pledge on the 'wall of dissent' (see Figure. 4).

The MoDC acknowledged that many of the attendees would not have the direct authority to determine certain behaviours and outlooks within their institutions. However, this does not mean that they are powerless. One staff member's decision to dissent from the norm, has the opportunity to change everything from a single visitor's experience, to embedding structural change within their institution.

Delegates Responses

The *Changeover* exhibition was a unique opportunity to speak with delegates about a variety of complex topics. The Exhibition guides describing the project were given out at the end of the experience, to prevent the MoDC from over explaining the role play before delegates became involved in the action. 81 exhibition guides were distributed out over the two days (38 were given out on the 8th of November, and 43 given out on the 9th). At the *Changeover* response area,

delegates were encouraged to write a pledge of 'Everyday Dissent' and hold themselves to account. The MoDC encouraged delegates to make a record of their pledge by either writing their pledge (and taking a picture), or engaging on twitter with #EverydayDissent. The response area was well received, with 40 *Changeover* visitors posting their pledges on the Wall of Dissent.

A major challenge to the project was the pace of the conference. The museum conference was a busy two days, with 10 other Festival of Change interventions, and a full programme of talks and seminars lined up. Hence a number of the visitors to the *Changeover* were short on time, only speaking with staff members rather than engaging with the printed exhibition guide and object interpretations. Throughout the *Changeover* exhibition the MoDC pushed the hashtag #EverydayDissent. It was hoped that this hashtag would inspire a Museum Conference ripple effect, with staff from museums all over the UK sharing their everyday dissent moments. Ultimately delegates seemed more engaged physically and though this led to great conversations during the conference, this made it more difficult to track the long-term dissenting effects of the *Changeover* experience.

The MoDC'S Reflection

A few weeks following the opening of the *Changeover* exhibition at the MA Conference, the MoDC reflected on the experience of running the intervention for the first time. The goals for this reflection were to be self-aware and critically evaluating our own responses to practice situations, in order to gain new understandings and improve future practice (Finlay 2008: 1). Individually, members of MoDC had experience with reflective practice and knew it was important to include time for reflection after the event to think about what had been learnt from this experience and how this would affect the collective's future practice. The reflective process involved a group discussion, which resulted in the creation of a survey of the following questions:

1. How did you find the recruiting process?¹
2. What, if anything, could have been improved in the recruiting process?
3. Can you recall any of your favourite interactions/responses to the intervention?
4. Can you recall any challenging interactions/responses during the intervention?
5. What was your favourite part of the Museum of Dissent creation process?
6. What was your least favourite part of the Museum of Dissent creation process?
7. Are there any provisions which would have improved your 'Changeover by the Museum of Dissent' experience?

The following observations emerged from the responses. Overall the MoDC believes that the *Changeover* intervention received a positive response over the two days of display. As the conference went on, delegates often stayed to listen to the explanation of the entire concept, during both the 'good' and 'bad' museum opening periods demonstrating the importance of word of mouth. In addition, a direct result

of conversations with an academic resulted in writing a listicle of 'Five ways museums can be sites for dissent' for the Red Pepper magazine (Miller, D. and Kennedy, L., 2019: 65-66).

It was also clear, however, that whilst many interesting conversations took place, there were times when delegates did not fully understand the collective's chosen methods of dissent. For instance, respondent C notes that 'one of our first visitors to the *Changeover* exhibition (whilst in its 'bad' museum iteration) came into the space and wanted to make a beeline straight out again' (Museum of Dissent, 2018D). Respondent D recalls a 'woman who got upset about the curator role and then left' (Museum of Dissent, 2018D). Similarly, for respondent A, some delegates 'did look a bit upset or puzzled but did not verbalise it, they tended to just leave the exhibition rather than engage in a conversation with us' (Museum of Dissent, 2018D). Respondent B found it 'a little frustrating when some of the delegates did not fully understand the point of the role play element of' the 'good' and 'bad' museums (Museum of Dissent, 2018D).

Whilst the intervention was intended to be a curated space to talk about forms of dissent, this was not always how it was interpreted by delegates. There were a few delegates who assumed the content of the *Changeover* only focused on decolonising spaces and Black and Ethnic Minority 'issues' (Museum of Dissent, 2018D). This demonstrates the need to talk about what dissent means and looks like in the museum context from different perspectives to bridge understandings of what acts of dissent may entail. For the MoDC, it was important to convey that certain acts of dissent should not be expected to be undertaken by *certain* people. This suggests a skewed understanding of what dissent means, and thus becoming almost a burden and responsibility of action by some. The MoDC counters this notion by arguing that everyone has a role to play when dissenting which can be explored in multiple ways. For Respondent C, one way of enacting dissent against various forms of power relations is through 'acknowledging your own privileges – whether

¹ Two volunteers were recruited in order to assist with the delivery of the Museum of Dissent 'Changeover' exhibition.

linked to race or sexuality, country of birth or anything else and see[ing] how you can dissent from norms which ignore the experiences of others' (Museum of Dissent, 2018D). Ultimately, dissent starts from looking inwards and thinking about how one understands and experiences the 'norm' and thinking beyond ourselves to consider realities faced by other people that may differ to our own. These were the types of thoughts the MoDC aimed to bring to the fore when delegates experienced *Changeover* and reflected on the Wall of Dissent (the response area).

Future Actions

From its very inception, the MoDC recognised that it would not be possible to cover all challenges to power relations in the intervention, nor represent all types of dissent, but there is still opportunity for change. This area has a strong potential for future research looking at how dissent has long-term impacts in museums, where it stems from and how it becomes embedded in institutional ethos. Whilst the *Changeover* exhibition and exhibition guide provided a lot of information for participants to digest, this was not something that could be limited to the two days of the conference.

Conclusion

To conclude, the *Changeover* exhibition brought together a variety of individual experiences and used these to create two polarised museum spaces. The 'bad' museum combined the negative norms from a variety of institutions into one space. The 'good' museum, illustrated how museums can become dissenting spaces. The MoDC presided over both of these concept spaces, in order to facilitate an emotive experience for delegates and to demonstrate how to use dissent as a practice to challenge existing power relations identified from our experiences.

The main message the MoDC attempted to convey, is that dissent in action has the potential to contribute greatly to positive changes within museums. The theme of the MA conference acted as catalyst, bringing museums professionals

in direct contact with dissenting practice. It would be interesting to see how relevant the theme of dissent remains in the museum sector. Dissent has power not only as a theme or title of an exhibition but as a way of internal reflection and consistent improvement. For the MoDC, dissent is an ongoing process, which is vital both personally and institutionally. The collective will continue to strive towards a museum sector which acknowledges its biases.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Emma MacNicol for her integral role as co-founder of the Museum of Dissent and curator of the *Changeover* exhibition (2018).

Bibliography

- Butler, J. (2009). 'Critique, Dissent, Disciplinary', *Critical Inquiry* 35(4): 773-795.
- Cambridge Dictionary (2019) *Dissent definition*. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dissent> (Accessed 10 December 2018).
- Finlay, L. (2008). *Reflecting on 'Reflective Practice'*. Available at: [https://www.open.ac.uk/opencetl/sites/www.open.ac.uk/opencetl/files/files/ecms/web-content/Finlay-\(2008\)-Reflecting-on-reflective-practice-PBPL-paper-52.pdf](https://www.open.ac.uk/opencetl/sites/www.open.ac.uk/opencetl/files/files/ecms/web-content/Finlay-(2008)-Reflecting-on-reflective-practice-PBPL-paper-52.pdf) (Accessed 8 January 2019).
- Foucault, M. (1980). eds. Gordon, C. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Translated by Gordon, C., Marshall, L., Mepham, J. and Soper, K. Great Britain, The Harvester Press.
- French, J.R.P., JR., and Raven, B. (1959). 'The Bases of Social Power' in Cartwright, D. (eds.) *Studies in Social Power*: 150-197. Michigan, University of Michigan.
- McGall, V. and Gray, C. (2013) 'Museums and the 'New Museology': Theory, Practice and Organisational Change', *Museum Management and Curatorship* 29(1): 1-17
- Hamilton, T. and Sharma, S. (1996). 'Power, Power Relations, and Oppression: A Perspective for balancing the power relations', *Peace Research* 28(1): 21-41.
- Kennedy, L. and Miller, D. (2019). Red Pepper magazine, 232: 65-66
- Larsen, Øjvind (2009). *The Right to Dissent: The Critical Principle in Discourse Ethics and Deliberative Democracy*. Translated by Dees, R. Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press.
- Museum Next (2017). *Shaz Hussain on 'diversity' and changing the language we use in museums*. Available at: <https://www.museumnext.com/2017/07/diversity-and-changing-the-language-we-use-in-museums/> (Accessed 1 January 2018).
- Museum of Dissent (2018A). *Exhibition Guide: Changeover*. Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/397388124/Exhibition-Guide-Museum-of-Dissent-Nov-2018> (Accessed 14 January 2018).
- Museum of Dissent (2018B). *Bad Labels Booklet*. Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/397388127/Bad-Changeover-Exhibition-Labels-Museum-of-Dissent-Nov-2018> (Accessed 14 January 2018).
- Museum of Dissent (2018C). *Good Labels Booklet*. Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/397388125/Good-Labels-Booklet-Museum-of-Dissent-Nov-2018> (Accessed 14 January 2018).

- Museum of Dissent (2018D). Unpublished survey, 'The Museum of Dissent Collective Reflective Survey' on *Survey Monkey*.
- Museum of Liverpool (2019) *About National Museums Liverpool*. Available at: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/about/index.aspx> (Accessed 6 May 2019).
- National Museums of Scotland (2002). *Exhibitions for All*. Available at: https://www.rnib.org.uk/sites/default/files/EXhibitions_for_all_NMScotland.pdf (Accessed 14 January 2018).
- Museums Association (2018). *Conference and Exhibition. Dissent: inspiring hope, embracing change*. Available at: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/conference/02052018-dissent-inspiring-hope-embracing-change> (Accessed 14 January 2018).
- Panther, B., & Swaim, L. (1968). 'An Interview with a Black Panther'. *The North American Review*, 253(4): 27-34.
- Turtle, J. (2019). Email to Lisa Kennedy, 10 January 2019.
- The University of Manchester (2018). *Bodies of Colour: Breaking with stereotypes in the wallpaper collection*. Available at: <http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/currentexhibitions/bodiesofcolour/> (Accessed 3 January 2019).



Challenging the Narrative Through Art

By Madeline Burkhardt

Abstract

History has always been written by the privileged. Even with the shifting narratives and focus on inclusion, the question remains: How can we, as museum professionals, tell a story that does not belong to us? As a white, middle-class female working in the birthplace of Civil Rights, I will explore how empathy can be irreplaceable in tours and how it can be found within your exhibitions. Through these exhibitions I have seen students' eyes open to history in a new way because rather than text, they can see the pain of a human through sculpture or two-dimensional objects. While there needs to be a shift in telling the stories of those whose voices are not heard, we also need to focus on how the majority who work in museums can display empathy to help those with no knowledge of the past have a better understanding.

Keywords

Civil Rights, Visual Art, History, Social Rights, Relevancy

In this paper, I will discuss ways art can help visitors understand empathy in museum, drawing on my experience curating exhibitions in the United States that tackle complex historical issues and challenges through art installations. In the United States, I have visited numerous history museums that merely have text on a wall with no supporting objects or visuals. There is a need for discussing the darker parts of history, which led me to ask: how have narratives influenced the ways viewers have perceived history for decades? How can this perception of history, which lacks depth, be changed through museum narratives? Changing the narrative at museums and institutions is not simply a new trend in the museum world, but it is a necessary movement to more accurately portray history. According to Hellgren, "Empathy is a key variable that creates a culture that positions courage and nonjudgment as the fulcrum to an openly creative and innovative dynamic" (Hellgren, 2015, pg. 50).

A number of museums in the Deep South of America are currently tackling their problematic histories head on by working with artists to create exhibitions that confront these uncomfortable truths by making them visually apparent. I have curated three exhibitions that have made a major impact

on our visitors' perceptions. All three have been more "in your face" than other shows in the area at the time.

Cash Crop by Stephen Hayes

My first foray into these installations was with *Cash Crop* by artist Stephen Hayes. In American history, the term cash crop has been used to describe cotton. Hayes argues that this term represents the slaves that were purchased in order to cultivate cotton. Slavery was a system that made many wealthy at the expense of dehumanizing an entire racial group (Hayes). The main focal point of this exhibition is the fifteen life size figures made from cement and shackled to wood (Figure. 1). Hayes used his friends, family members, and even himself to create these realistic statues. The number fifteen is prominent in the exhibition because it represents the fifteen million individuals who were transported during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The shackles connect the figures to wood that is in the shape of a ship with the Brookes Diagram of a slave ship carved onto the back. The chains are also attached to a shipping palette that is reminiscent of those used at mega-stores, such as Wal-Mart. On top of the palette, the seal of the United States of America is represented. This



Figure. 1
Cash Crop figures by artist Stephen Hayes, 2017, by the Author
These fifteen figures represent the fifteen million transported during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and were created using the artist's family and friends as models.



Figure. 2
Cash Crop sculptures by artist Stephen Hayes, 2017, by the Author
Hayes locked himself in his bedroom to create these sculptures to mimic the feel of work inside of a sweatshop.



Figure. 3
Detail of Fabric of Race tags, 2017, by the Author
On each shirt, there was a handstitched tag that had the name, location, date, or method of a victim of racial violence.



Figure. 4
Detail of Fabric of Race jars, 2017, by the Author
After a lynching, onlookers would take "souvenirs" from the scene and place them in jars as warnings.

icon connects the history of the slave trade to modern day practices of slavery, such as sweatshops. Slavery was born out of the need to create products; thus, we were and still are all slaves to a consumer economy. Usually when this is shown, the figures are spaced out at a distance so visitors can walk between them to hear the rattling of the chains and feel the metal beneath their feet. The Brookes Diagram model is a recurring image throughout the installation. It can be seen on metal, on paper, on a frame, on a wooden quilt, and within a shadowbox installation (Figure. 2). While creating the shadowboxes, Hayes locked himself into the small confines of his room and painstakingly created for two weeks to mimic the feeling of working inside of a sweatshop. Work. Eat. Sleep. Repeat. He gave himself very few breaks, and there is little difference between the boxes (Kress, 2014).

The first moment I realized that art can help change people's perceptions about the past, I was conducting a tour of the exhibition hall to local middle schoolers. One student came to me and stated that she had read about slavery in her textbooks at school and was familiar with the institution, but by putting a face to those affected by it, she realized that slavery was not just text in a history book. These were real people who had families and who were uprooted from their lives. When reading a textbook or hearing a lecture, one can often forget that every historic event affected a real person who is not so different from you and me. Without giving a face to those whose voices have been stifled for so many years, how can you accurately portray their side of history?

Fabric of Race: Racial Violence and Lynching in America by Renee Billingslea

Racial terror lynchings have always been a part of the southern United States' past, but what most do not realize is that these events happened not too long ago and that these were considered social events. In an effort to portray how a society would gather for a lynching, Billingslea used mundane objects to humanize those who were victims and those

who were guilty. Billingslea manipulated old photographs depicting the crowds on bits of fabric, ties, and jars. "Straw hats" adorned a wall and were reminiscent of those worn by white men during that time. These hats had words and phrases taken directly from Billingslea's research on either what was said by men, or the steps they would take in preparation for a lynching. Young boys began participating at an early age. They would fetch rope, prepare the fire, or tie the victim up. While every element of this exhibition was shocking, the main focal point was the center walls. The artist and I decided to paint the walls blood red to allow the artwork to stand out. On the walls, the artist hung shirts to represent victims of racial violence. While there were not nearly enough shirts, there were enough variations in the size and colors to depict the wide range of victims. These were not merely adult men from the 1800s. Many families were lynched as well as women, children, and expectant mothers (Figure. 3). The last *recorded* lynching was in Mobile, Alabama in 1981¹; therefore, the shirts represent this change in time (Gore, 2018). Some shirts appeared to be very old and were different sizes. This show had more of an emotional impact than the others I curated, and I believe it is because these items caused the visitor to realize that these were real people with families. This is the only exhibition I have curated that has caused visitors to be filled with rage and leave the room or to burst into tears. Many visitors had to leave the room to gather themselves and then reenter after a few moments alone. It was shocking. It was in your face. It was needed. It is crucial that human rights museums do not only tell stories of triumph, but that they also recount the struggles and the histories of those who gave their lives to achieve the rights we have now. The story of civil rights in America does not begin in the 1950s. We must look at all our history to understand why the Civil Rights Movement happened and why the fight continues to this day (Billingslea).

Historically, after a lynching occurred, onlookers would take "souvenirs" such as bits of the rope, coal, ash, or

¹ The word recorded is stressed because many lynchings were not documented.



Figure. 5
Soiled, 2017, photo by the Author
V.L. Cox found this Klan robe that has been dated from the Red Summer of 1919 and that is stained with blood along the back.

even body parts and place them in jars in their store windows as a warning (Figure. 4). To help humanize this grotesque history, Billingslea brought her family into her work. She used her and her husband's rings, her daughter's hair, and photos of her husband in the installation. Billingslea chose to use zoomed in photographs of various body parts on her husband to mirror what would have been seen in these jars. She then used hair from her daughter in a quilt to weave her family into the history of lynching. Her family would have been targeted during that time because of their racial backgrounds. By connecting physical parts of her family to this story, Billingslea is stating that this horrific history would have affected her family had they been alive during this time. Again, this causes the viewer to realize that these stories represent real people who had loved ones.

Another key factor that made this exhibition impactful was the visitor's ability to physically engage with the installation. Billingslea wanted visitors to run the cloth of the shirts in between their fingers. By touching the fabric, the viewers are directly connecting themselves to that history and are instantly able to place themselves in that moment. Pick up the handstitched tags. Trace your fingers over the names of those killed. Speak their names. Know their names. For every one name known, four are left unknown. One of the most profound moments I witnessed during this exhibition period was watching a woman pin the name of her relative onto a shirt, who had been a victim of lynching. She was given the chance by the artist at the opening of the exhibition to pick a shirt and add his name and death year. Seeing the emotional impact this show had on our visitors made me realize that we need to have these conversations take place in museums. Wounds do not heal if we avoid them; we must treat them by recognizing what caused them and how we can avoid opening them in the future (Billingslea).

Break Glass: A Conversation to End Hate by V.L. Cox

In April of 2018, I helped bring V.L.'s exhibition to life in the Deep South. Her show sparks a conversation on

how words of the Bible and government documents are twisted and used by various hate groups to further their own agendas. In this body of work, there are doors that represent opportunities allowed for certain groups, an automatic assault rifle made out of human bone, an American flag made out of Bible pages formed into tea bags, and an assortment of Ku Klux Klan memorabilia. The Klan is still prevalent in America, and even holds summer camps for children in Arkansas. This organization uses the Bible and other documents to promote white, Christian, male supremacy. However, these men (and sometimes women) stay hidden behind hoods and robes. The mere image of a Klan robe strikes fear into the hearts of many Americans, but what do we fear? Is it the silhouette of the evil or hate filled person behind the mask? Klansmen hold public office, are trained doctors, and educate our youth. These men and women are able to blend into our society seamlessly because of their masks. In the past, one could tell a Klansperson by their shoes. With fashion readily available in today's society, you may only be able to spot a Klansman by his or her questionable social media posts. While not as openly violent as they were in the past, they are still involved in creating laws in America, which can be just as dangerous. Many think the Klan has faded away or is an organization reserved for the rural, southern parts of the United States. The reality is that they are everywhere. Cox brings awareness to this through her art. One stark example is *Soiled*, which is a Klan robe from the "Red Summer" of 1919 paired with an antique "White Rit: Color Remover" sign, rope, and an old "Puritan Cleaner" can (Figure. 5). This robe has human blood stained down its back. You can see how a man wiped his hands in an effort to clean them of the blood down the back of his thighs. You can also make out the impression of a bloodied rope. This ghastly figure is a reminder that these men are capable of killing in order to further their own agenda. Visitors who have had friends or family members harassed or killed by the Klan are encouraged to touch the robe and gain their power back. There is no man behind this hood. It is simply an icon for evil and we must remember that those who



Figure. 6
Break Glass title piece, 2017, photo by the Author
In order to better understand one another, V.L. Cox believes we should simply talk face-to-face with one another.

hide behind cloth are cowards. Cox humanizes this evil icon and encourages us to remember that Klan members are not strangers. They are men who have families, and some may be right under our noses (Cox).

The exhibition is named after a piece entitled *It's Time We Start Over and Talk About Hate* (Figure. 6). This piece is similar to a glass case used to hold a fireman's ax or fire extinguisher. Instead of one of those items being in the case, there is a pair of cans hanging from a string – just like the kind you would use to play telephone as a child. Cox believes that in order to overcome hate, we must sit down and talk to one another. Not by text, email, or a phone call, but simple face-to-face interaction. Even though this is the piece the exhibition is named for, the focal point of this show is the “End Hate” doors (Figure. 7). Eight in total, they depict

the barriers to opportunities faced by groups. For example, I am only allowed to enter through the “white” and “women” only door. Some may be only allowed to enter the “homeless,” “veterans,” or “immigrant” only door. At the end of the row of doors, there is one titled “human beings” and it is chained up. This is a powerful statement that implies that we cannot be on an equal playing field. We must all go through our respective doors until someone is able to find the key to this door (Rinchetti, 2018).

One day, a fourth-grade girl did find the key. In excitement, she ran up to me and stated, “I know where the key to the door is.” Being the curator, I knew there was no key to this door, but I did not want to disappoint her, so I played along. “Oh, really? Where is the key?” The girl said, “The key is hanging by the cans that say ‘in case of emergency, break

glass.' The key is to talk to others. That is how we can open up the door to everyone being considered a human being." With that, she walked away. Sometimes, having a young, innocent student come in to view these exhibitions can bring clarity to the work that not even the curator or the artist realizes is there. Her answer was so pure and so simple. It tied the entire exhibition together without overcomplicating the other works. If others could look at situations and history as this girl did, we might be better able to empathise with those who do not look like us, worship like us, or have the same views as us.

Conclusion

Through creating visual ties to history, artists are able to transport visitors into the shoes of another. Art can remind viewers that history is not some general idea and the victims or heroes are not unattainable figures. These

people had families, friends, and lives apart from their circumstances. Sometimes, their stories can get lost in the text that mainly covers a particular moment in their life. A person's life should not be defined by one moment, and history should not be defined by the recollection of one racial group and class. By including everyone's story, we are able to provide a more accurate depiction of history. With this comes a shift in thought and a way this information is presented. In order to change the most steadfast stories and views, we must force those in power to invoke change to empathise and feel. Without feeling, history remains a cold subject that is in danger of being repeated.

Acknowledgement

First, I would like to thank V.L. Cox for encouraging me to keep talking about her work and other works I find important. Without her support,



Figure. 6
End Hate Doors, 2017, photo by the Author
Cox created these doors to symbolise how opportunities are only available to some.

I would not have much of a topic! I would also like to thank Renee Billingslea and Stephen Hayes for their patience with me and for accepting my proposal of coming to display their work in Montgomery, Alabama. My colleagues Donna Michelle Beisel and Keith Worthington have been supportive of my wild ideas and always push me to do more. Thank you to my director, Dr. Felicia A. Bell for allowing me to speak on these exhibitions. To Dr. Angela Stienne, thank you for always listening to my rants and sending words of encouragement from “across the pond.” Finally, thank you to my parents for knowing that I can do anything I set my mind to and for instilling a love of museums at an early age.

Bibliography

- Billingslea, R. *Renee Billingslea Art*. Available at: <http://www.reneebillingslea.com/> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Cox, V. L. *V.L. Cox Art*. Available at: <https://www.vlcox.com/> (Accessed 13 January 2019).
- Gore, L. (2018). ‘Last lynching in America’ shocked Mobile in 1981, bankrupted the KKK, 26 April. Available at: https://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2018/04/last_lynching_in_america_shock.html (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Hayes, S. *Stephen Hayes Creations*. Available at: <http://www.stephenhayescreations.com/> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Hellgren, R. K. (2015). *Designing for Museum Relevancy: Improving Innovation and Adaptability in Museum Management with Design Thinking*. Available at: https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send_file?accession=kent1429521944&disposition=inline (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Kress, N. (2014). *Cash Crop - Stephen Hayes at the African American Museum, 9 October*. Available at: <https://www.theartblog.org/2014/10/cash-crop-stephen-hayes-at-the-african-american-museum/> (Accessed 19 January 2019).
- Rinchetti, S. (2018). *Breaking Glass: V.L. Cox Creates Art to End Hate, 29 March*. Available at: <http://www.gayrva.com/arts-culture/breaking-glass-vl-cox-creates-art-to-end-hate/> (Accessed 15 January 2019).



Visual Submission: A Place for All? Cultural Accessibility at Stake: an Italian Example

By Valeria Florenzano

The museum in my picture is an archaeological site. The Roman amphitheatre and annexed Museum of Castelleone di Suasa is managed by the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage. However, due to lack of funds it is partially closed to the public...

The same site was chosen by epigraphist and writer Stefano Conti as a setting for the shooting of a trailer for his book *Io sono l'Imperatore*, a historical novel published in 2017.

By endorsing the writer, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage seeks to promote a site, which is otherwise overlooked. Still, this very same organisation does not have the power to keep it open and available to the communities it belongs to. Should their position be praised or condemned? Is it enough to access our cultural heritage only part of the time? The deeper message of this picture seems to contrast with such an idyllic and peaceful view.



Exhibition Review: No Offence? – LGBTQ+ Histories at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

By Abbey L. R. Ellis

From 25 September to 2 December 2018, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford was the first institution to play host to a British Museum touring exhibition aimed at exploring the underrepresented histories of the LGBTQ+ community. The title *No Offence*, given to the exhibition by the Ashmolean, alludes to its aim of commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act, which partially decriminalised homosexuality in the United Kingdom.

The exhibition, based on Professor Richard Parkinson's 2009 book *A Little Gay History*, showcased objects from British Museum collections that in the nineteenth century, were locked away in a secret space within the museum. Until the 1950s, visitors were required to sign a register to access the "shocking" material. This touring exhibition is the first time that many of these objects have been available for public viewing. The objects on display covered an impressive breadth, both in terms of time and culture, with artefacts from ancient Greece and Rome sharing cases with Native American, Japanese, and Maori pieces. This review will first consider two of the exhibition's standout objects, evaluating the success of their display, followed by an exploration of some of the exhibition's underlying themes, including colonialism and social class.

No Offence occupied just one third of the Ashmolean's temporary display space in Gallery 8, but despite the small space - and in some cases, equally diminutive objects - the exhibition succeeded in conveying big, wide-reaching ideas. The display began with what curator Matthew Winterbottom described as the most important object within the exhibition, a miniature sculpture from Ain Sakhri, dating from 9000BC.

The figurine represents a pair of entwined bodies, made from a calcite stone, found near Bethlehem in Palestine. This is thought to be the earliest extant image of a copulating couple. Traditionally, the pair is interpreted as a man and a woman (see Boyd and Cook 1993, 401), although the *No Offence* exhibition rightly problematises this heteronormative reading of the object. There is nothing explicit within the figurine to suggest that the pairing is of a male and a female, the genders of the figures are ambiguous. The associated label encourages us to ask the question "Why should we assume that they *must* be heterosexual?" The display of the Ain Sakhri figurine is given a new modern relevance through being displayed in the same case as LGBTQ+ campaign badges from the 1980s and 1990s. This juxtaposition of ancient and modern communicates how these prejudices do not only impact the interpretation of historic objects but also the treatment of members of the LGBTQ+ community today.

Another of the exhibition's standout objects was unique to the Ashmolean's display. After its run in Oxford, the exhibition visits Nottingham, Bolton, and Norwich, but due to its fragility, the Winter Count was only exhibited at the Ashmolean. The Winter Count is a visual historical record produced by the Sioux people of North America, recording events between the years 1785/6 and 1901/2. The sequence of 119 images which make up the calendar were drawn on a large piece of muslin. Among the representations is an image showing the suicide of a *winkte*, meaning 'wants to be a woman'. Individuals identifying as *winkte* were males who assumed social roles and professions usually ascribed to females (Parkinson 2009, 1891). The Winter Count was



included within the exhibition with the aim of making the point that although gender diversity is nothing new, it has not been addressed in museums until relatively recently. This aim is certainly achieved but perhaps more could have been made of the circumstances in which the transgender individual is represented in the Winter Count: the *winkte* is shown in the act of hanging themselves. Given the late nineteenth / early twentieth century date of the object, the viewer cannot help but wonder whether this act of suicide was related to the arrival of European colonialists in North America. Colonialism is thought to have had a devastating impact on gender non-binary individuals from societies like that of the Sioux, who had previously esteemed these members of their communities. The *winkte* in Lakota culture were revered as especially close to the spirits due to their difference from so-called 'average individuals' (Williams 1992, 32).

The exhibition does explicitly acknowledge the colonial impact on indigenous societies in other areas. For

example, in the description of the Bhupen Khakhar intaglio print entitled *In the River Jamuna*, which features two men in the foreground of the scene making love, the display makes reference to the 1861 British colonial laws which made homosexuality in India a criminal offence. These laws remained in place throughout Khakhar's lifetime and the exhibition label acknowledges his courage when expressing same-sex relationships through his work in the 1980s.

However, returning to the Winter Count, presenting narratives of indigenous queer acceptance and the impact of colonialism is far from clear-cut. Scholars have now begun to argue for a reappraisal of the modern celebration of indigenous transgender acceptance. The portrayal of indigenous societies as being open-minded is perceived as suppressing the voices of individuals within these communities who face violence and discrimination today (Chrisholm 2018, 32). Further complicating the narrative is the fact that some Native Americans now perceive European colonialism as the source

100

of ‘gayness’ within indigenous communities (Gilley 2006, 61). The *No Offence* curators had to navigate similar contentious interpretations with their Oceanic objects, including an eighteenth-century Maori treasure box, which is decorated with a central frontal face performing oral sex on both male and female genitalia. Today, the deeply Christian attitudes of the places from which these objects come cause the rejection of queer interpretations of their cultural heritage, making the appropriate presentation of queer narratives a very complex task for the curators of the *No Offence* exhibition and beyond.

While *No Offence* aimed at celebrating diversity, the exhibition’s objects cannot be considered to be truly diverse. There was overwhelming focus on homosexual male love throughout the displays, with few depictions of lesbian activity. However, this reflects a bias in the extant evidence towards male homosexuality and not a failure on the part of the museum. One of the few images of lesbian sex displayed within the exhibition, a first century AD oil lamp from Roman Turkey which shows two women engaged in oral sex, is also very difficult to interpret. It cannot be known whether this image was an expression of genuine female same-sex desire or pornographic titillation for the male gaze (Parkinson 2009, 52). Furthermore, the exhibition cannot be thought of as truly inclusive in terms of geography. Africa was very poorly represented and nothing from China was present. However, curators giving tours of the exhibition were well aware of this fact and assured attendees that active collecting policies now aim to bring more balance to the discussion of this material.

In addition to this, many of the displays addressed class privilege, such as that enjoyed by Chevalier D’Éon, who, thanks to their noble birth, lived as both a man and a woman in eighteenth century France. D’Éon was represented in the exhibition in the form of a full-length portrait where they were shown split down the middle, half dressed as a man, half as a woman. D’Éon was represented in many such portraits and caricatures: they were depicted entirely without satire or malice even when presenting as a woman. D’Éon’s life was not without discrimination: an etching in the *No Offence* exhibition

illustrates how they were subjected to an inquiry to determine their gender and an autopsy to resolve the matter after their death. Nevertheless, D’Éon’s life shows how one could subvert gender norms even in this era, should one have sufficient wealth and social status. The label for the *Men and Classical World* case, featuring the Ashmolean’s copy of the ‘Warren Cup’, also includes an oblique reference to class, stating that ‘sexual behaviour between males was accepted *within certain boundaries*.’ This appropriately draws attention to the fact that we lack evidence for the lives of queer individuals in the lower social classes and that for them, life could have been very different.

Finally, the approach to selecting objects for inclusion within the *No Offence* exhibition seems to have been somewhat scattergun. Any object with an LGBTQ+ connection, whether that be a queer artist, subject, and theme of any kind, was deemed fit to feature. The resulting effect was that the long-lived and global nature of LGBTQ+ histories was beyond doubt, but the lack of structure and the absence of a strong story or narrative let the exhibition down. Nevertheless, this exhibition forms an important starting point for including more queer histories within museums. The legacy of *No Offence* will live on at the Ashmolean through the *Out in Oxford* trails set up across the city’s museums, exploring the history of the LGBTQ+ community across the University’s collections. The challenge will be to encourage other museums to follow suit, incorporating these stories within permanent displays without succumbing to sensationalism.

Bibliography

- Boyd, B. and Cook, J. (1993). ‘A Reconsideration of the “Ain Sakhri” Figurine.’ *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 59: 399-405.
- Chisholm, J. (2018). ‘Muxe, Two-Spirits, and the Myth of Indigenous Transgender Acceptance.’ *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* 11.1: 21-35.
- Gilley, B. J. (2006). *Becoming Two-Spirit: Gay Identity and Social Acceptance in Indian Country*. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press.
- Parkinson, R. B. (2009). *A Little Gay History. Desire and Diversity Across the World*. London, British Museum Press.
- Williams, W. L. (1992). *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*. Boston, Beacon Press.



Dr Matthew Winterbottom, curator of the exhibition, and Prof Richard Parkinson, author of the book *A Little Gay History* on which *No Offence* was based, stand amongst the exhibition displays.
© Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford



Visitors studying the *No Offence* exhibition, located in Gallery 8 of the Ashmolean Museum alongside the *Antinous: Boy Made God* exhibition, which can be seen in the background. The Winter Count pictorial calendar is displayed on the red dividing wall.
© Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford

Museums networks in isolated territories: the case of Aysén

Museums Network in Aysén Region, Chilean Patagonia

By Anamaría Rojas Múnera & Kémel Sade Martínez

Abstract

This paper shows the process behind the creation of Aysén Museums Network (*Red de Museos Aysén*), aimed at building partnerships with museums practitioners and consolidating a network of information based on existent collections. An overview on museums partnerships and on the development of Aysén museums and particular collections is provided, including the challenges faced due to geographical isolation. A museological study was developed and the traditional definition of museums by ICOM is contrasted with Aysén museums. At the same time, a participatory registry of archaeological, paleontological and historical collections is made in local museums and in various particular collectors. In addition, meetings and trainings have taken place among local museum practitioners. The social encounters between individuals and the flow of information enables the functioning of a network based on mutual trust, which is a new stage in the history of Aysén museums and collections. In this Region, collaborations will support them in their missions for integrating heritage, community and territory.

Keywords

Collaboration, Museums Collections (research), Museum Studies

Introduction: the need for museums partnerships

Collaborations and partnerships between museums are situated in museum studies back in the 1960s and 1980s, when the discipline witnessed a re-draft of the traditional museum concept and a re-examination of new commitments for museums. Indeed, in Latin America the need for integration can be traced back in the different recommendations promoted by the Roundtable of Santiago in 1972.¹ Specifically, it resolved that museums should focus and promote an awareness on the problems concerning rural and urban areas, as well to participate in the agendas of other bodies responsible for scientific and technological development. The Roundtable introduced the concept of the integrated museum, which is

understood it as an active institution, which engages, commits and participates in all aspects of the life of its communities (Mostny 1972, 1973; Davis 2011), sustaining as well their local culture, environment and local economies (Bize & Weil 2018).

Overall, in this new image of museums, such institutions are shaped by the needs and projections of its three main components: communities, heritage and territory (Davis 2007). As museums are linked to their surrounding realities, they should seek for the establishment of relationships through the transformation of their core ideals. As an adaptive medium (Parry & Sawyer, 2005) the integrated museum substitutes the traditional pillars of neutrality, objectivity and distance,

¹ The Roundtable of Santiago de Chile was a meeting convened by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Santiago de Chile. It reaffirmed in a Declaration, recommendations and guidelines on museums as social tools for development, suggesting the need of orientating their practices towards the issues faced by communities, with a strong Latin American focus. The concept of the integrated museum articulated its main conclusions, asking for participation in their communities' growth. A complete analysis on the Declaration was made by Cristóbal Bize and Karin Weil (2018) as part of EULAC Museums project, and can be found at: <https://eulacmuseums.net/index.php/bibliography/details/1/93>

by calling for diversity and encouraging mutually nurturing partnerships (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007).

Hence, museums networks enable us to trace the interconnectedness between museums and their communities. They are *collectives* made up of individuals which participate in all stages of their museums life (Camarena & Morales, 2016). Networks support integrated museums and their people in the defence of their culture by promoting the creation, conservation and management of such institutions by their own communities. In this model, a network operates through an organisation scheme where people, rather than institutions, are represented, and where horizontal collaboration occurs through museums practice (e.g. education, exhibitions, dissemination, among others), strengthening communities' identity, autonomy and auto-determination.

In such kind of organisations, partnership results from an awareness of its immediate context. Networks enable the articulation and participation of museums in decision-making processes and the circulation of ideas, professionals, cultural goods and technology (Tanackovic & Badurina, 2009; Duff, et al., 2013; Jung & Love, 2017). Working as a network entity allows museums to serve communities better, to jointly work towards the preservation of heritage and to achieve the budgetary, social and ecological development that could not be achieved acting alone (Azor, 2011; Estévez González, 2006). It especially applies for small and medium scale museums that are challenged to overcome social and financial difficulties while facing insufficient economic and human capital for innovation (Li & Ghirardi, 2018).

Some controversies occurred may point out some disadvantages of museums networks. Estévez (2006) states

that the consolidation of museum networks has been confused with the creation of 'declarations of intent', that have little to do with the real dynamic of museums in convergence. Risks also may come from the imposition of standardised collections management systems, that in order to promote common strategies and solve cataloguing needs, might work against the real capacity of some museums to sustain its implementation. On the other hand, a negative aspect envisaged may be the standardisation of an agenda, infrastructure and exhibition elements as a mean to improve their public offer, without considering the particularities of each museum member and community (such as traditional design, the use of local materials, the practice of local exhibition cultures).

However, to the scope of this paper, some experiences of museums associations in Chile exemplify that the various relations that occur inside them do have an impact in their members, surrounding communities and territory.² Overall, the most noteworthy features of such networks are the opportunities they offer as platforms for social encounters. The professional and institutional support provided among their members and participants, endorse individuals and highlights local struggles to heritage preservation. Moreover, the capacity to attract funds for their management, training, and exhibition development, design and planning. The strong articulation processes that have emerged from them consolidate strong bodies that are active in the Chilean museum context, serving as a voice to make the traditional visible and distinguishable at a local, national and international levels.

History, development and challenges of Aysén Museums

Aysén is the third biggest Chilean region, and one of

² Two case studies are of interest of this article: The Network of Museums of Magellan Region and the Network of Museums of Los Ríos Region. The former, known as the Red MUMA, is the example of a legally established organisation, coordinated by the State-managed Regional Museum of Magellan. Regarding their functioning model, plenary sessions occur twice a year, where 15 museum practitioners participates, representing 10 museums under various administrations. In this model the figure of the Regional Museum of Magellan prevails as a condition of its proper sustainability, acting as a 'mentor' to fellow museums members of the association: <http://www.redmuma.cl/650/w3-propertyvalue-93388.html>. On the other hand, the Network of Museums of Los Ríos Region is coordinated by the Austral University of Chile in its Isla Teja Campus (Valdivia). It is, a voluntary organisation that includes 23 museums and cultural institutions. The fact that it is presided by a University has oriented the network's actions towards the construction on new knowledge on museums discipline. The University participates in the project EULAC Museums and Community, a consortium of academics, museum professionals and policy makers from Latin American, Caribbean and European countries. Museums from the Network of Los Ríos have participated in such studies and meetings: <http://www.museosregiondelosrios.cl/index.php/sobre-nosotros>

the Southernmost in the American continent, with a total land area of 110.000 km². The region has a complex topography: a network of channels, islands, archipelagos and national parks, in a territory of different microclimates, from steppes to hyper-humid evergreen forests. Early inhabitants date from at least 12.600 years BP, being inland pedestrians hunters, and in the late 5.000 years, canoeists in insular environments (Bate 2016). Archaeological evidence from inland hunters is well represented by rock art (naturalist scenes and hand prints), lithic material as scrappers, arrowheads, *boleadoras* balls, among others. On the other hand, archaeological evidence from the coast hunters is represented by shell middens, axes and human burials in caves (Sade 2008).

Europeans and Chileans began to study this territory almost 400 years ago, in a journey that took centuries amidst the power of Aysén and Southern Chile's nature. At the end of the 19th century, the majority of indigenous population had disappeared due to many causes, primarily genocide, diseases, and their assimilation of other cultures, among others (Calderón 2015). However, it is until the beginning of the 1900s that the modern human began to populate the region we know today. Those 'pioneers' and 'settlers' came due to the increasing interests in livestock farming, and land concessions given by the Chilean state to economic groups and any settler that could demonstrate progress in 'previously inhabited lands'. The Region, then, began to consolidate a sense of regional identity after its formal creation under Chilean State mandate in 1927. Over the course of this century research on the nature and societies of this land is still ongoing, turning Aysén Region into the least populated region of the world. As the recent history of Aysén is short, so has been the history of its museums, as well as their partnerships and reflections on their practices. In fact, the history of local museums is different from the ones experienced in the rest of Chile and Latin America, where museums emerged during the 19th

century, following independence movements from Europe, promoting unity and exploring symbolic relations in the new born Latin-American nations (Mostny 1972).³

In contrast, the mid-20th century called upon the creation of local history museums in this Region. Until today, they store and display collections donated by the community and objects on loan, which can be categorised as follows: those under protection of the Chilean Law 17,288 on National Monuments (archaeological and paleontological items); those of value to some communities (ethnographic, local history collections) and objects of aesthetic value (decorative arts). Since the 1960s' until now, 22 small and medium scale museums have been created (Figure. 1). The first initiative dates back to 1963, when the Servants of Mary boosted a collection of social and natural history at the secondary school San Felipe Benicio at Coyhaique. Thereafter, such collections moved to municipal deposits (Sade & Quezada, 2016). The existence of those collections and the need of their research and dissemination through a museum, was the driving force for the creation, 55 years later, of the Regional Museum of Aysén, the only state-managed big scale museum in the Region (Rosas, 2018).

Overall, the narratives conveyed by museums are the recent history of human settlement, promoting an exaltation of pioneers' courage to populate such an extreme land. That is the case of the *Museo del Mate* (Figure. 2), which was created in 2002 to highlight stories of the establishment of the first settlers from El Blanco village, their everyday life and the activities and beliefs that consolidate their identity.

As museums grew, so did collectionism. For many years, Aysén inhabitants collected important archaeological materials. This practice started in Aysén Region at the early 20th century, during the arrival of the first settlers for agro-livestock production. However, a natural factor stopped largely collectionism as a practice: the eruption of the Hudson

³ The end of the 19th century saw the creation of the first Chilean museums in Santiago de Chile: the Natural History Museum (1830), followed 50 years later by the Museum of Fine Arts. Afterwards, the Mineralogical Museum is created in 1887 in La Serena and the Maggiorino Borgatello Museum founded in 1893 by Salesian missionaries in Punta Arenas, located in the Southern-most Chilean region, Magallanes (Mostny 1972).



Figure. 1
Map of the museums located in Aysén Region, Chile

Volcano in 1970, 1971 and 1991, which covered with ash a large portion of the regional area where archaeological remains were more abundant, limiting access and human alteration to those sites (Sade *et al.*, 2019).

Some challenges followed the development of museums and particular collections. In general, questionable practices on collections management, added to the lack of accessioning procedures and inventories have had a significant impact on the damage and loss of context - both of collections protected by law or with value to some communities. The challenges regarding particular collections are also related to an historical lack of heritage institutions in the territory, that could provide professional counselling and control over

such material. On the other hand, in the case of museums, the social support has decreased, making people reluctant to donate collections to those institutions or asking museums to return items donated in past years.

In addition, several risks are faced by particular collections. The Hudson's first eruption of 1970 coincided with the enactment of the Law 17,288 on National Monuments, indicating the Chilean State ownership of archaeological and paleontological heritage. This situation served the role of dissuasive measure to collectionism. However, the enactment of the law did not take into account the context of Aysén's particular collections. For instance, an attempt of confiscation was made by the Brigade of Environmental Crimes of the



Figure. 2

Collections of community value were donated by inhabitants of El Blanco village to the Museo del Mate, displaying the memories of its first settlers through everyday life objects. Aysén Museums Network archive.

Investigation Police of Chile to a descendant of first settlers, whose collections were found before the promulgation of the law in the 70s.⁴ This induced a widespread fear among first settlers' descendants, who hide or throw away archaeological collections in order to avoid State penalties. Despite the current existence of the law, the absence of the National Monuments Council has stymied its implementation.

In addition to those challenges, discussions and reflections on museum practices have been sparse in Aysén. However, for a few years now some publications have been addressing different subjects relevant to the context, such as the need of a common framework for collections research (Sade & Pérez-Barría 2012), the potential and history of the regional museum (Morales 2015; Rosas 2018), the use of museum spaces and heritage collections (Sade & Quezada 2016; Quezada, *et al.*, 2017) including investigations on

Aysén museums' collections and narratives (Marín 2006; Rojas & Sade 2017; Sáenz 2018; Castañeda 2018) and on the potential of a museums network (Rojas 2017). Moreover, some museum practitioners have been participating through descriptive reviews that highlight the origins, characteristics and activities of their museums (Aguilar 2018; Vega 2018; Palominos, *et al.*, 2018).

Towards Aysén Museums Network

The first attempts to address such common problems regarding Aysén museums and general collections, began in 2012. A project was aimed at researching archaeological and paleontological collections protected by law, kept at five municipal museums from the commune of Coyhaique (one of the ten administrative subdivisions existing in Aysén Region) (Sade & Pérez-Barría 2012). Although it was not carried

⁴ The case appeared in the local news at: <http://www.eldivisadero.cl/noticia-43867>

out at that moment, the project was refined, as to operate in a regional level, giving rise to 'Aysén Museums Network project: museological research and collections registration' (*Red de Museos Aysén: investigación museológica y diagnóstico de colecciones*).

The initiative is run by the Austral University of Chile (Campus Patagonia) in partnership with the Regional Museum of Aysén, funded by the Regional Government of Aysén's Fund for Innovation and Competitiveness (FIC). The Campus Patagonia is the oldest university in the Region, born in 1993 as an autonomous institution called Trapananda Centre. The university is the only one in Chile with a Directorate of Museology in its Valdivia city Campus, running three museums. It coordinates the Network of Museums of Los Ríos Region and now the museums network in Aysén Region. On the other hand, the Regional Museum of Aysén is the only big scale, state-managed museum in Aysén Region. In general, the project is aimed at developing and implementing a research methodology to: investigate collections protected by law 17,288, together with those of community value existing in museums and particular collections; and to characterise local museums. In addition to that, the project considers practical workshops and seminars to promote capacity building in practitioners; and developing the methodological guidelines of the network operation and functioning.

Methodology

In order to define the museums and collectors that were going to participate in the research, the project team contacted key informants such as the Responsibles of Culture from Aysén's municipalities, social organisations, community leaders and local researchers. They provided information on existing and upcoming museums, as well as on collectors. Once the universe is selected, a timetable is agreed in a three-

year period (2018-2020) to proceed with the museological study and registration of collections.

A museological study was designed to characterise Aysén museums. Museums' managers were interviewed, using this form as a route. In it, museum information is collected according to six units of analysis: administration, collections, infrastructure, functioning, human resources and relationships.⁵

As part of this form, the team contrasted the definition of museums by ICOM with the reality of local museums. Accordingly, a museum is a

Non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment (ICOM 2007).

The parameters and key elements of this definition were analysed using the methodology undertaken by the Network of Museums and Cultural Centres of Los Ríos Region (Weil, *et al.*, 2017).⁶ It took into account the reiterative qualities of local museums, their transformations and practices, which called upon a more integrative and current definition that could match with the regional context. It resulted in a definition of museums for Aysén Region, shown below.

For researching local collections, the team developed a classification method, which is applied *in situ* through an online form associated with a database (Figure. 3). Forms are applied to each museum or particular collector's facilities, according to the type of collections held: those i) protected by law, ii) and those of community value. A complete

⁵ Those units were selected after a literature review and an analysis of the existing researches particularly from the Network of Museums of Los Ríos Region (<http://bit.ly/2YE2MNZ>), and then from the Chilean Museums Register (<http://bit.ly/2VCA8v7>).

⁶ The 'Characterisation of the Network of Museums of Los Ríos Region and a selection of case studies' can be accessed at: <https://eulacmuseums.net/index.php/resources/database/bibliography/details/1/92>



Figure 3
Participatory registry and documentation at Museo del Valle de la Luna, Ñirehuao (Aysén Region, Chile). Aysén Museums Network project archive.

photographic registry of collections protected by law was developed (Figure. 4), including a representative sample of historical objects (between 50-100 objects) to consolidate a regional online catalogue. This is an ongoing stage to be published.

The collections registry process is a participatory documentation, which is developed together with local museum practitioners. Its purpose is to transfer technical knowledge for future registry processes, while promoting the autonomy of each leader and community in rescuing the collective memory behind their heritage. Such activities with museums' practitioners also involved co-creating articles and reviews on their institutions, to be published in *Revista de Aysenología*.⁷

In addition to that, the project promotes capacity building in local museum practitioners through meetings,

practical workshops and flexible seminars. They are developed with the support of partner institutions, with the purpose of improving museum practices in Aysén and establishing professional relations between practitioners who had not spoken to each other in the past, coming from more remote areas of Aysén.

Results: Characterisation of Aysén Museums

From the 1960s to the late 1990s the earliest four museums were founded, located in the cities of Coyhaique, Cochrane, Chile Chico and Villa O'Higgins. Then, the first decade of the 21st century, saw the rise of nine museums, including the only five offering library facilities as well as a local radio station within their infrastructure. From 2010 until now, ten museums were created, including the Regional Museum of Aysén (2018), and some others have undertaken

⁷ Articles written by museum practitioners from the towns of Ñirehuao, Villa Ortega, Coyhaique and Puerto Río Tranquilo can be found in the sixth issue of the open-access journal *Revista de Aysenología*, published by the Regional Museum of Aysén: <https://www.aysenologia.cl/6-abril-2019>



Figure. 4
Photographs were taken during the collections register process. On the top row, the figure shows archaeological and paleontological collections protected by law 17,288. In the middle row, collections from the thematic football- museum Bajo Marquesina and the site museum at Puerto Cristal. In the last row, historical collections from the museums of Balmaceda and Villa O'Higgins. Aysén Museums Network project archive.

different redevelopment process.

Until this year, 22 museums are functioning in Aysén Region. They are divided into five categories: site museums that preserve and interpret *in situ* locations of historical importance (n=2); historical museums with ethnographic focus, exhibiting the indigenous heritage along with the recent cultural and natural history of Aysén (n=12); small scale exhibitions inside public offices (n=3); school museum (n=1) and thematic museums, displaying topics such as mining, sports (football), nature conservation (n=4). Almost half of such museums keep collections protected by law (n=10).

Regarding their administration, over half of the museums depend on Municipalities (n=13), the Regional Museum of Aysén, originated by a State mandate, depends on the Chilean Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage (*Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio*) (n=1). Other museums have been developed by private groups and individuals (n=7) and as well as by the Armed Forces (Carabineros de Chile) (n=1). The majority of museums are open to the general public for visits year-round, except for those that are subject to managers' availability (n=5) and the only one that is currently closed (n=1).

Museum staff, both men and women, participate actively in their town's dynamics as leaders, serving the role of mediators between municipalities and community. On the other hand, there is a significant amount of practitioners (n=11) that hold Basic and High School education, followed by individuals who hold university degrees (n=9). There is just one manager (director) with a Postgraduate degree (n=1), and one with military background (n=1).

Revising and contrasting the traditional definition of museums by ICOM with Aysén museums reality, shows that such institutions do not meet the criteria of what a museum should be. Especially when it comes to conservation, permanence and research. In just one institution (the Regional

Museum of Aysén) such activities take place since 2018.

Under these circumstances, a current definitions of museums for Aysén Region was proposed, bearing in mind their history, diversity and relationships: Museums are community experiences of integration, serving as social organisation platforms. They are mediators between the surrounding and external actors (such as the State or the private enterprise), facilitating communication and information flow. Museums



Figure. 5
Symbolic wool network for the participatory creation of the Aysén museums Manifesto. Aysén Museums Network project archive.

In 2018 two meetings took place under the name of Museums without Gates (*Museos Sin Tranqueras*), developed in partnership with the Red Cultura national programme of the Chilean Ministry of the Cultures, Arts and Heritage.⁸ Those activities were intended for museum practitioners, as well as cultural institutions representatives. Over 24 individuals attended, including government officials and local artists. Figure. 5 displays the development of team building activities, for the construction of the First Declaration for Collaborative Work between Aysén Museums. It sums up the perceptions on the meaning and responsibilities of local museums as part of a network:

- To support local museums to overcome infrastructure problems, by working collaboratively with their sponsors and administrators.
- To organise and participate in the network meetings,

⁸ The activity appeared in the local press <https://eldivisadero.cl/noticia-50350> and on the website of the Chilean Museums Register <http://www.registromuseoschile.cl/663/w3-article-89866.html>

seminars and practical workshops on museum studies and practice.

- To recognise local artisans, musicians, craftsmen through museums displays and work.
- To strengthen communication between museum workers.
- To develop a common vision of local museums management.
- To understand the relation between museums and communities as fundamental for social development in Aysén.
- To develop a vision on the management of museums, to improve decision-making processes on our priorities, values and practices as a sector.
- To turn into museum practice leaders in Patagonia, Chile and the world.

That meeting enabled participants, as well as the team project, to understand that collaboration within Aysén museums sector, and particular collectors permit the transformation of heritage management practices on the basis of the knowledge of collections and museums. Consolidating a museums network is seen as an opportunity to promote new discussions regarding the history, relationships and social purpose of Aysén museums. Overall, practitioners consider that it enables the sector to overcome historical difficulties, embrace opportunities, improve the relationships between museums and their administrators, and work towards common agendas.

Additionally, the second meeting was held on November 2018. At that time practitioners participated in workshops on collections care and registration, participation and collaborative work. Specially, on this opportunity practitioners shared personal stories through talking about the memories associated to their significant objects.⁹ Also,

everyday experiences at their museums were shared, including the current employment conditions, infrastructure problems and the need for further cooperation with heritage inspection bodies, such as the National Monuments Council and the Chilean Investigative Police. The meeting ended with group visits to the local museums of Villa Ortega and Ñirehuao, as well as to the Football Museum-Restaurant Bajo Marquesina in Coyhaique.¹⁰

Final thoughts: a network that integrates community and heritage in an isolated territory

Museums networks are important in isolated territories, where small-medium scale community museums operate standing up for the preservation of local identities through their memories and significant objects. The research on collections, museums and their human resources in Aysén reveals the need for a museums network at a regional level, to safeguard representations of identity, traditional knowledge and ecology. Overall, the existence of a museums network is a new stage in the history of Aysén museums, which began since the first museum was created in the 60s.

Aysén witnessed the emergence of 22 museums that assumed integrative roles of other institutions that had not reached their locality yet. Until today, some of such spaces still functioning as a library, meeting centre, community radio, cultural centre and post office. Their practitioners call for a transformation of their already integrated museums under the scheme of partnerships, being aware of the difficulties, needs and ecological problems concerning their rural areas, but more specifically, on the particularities of what it means to inhabit Aysén. Within this context, Aysén Museums Network would be the newest case of this kind of organisations in Southern Chile. Pursuing its consolidation will proof how social partnership endorses the silent work done by museum workers under challenging circumstances posed by this large

⁹ This activity was based on the Empty Boxes methodology and on the 'significant objects' technique. It is aimed at strengthening the individual's curiosity about their everyday objects, being a useful tool to introduce the importance of collections held at local museums. The handbook can be accessed at: https://issuu.com/museosaustral9/docs/cajas_vacias

¹⁰ More information on the meeting Museums without Gates can be found at: <https://eulacmuseums.net/index.php/pt-eulac-noticias/details/3/104>

territory, resulting from the lack of connectivity, resources and institutional recognition.

After recalling the concept of the “integrated museum” from the Roundtable of Santiago in 1972, we understood that in Aysén, museums are institutions depending on peoples’ efforts, interconnected with its social surroundings and environment. Furthermore, that through a common vision, they will support communities in pursuing the future of their traditions. Although the network has not been formally registered as an organisation, a *social* and an *information* network has already been consolidated. The collections and museums research, as well as the participatory approach for creating the open-access catalogue, show a merging network of information, which integrates people through the sharing of knowledge and the promotion of collective memory.

Moreover, the meetings show the current entrenchment of a social network, which calls for teamwork rather than assistance, and seeks for openness, social recognition, and mutual relationships between museums’ leaders and their private/public sponsors. Specially, museum practitioners call for more social encounters with their colleagues, as well as with government officials, and private/public actors relevant to the sector, such as the Investigations Police of Chile. Encounters display the great need for knowledge sharing and research, dissemination of local heritage and community building.

In the short future, the formal implementation of the network must consider the natural factor. In general, the implementation of digital platforms tend to overcome such problems. However, the geographic distances and extreme weather are real obstacles for integration, since for those museums located in the most remote areas of Aysén, the lack of connectivity (internet connection and telephone signal) is still a reality. This isolation has had an impact on museum awareness on digital platforms, reducing the use of technologies in such spaces.

The awareness on our rural context is real, however, it is also real that many of those who work in Aysén museums

sector, have been noting more and more the potential of museums integration for social development in the Region. So far, a common pattern to most museums emerged, that is the strong interest in preserving and sharing as a network the collective memory on how Aysén has been inhabited through the years. The interest in promoting the uniqueness and particularities of each community museum is increasing, and it can be seen in the will and great efforts undertaken (most of the times in silence) by each women and men behind a museum or heritage collection.

From the isolationism, to the need of exploration; from small-medium scale museums to particular collectors; from early individual efforts to recent State sponsorship; Aysén museums history has been shaped by the need of integrating community and heritage, with the particularities of a territory. A network as a platform of mutual trust strengthens social ties, while facilitates the sharing of meanings in Aysén, where museums are social strategies for integration, against the consequences of isolation.

Useful Link

Aysén Museums Network project website: <https://www.redmuseosaysen.cl/>

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Aysén museums leaders and sponsors, as well as to Aysén Museums Network project team. This work was supported by the Regional Government of Aysén’s Fund for Innovation and Competitiveness (FIC), the Austral University of Chile (Campus Patagonia) and the Regional Museum of Aysén.

Bibliography

- Aguilar, M., (2018). ‘Museo Los Colonos de Nuestra Tierra.’ *Revista de Aysenología* (6): 61-62. Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/373948_237c6e99aee74075af9c4f6dfb17cad9.pdf (Accessed 19 May 2019)
- Bate, L. F., (2016). *Orígenes de la comunidad primitiva en Patagonia*. s.l.:Ofqui Eds.
- Bize, C. & Weil, K. (2018) *An analysis of the “Round Table of Santiago” of 1972, the social role of museums, and its relevance to sustainability in the present*. Available at: <https://eulacmuseums.net/index.php/bibliography/details/1/93> (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Calderón, A. A., (2015). ‘Reflexiones para una reinterpretación del quehacer del pueblo aónikenk durante la expansión chilena sobre el extremo austral patagónico.’ *Tzibtzun. Revista de estudios históricos* (62): 69-107.
- Camarena, C. & Morales, T., (2016). *Memoria: Red de Museos Comunitarios de América: Experiencias de museos comunitarios y redes nacionales*. Oaxaca, Red de Museos Comunitarios de América.
- Cassidy, C. et al., (2018). ‘Digital Pathways in Community Museums.’

Museum International 70(1-2): 126-139.

- Castañeda, F., (2018). 'Museos de Aysén, el valor de sus depósitos: el caso de Punta del Monte 1.' *Revista de Aysenología* (6): 50-53. Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/373948_5a7b8eae6ceb47b2a01526d118246f63.pdf (Accessed 19 May 2019)
- Davis, P., (2007). 'Ecomuseums and sustainability in Italy, Japan and China: Concept adaptation through implementation' in MacLeod, S., Waton, S. and Knell, S. (eds.) *Museum Revolutions: How museums change and are changed*: 198-214. Oxon, Routledge.
- Davis, P., (2011). 'Ecomuseums, tourism and the representation of rural France.' *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology* 1(2): 141-153.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E., (2007). 'Interpretive Communities, Strategies and Repertoires' in Watson, S. (ed.) *Museums and their Communities*: 76-94. Oxon, Routledge.
- International Council of Museums , ICOM, (2007). *Museum definition*. [En línea]
Available at: <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/> (Accessed 22 May 2019)
- Li, C. & Ghirardi, S., (2018). 'The role of collaboration in innovation at cultural and creative organisations. The case of the museum.' *Museum Management and Curatorship*: 2-17. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09647775.2018.1520142> (Accessed 12 January 2019)
- Marín, A., (2006). 'Diagnóstico de la colección histórica del Museo de Cochrane (Región de Aysén, Chile).' *Revista de Aysenología* (2): 22-31. Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/373948_5173c8d6d19142149d55da35dfc4e840.pdf (Accessed 19 May 2019)
- Morales, A., (2015) *Un Museo Regional para Aysén. Actas del Seminario Aysén y Patrimonio*. Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos.
- Mostny, G., (1972). *El desarrollo y la importancia de los museos en el mundo contemporáneo. Boletín Mensual Museo Nacional de Historia Natural de Santiago*. Available at: <http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/archivos2/pdfs/MC0072886.pdf> (Accessed 20 May 2019)
- Mostny, G., (1972). 'The role of museums in today's Latin America.' *Museum* 25(3): 176.
- Palominos, D., Sepúlveda, J. & Pardo, L., (2018). 'Reabriendo el Museo de Puerto Río Tranquilo.' *Revista de Aysenología* (6): 54-58. Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/373948_dc70a11741c846d8ad582913497bf01a.pdf (Accessed 19 May 2019)
- Parry, R. & Sawyer, A., (2005). 'Space and the machine: Adaptive museums, pervasive technology and the new gallery environment' in MacLeod, S. (ed.) *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, design, exhibitions*: 39-52. Oxon, Routledge.
- Pérez-Barría, L., Ross, S., Sade, K., Castañeda, F., Marín, A., Garay, R., (2011). Línea Base y Términos de Referencia Para Un Museo de Calidad en Cochrane. Ilustre Municipalidad De Cochrane. Informe al Gobierno Regional de Aysén 2% Cultura. Unpublished manuscript.
- Quezada, P., Barría, D., Becerra, M., (2017) 'Modelo de Gestión y Procedimientos Técnicos del Museo Escuela Villa Cerro Castillo (Aysén Patagonia).' *Revista de Aysenología* (4): 44-50. Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/373948_2dc5485f021b461884c9c849f6b97f4a.pdf (Accessed 22 May 2019)
- Red MUMA, Red de Museos de Magallanes., (n.d) *Quiénes somos*. Available at: <http://www.redmuma.cl/650/w3-propertyvalue-72451.html> (Accessed 6 May 2019).
- Red de Museos y Centros Culturales de la Región de Los Ríos., (n.d) *Sobre Nosotros*.

Available at: <http://www.museosregiondelosrios.cl/index.php/sobre-nosotros>. (Accessed 6 May 2019).

- Rojas, A. & Sade, K., (2017). 'Bases de Implementación para el Museo de Cochrane.' *Revista de Aysenología* (4): 51-57.
- Rosas, M., 2018. *Museo Regional de Aysén: Una construcción con historia*. Available at: <https://www.eldivisadero.cl/redac-46187> (Accessed 01 February 2019).
- Sade, K., (2008). *Cazadores Extintos de Aysén Continental*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/295547217_Cazadores_extintos_de_Aysen_Continental (Accessed 6 May 2019).
- Sade, K., Castañeda, F. & Pérez-Barría, L., (2019). 'Poblamiento y registro arqueológico de la costa sur del Lago General Carrera.' *Revista de Aysenología* (6): 29-49. Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/373948_8e0c4adf9677470893a31d96773f62ba.pdf (Accessed 15 May 2019).
- Sade, K., & Pérez-Barría, L., (2012) Diagnóstico multidisciplinario de los museos de la comuna de Coyhaique. Unpublished manuscript.
- Sade, K. & Quezada, P., (2016). 'Situación y diagnóstico comunal para la puesta en marcha del Centro Cultural Coyhaique.' *Revista de Aysenología* (1): 39-47. Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/373948_1e1ed09ba45340fabfbcc495f5799513.pdf (Accessed 15 May 2019).
- Sáenz, J., (2018). *Cultura material del Baker: aportes para una colección histórica*. Puerto Montt, Dimacofi.
- Teruggi, M. E., (1973). 'The round table of Santiago (Chile).' *The role of museums in today's Latin America* 25(3): 129-133. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000127362> (Accessed 15 May 2019).
- Vega, R., (2018). 'Museo del Valle de la Luna, Villa Ñirehuao (Aysén Chile).' *Revista de Aysenología* (6): 59-60. Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/373948_0f1494e9620940d8952ac14d012e3d06.pdf (Accessed 19 May 2019).
- Weil, K., Fuquene, L., Blanco, G., Urbina, S., Bize, C., (2017) *Characterization of the Museums Network of Los Ríos Region and selection of case studies*. Available at: <https://eulacmuseums.net/index.php/resources/database/bibliography/details/1/92> (Accessed 20 May 2019).
- Weil, K. & Urbina, S., (2017). *The Network of Museums and Cultural Centres of the Los Ríos Region, Chile*. Available at: <https://icom.museum/en/news/the-network-of-museums-and-cultural-centres-of-the-los-rios-region-chile/> (Accessed 10 January 2019).

The Return of Cultural Objects and Human Remains as a Way of Healing the Historical Trauma of Indigenous Communities

By Justyna Ładosz

Abstract

This paper will examine the power of museums through the issue of return of cultural objects and human remains to Indigenous peoples. These communities suffer from Historical Trauma, the healing of which can be facilitated through the return of cultural objects and ancestral remains. It will be argued that the return of cultural objects could help many indigenous people in reconstructing their fragmented identities and allowing their communities to revive tradition, facilitating the process of healing Historical Trauma. The counter argument that historical wrongs cannot be addressed through returns of cultural objects will be critiqued by looking at the role of material culture and remembrance in dealing with grief, loss, and traumatic events. Museums, instead of viewing returns and repatriation as dis-empowerment, should embrace them as opportunities to restructure the power balance between themselves and communities which have been traditionally excluded from museum spaces.

Keywords

Historical Trauma, Indigenous People, Repatriation

The concept of Indigenous Historical Trauma (HT) can be understood as the cumulative, transgenerational effect of colonisation on emotional, physical and spiritual health of Indigenous communities (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998, Kirmayer et al 2014, Quinn 2007). Indigenous populations across the world have severely suffered at the hands of European colonisers through conquest, the spread of disease, and the theft of land. Part of this process was also the theft of their culture, the decimation of traditional ways of life (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998: 61-64), and structural oppression (Kirmayer et al 2014:303). This cultural aspect of Historical Trauma has gained more attention in the last twenty years, especially in field of psychology and psychiatry (see Evans-Campbell 2008, Gone 2013, Kirmayer et al 2014). It has also been increasingly used by indigenous communities (Brave Heart 2011, Shariatmadari 2019, Colwell 2019), to argue that

the return of cultural objects and human remains can help in the process of healing Historical Trauma. `

Many human remains and cultural objects which were taken away from their original communities are now housed in museums and collections across the world (Thornton 2002:18). These past injustices reverberate through Indigenous communities today (Besterman 2014:20). In light of claims that 'the "repatriation process" helps Native Americans to achieve some closure on traumatic events of their history' (Thornton 2003:22), various aspects of the relationship between Historical Trauma and Cultural Heritage will be examined. First, the health benefits of the renewal of culture facilitated by the return of cultural objects and human remains will be explored extensively. Secondly, the impact on individuals, especially the importance of identity, will be considered. Finally, the criticism that historical wrongs cannot

be addressed through cultural objects will be examined by specifically looking at the role of material culture and remembrance in dealing with grief, loss, and traumatic events. The importance of external acknowledgement of the harm done, and the role of culture in the creation of identity will underpin the entire discussion.

Museums tend to consider restitution claims somewhat reluctantly, commonly using two strands of argumentation to defend their collections. One is that human remains held in museums are vital for scientific research, which benefits the whole of humanity (Jenkins 34-53). The other is based on the notion of the universal or encyclopaedic museum, and usually takes the form of arguments for preservation, access or education. This sees the preservation of cultural objects as the key mission of the museum, alongside granting access to and educating the public about “our common heritage” (Cuno 2008:20). Moreover, museums in the UK have been constrained from de-accessioning objects in the past, though the Human Tissue Act (2004), now provides a legal framework for returning human remains (Jenkins 2010:49).

This paper is based on the belief that such approaches are flawed in that they endorse the existing post-colonial power structures and continue to privilege western ways of knowing in their rhetoric. It is not up to western museums to decide what to do with Indigenous ancestors and cultures. Considering the wishes of communities of origin is of paramount importance in restitution cases (Shariatmadari 2019). Museums can play a vital role in the process of cultural renewal by redressing the power imbalance still present in restitution claims (Colwell 2015).

Further, this paper will consider the importance for Indigenous communities of gaining closure and creating cultural renewal through the burial of their ancestors and access to their cultural heritage. The argument is based on a synthesis of psychological and psychiatric texts on Historical Trauma (e.g. Kirmayer et al 2014, Gone 2009, Chandler and Lalonde 2008, Brave Heart et al 1998), the perspectives and

case studies reported by museum and heritage professionals (e.g. Thornton 2003, Simpson 2009, Peers 2013) and, most importantly, Indigenous narratives (Turnbull et al 2010, Conaty et al 2015). The exact effects of restitution on HT have not been studied extensively (Jenkins 2010:23), partially due to the difficulties of measuring HT using traditional scientific procedures (Evans-Campbell 2008:317). Therefore, this paper is not geographically focused and draws on communities across Australia, New Zealand, and North America. At the same time, it is important to note that Indigenous people are not all the same and the meaning that culture, healing and trauma have for them should never be assumed to be uniform (Chandler and Lalonde 2008:9, Harris 2018:203). Therefore, the concepts and solutions proposed may be applicable to only some of these communities. No attempt to offer blanket theories and solutions is intended. This article will use the term Indigenous in reference to Native Americans, Canadian First Nations, Aboriginal populations of Australia, and Alaska Natives.

While the paper draws on case studies and narratives of restitution extensively (Morton 2017, Potts 2015, Peers 2013, Hemming and Wilson 2010, Simpson 2009ab, Pullar 2009, Batty 2005, Thornton 2003), the author feels it is outside of its scope to offer practical solutions to museums. This is partially because every restitution claim should be considered on a case by case basis. Mostly, the author is aware that depending on the jurisdictional placement of any museum, the restitution process will differ. Even within the UK, de-accessioning of human remains is governed by different rules. The Human Tissue Act (2004), for example, does not extend to Scotland, which has separate legislation (Jenkins 2010:49). The consideration of this is beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, given the sensitive nature of this matter, the differences between the many Indigenous communities considered (see Batty 2005 for returns causing damage, not healing) and the difficulty of collaborative projects (Lynch and Alberti 2010), offering a blanket practical approach may do more harm than good. Instead, this paper highlights the

necessity of restitution for the wellbeing of many Indigenous communities, and seeks to motivate museums to consider this issue on the individual institutional level.

What is Historical Trauma?

Psychologically, trauma can be defined as ‘the idea that real events can bring about a breach in the protective shield of the psyche, disrupting psychic structure and the sense of self’ (Connolly 2011:607). Trauma does not need to manifest immediately and can be the result of a single event or an accumulation of stressful events (Denham 2008:395). Historical Trauma, sometimes termed ‘cumulative collective trauma’ (Conolly 2011:608), intergenerational trauma, historical grief, or intergenerational Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Dunham 2008:396), has proven more elusive to define. This type of trauma was at first identified in connection with the Holocaust when the ‘protracted, all pervasive, massive trauma’ (Blum 2007:64) experienced by the victims of the Nazi regime had a manifested impact on the children of survivors (Blum 2007:64,65, Kellermann 2001:256). Similarly to other concepts such as trauma or PTSD, due to its popularity in professional and public use, HT has lost some of its specificity (Conolly 2011:608, Denham, 2008:395-6). Kirmayer warns against this dilution and confusion, arguing that sometimes it is used simply to mean ‘postcolonial distress’ (Kirmayer et al 2014:301). There is also little agreement on how HT is transmitted between generations, with psycho-dynamic, sociocultural, biological or familial systems all proposed as avenues of transmission. It is proposed that the trauma is passed onto children unconsciously, directly through interaction and information, indirectly through the way the children are raised, or through physiological processes, if the trauma had an impact on the neuro-chemical make-up of the parent (Kellermann 2001, Gone 2013:688).

The idea that colonisation and subsequent oppression of Indigenous people caused Historical Trauma emerged in the 1980s and gained ground with Brave Heart’s

influential work *The American Indian Holocaust* (1998), which convincingly argued that theories of Holocaust transmission of grief can be used to understand the trauma that was experienced by generations of American Indians (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998:61-62). HT when applied specifically to Indigenous people can be defined as consisting of colonial injuries to entire Indigenous communities, the effects of which have increased over time, and are felt throughout multiple generations (Kirmayer et al 2014:301). Likewise, Brave Heart defines trauma as the ‘cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences’ (Brave Heart 2003:7 in Denham 2008:396).

There have been numerous studies of HT in an effort to identify its symptoms and consequences (Denham 2008:396), some of which include: depression, substance abuse, violence, guilt behaviour and survivor syndrome (Denham 2008:397). Continuous oppression of Indigenous communities, the view that they were savages with no capacity to grieve (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998:67) and looting of cultural objects and bones of ancestors meant that often Indigenous people did not have a chance to bury their loved ones (Thornton 2003:22), which compounded their initial suffering. This ongoing wound and lack of closure is used by Indigenous people in repatriation claims today (Shariatmadari 2019). When massive, extreme trauma of this kind occurs it may cause considerable damage to the psyche, which results in the destruction of the ‘emphatic bond’ and entire sections of the personality, as well as extreme disassociation (Conolly 2011:608). These identity issues have been shown in the survivors of the Holocaust (Blum 2007:72) and can arguably be seen in Indigenous populations.

The HT suffered by Indigenous people cannot and should not be fully equated to that of Holocaust survivors as there are substantial differences in the levels of recognition in the public, academic and political sphere, and the types of violence and loss experienced, especially forced assimilation, suppression of culture, and structural oppression (Kirmayer

et al 2014: 303-304). Therefore, in applying theories and concepts based on the Holocaust to Indigenous populations, awareness of this, and the differing experiences of various indigenous tribes is required.

Historical Trauma And Healing Through Culture

‘Culture gives a people self identity and character. It allows them to be in harmony with their physical and spiritual environment, to form the basis for their sense of self-fulfilment and personal peace. It enhances their ability to guide themselves, make their own decisions, and protect their interests. It’s their reference point to the past and their antennae to the future. Conversely without culture, a community loses self-awareness and guidance, and grows weak and vulnerable. It disintegrates from within as it suffers a lack of identity, dignity, self respect and a sense of destiny.’ (Maathai 2009:160-61 in Besterman 2014:32)

This understanding of culture and its role in the formation of identity is the key assumption that underpins the connection between Historical Trauma, cultural objects and heritage, and return claims.

The destruction of Jewish culture and the annihilation of all traces of Jews’ existence was a key aim of the Nazis; the theft of their property was ‘woven into the fabric of genocide’ (Fogelman 2001: 159). Similarly, the erasure of culture was the effect of assimilation policies for Indigenous peoples and has been termed ‘cultural genocide’ (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998:64). Through programmes such as residential schools, Indigenous people were severed from their cultures, families and communities (Gone 2009:2-3). Forced assimilation and other acts of epistemic violence contributed severely to the issues these communities experience (Chandler and Lalonde 2008:25). Further, ‘the cumulative loss of traditional life ways’ (Denham 2008:397) is seen as a cause of the contemporary issues these societies are experiencing today (Denham

2008:397), both can therefore be understood as key in the formation of their HT. The restoration of culture has therefore been proposed as a remedy (Kirmayer et al 2014:311).

The looting of cultural objects and human remains, and their subsequent display in museums has also been argued as a contributing factor to the HT felt by Indigenous communities (Thornton 2003:23, Pullar 2009:108, Atkinson 2010:18). It is undeniable that acquiring cultural objects and displaying them in a museum can be, and historically has been, inherently harmful (Shapiro 1998:97), especially given the root of the practice in Europe and the West is that of war loot displayed as demonstration of the domination of the other (Peers 2013:148). The retention of these objects by those who also caused physical suffering can feel like a further insult (Shapiro 1998: 98-100, Atkinson 2010:18). The continued absence of cultural property and ancestral remains from communities is described as ‘festering wrongs in need of remedies’ (Shapiro 1998:100). These wrongs were not dealt with in the past, and therefore the harm reverberates throughout generations (Shapiro 1998:100 *ibid.*). Increasingly, scientific studies have tried to establish a link between mental and physical health issues and cultural loss (Simpson 2009b:123); for example, the loss of ‘cultural continuity’ has been linked to the above average suicide rates experienced by First Nation communities (Chandler and Lalonde 2008). It is important to note that health for Indigenous people can include the spiritual sphere as well as physical and emotional wellbeing (Simpson 2009b:123-125), therefore western scientific approaches can be inadequate. The therapeutic effect of repatriation has been increasingly cited by those making return claims, arguing that strengthening traditional culture will help with the health issues that affect their societies (Jenkins 2010:22-23). The claims referring to cultural renewal, individual identity and addressing historical wrongs will be examined below.

Cultural Renewal

Return of cultural objects and human remains can

lead to the revival of traditional culture (Simpson 2009b, Potts 2010, Weasel Head 2015), as cultural objects facilitate the re-learning of ancient practices (Peers 2013). The revival of cultural knowledge can be seen as a way of healing Historical Trauma and a key aim of return claims (Pullar 2009:114). Increasingly, these claims are gaining attention in Western media, and Indigenous claim makers cite returns of human remains and cultural objects as an important healing practice (Shariatmadari 2019, Colwell 2019, Wilding 2019, Welle 2019). In a recent case of human remains returned from the Natural History Museum, London to a community on Thursday Island, one of the communities explained:

‘As one elder said: “How would you feel knowing that one of your family members is in some strange place and, more importantly, hasn’t been afforded the right burial?” That has an impact on the psyche of a group.’ (Ned David in Shariatmadari 2019)

Similarly, healing approaches to mental health among Canadian Indigenous communities have emphasised the tie between HT and cultural identity of individuals and communities. The processes of colonization, particularly the evils of the residential schools programme, which aimed to suppress the language, culture and links to community of Indigenous children, are seen to have a high impact on the mental health of individuals (Gone 2009: 2-3). This loss of culture is linked by many Indigenous people to the problems that still haunt their communities, such as violence, abuse and addictions (Simpson 2009b:124). Healing practices in one particular instance included an emphasis on regaining pride of Indigenous identity by individuals and entire communities (Gone 2009: 7 -8). Testimonies of Indigenous people showcase this effect of return of cultural objects. The return of medicine bundles to Blackfoot communities in the 1970s subsequently increased the engagement of young people in traditional ritual (Potts 2015:149). Correspondingly, the

return of sacred bundles to the Kainai community facilitated a process of cultural renewal. The bundles were once again in use, and the performance of transfer rituals created a chance to learn about traditional rites for many in the community. Weasel Head connected this to the ability of his community to flourish, seeing increased self-governance of the community as a consequence (2015:177). Cultural revival led to increased pride and self-determination, which could be seen as signs of healing in themselves (Weasel Head 2015:179). Moreover, re-asserting control over governance and preserving traditional culture were two markers used to evaluate how far communities secured their past and future, and therefore their ‘cultural continuity’ (Chandler and Lalonde 2008:18). In those tribes where cultural continuity was particularly strong, suicides of young people and adults between 1987 and 2000 were either absent or much rarer than in other First Nations tribes (Chandler and Lalonde 2008:1,18). Furthermore, the repatriation of human remains and the return of cultural objects is often reported to result in a type of emancipation, or re-asserting of strength and confidence for Indigenous communities (Simpson 2009a:62, Besterman 2014:32, Weasel Head 2015), suggesting at least an interaction between preservation of culture and the impact of HT at community level.

Another aspect of Historical Trauma which can be healed on a community level is unresolved grief. The return of human remains and rites associated with their reburial are argued to be a key way in which Indigenous communities can seek to resolve their grief (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998, Thornton 2003). The Human Remains Working Group, a British government appointed committee, specifically cited the role of repatriation in healing the damage of colonization, which is compounded by the retention of human remains (Jenkins 2010:22). For the Ngarrindjeri nation of Australia, HT can only begin to heal when funerals for their ancestors are held. The human remains of the Ngarrindjeri were ‘collected’ on a massive scale in the 19th and 20th century, mostly by digging up burial sites. The elders of the community describe them as

the 'First Stolen Generation', when discussing the ceremonies necessary for the healing of the entire community that take place when they are repatriated and buried (Hemming and Wilson 2010:186,193). In relation to the Jewish Holocaust, Fogelman argues that encounters with others who have suffered similar experiences can help sufferers deal with the ungrieved past and facilitate healing of identity. The sharing of massive trauma with others, belonging to groups, and commemorations or rituals (Fogelman et al 2002:46) have a clear effect on sufferers of HT. For Indigenous groups rituals that accompany the return of their ancestors help them heal, such as in the case of the Haida First Nation in Canada (Simpson 2009b:127).

The return of ancestral remains and cultural objects can renew cultural practices that have almost vanished (Potts 2015, Hubert and Fforde 2003:8), and establish cultural identity and cohesion in communities which have lost it through oppressive government policies such as residential schools (Simpson 2009b:125). The case of the return of Tambo to Palm Island, Australia, is argued to bring such cultural cohesion to Indigenous people from different tribes (Hubert and Fforde 2003:9). According to Hubert and Fforde 'issues of identity permeate the whole concept of repatriation' (2003:11), since repatriation is used to establish new identities, and to change and reinforce old ones (Hubert and Fforde 2003:12).

Cultural and Individual Identity

The connection between individual identity disruption and Historical Trauma is well documented. Trauma and HT impact the psyche or ego and can affect parts of personality or result in extreme disassociation, which has a terrifying impact on the health of the individual (Connolly 2011:608). Moreover, HT has been shown to cause a range of personal mental health issues such as depression or alcohol abuse (Denham 2008:397). The renewal of cultural practices can help individuals to tackle these. Culture is a key way in which individuals can try to overcome the impacts of HT. This

is one of the aims of the returns of the medicine bundles to Blackfoot communities (Simpson 2009b:125). Archaeologists have noted for some time the role of the material past in identity processes, especially as a symbolic representation of our ties to the past, and to our wider social community. For our identities, individual or cultural, to be effective, they need to have material representations (Stutz 2013:175-6). Similarly, for Blackfoot communities, sacred items are used as anchors to cultural identity. Most importantly, a person needs to have a continuing relationship to these objects for cultural identity to be well established. When cultural objects were taken away to museums, this relationship was broken (Peers 2013:140). Renewed contact with cultural property, whether through return to communities or more open access in museums (see Peers 2013 for cultural renewal of the Blackfoot through interaction rather than restitution at the Glenbow and Galt Museum, Canada) can facilitate the healing of Indigenous people through the re-establishment of their cultural identity (Peers 2013:141).

Cultural renewal is not just important for community grieving and establishing community independence, but is also key from the perspective of individual identity. Pride of heritage was a key component of the healing practice in a Native American healing lodge, which through a range of therapy methods addressed such issues as substance abuse (Gone 2009:1,8). Similar efforts have emphasised that reconnecting to Native culture is key to resolving identity crises, and can help with PTSD and healthy functioning (Quinn 2007:76). The study conducted by Chandler and Lalonde which examined the rates of youth suicide among First Nation tribes in Canada also speaks about the importance of culture for the individual. They established a possible correlation between 'cultural continuity' and 'personal persistence in time' with rates of suicide (Chandler and Lalonde 2008:1). They argue that if a person's 'individual or cultural identity is somehow fractured or disabled, those persons... are put at special risk to suicide' (Chandler and Lalonde 2008:4). Their findings affirm that tribes which have cultural continuity (that

is, a preserved cultural past and control of their civic affairs such as education) had no youth suicides during the study, while other First Nation communities experienced more than ten times the national average (Chandler and Lalonde 2008:2). This points to the conclusion that in communities that have taken charge of their culture, individuals experience less fragmented identities, and therefore, struggle less with HT. Similarly, in studies of Indigenous communities of Alaska, cultural objects and visual representation are found to be key to re-establishing indigenous identity (Pullar 2009:112). Therefore, renewing culture through cultural objects or rituals that welcome back human remains of ancestors (Simpson 2009b:122), and establishing a better 'persona persistence' (Chandler and Lalonde 2008:1) are essential for identity and individual health.

A strong sense of self is vitally important to mental and spiritual health. Fragmented identity is one of the effects of HT, and re-establishing this identity can be key for the healing process (Fogelman et al 2002). Similarly, reconstruction (that is understanding the trauma and the past that caused it) has been shown, in one case study, to contribute to 'transforming and detoxifying the pathogenic past', helping a child survivor of Holocaust to understand himself (Blum 2007:72). While these two studies focused on survivors of Nazi induced trauma, similarities between the Holocaust and the Indigenous genocide have been shown and studied extensively enough (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998, Kirmayer et al 2014) to posit an argument that fractured identities and a lack of understanding of the past and the experiences of one's ancestors contribute to mental health issues experienced by Indigenous populations too. The return of cultural objects has been shown to facilitate these conversations (Potts 2010, Weasel Head 2010) and could therefore form a good approach in the process of healing.

Addressing Historical Wrongs

A key criticism of the claim that cultural objects and human remains should be returned to facilitate healing is that

history is unfixable. Discussions among heritage professionals regarding the return of human remains are often faced with statement such as: 'it's happened; there's no point now in incinerating or reburying these objects' (Payne in Hubert 2003:9), and doubts that the wrongs committed in the past can be atoned. Similarly, when speaking about the art looted by Nazis, Rosenthal has stated 'history is history and you can't turn the clock back or make things good through art' (Rosenthal 2008:2 in Besterman 2014:22). These two quotes illustrate the view that cultural objects do not have the power to address historical wrongs. However, research on HT, the importance of mourning and the role material culture has within dealing with loss and devastation, shows the opposite is possible. Both Fogelman and Brave Heart have extensively illustrated the dangers of not grieving properly (Fogelman et al 2002, Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998). Specific cultural practices of the community determine the form of grieving (Denham 2008:398), but it is clear that the return of human remains can facilitate this process (Simpson 2009b: 128). The importance of remembrance is also apparent through research on Holocaust survivors, and other historical tragedies. The act of remembering the past can help child survivors of Holocaust (Blum 2007, Simine 2013). This could perhaps be applied to Indigenous communities. The Ngarrindjeri elders emphasised the emotional difficulty of the reburial of their ancestors, but insist the process results in healing. Reconstruction of the past and the closure it may bring is part of this process (Hemming and Wilson 2010:193), which arguably is the first step towards righting a historical wrong.

Research on remembering of tragic historical events has shown that while some forms of remembering can be damaging as they extend pain, some processes of remembrance can incite hope that leads to new ideas of community, identity and relationships. Remembrance can be a form of learning that leads people to confront their past and present (Simon et al 2000:6-8). While these conclusions were based on western societies, similar investigations in Indigenous communities, which stress a different relationship to the past (Besterman

2014:20), could result in interesting insights. Secondly, material culture, including objects connected to lost loved ones, has a role in adjusting memories and relationships with the dead, and overcoming grief (Miller and Parrott 2009). While the study by Miller and Parrott was conducted in South London, a context very different from Indigenous ones, the way some Indigenous people speak of their attachment to cultural objects and human remains, for example: 'These skeletal remains belong to me and I belong to them' (Atkinson 2010:15), suggests a similar process. Further study is needed to examine the ways in which cultural objects facilitate forms of remembrance in Indigenous communities.

Given all of these strands, it is undeniable that the return of cultural objects can help right the wrongs of history and there is a purpose to the reburial of human remains, contrary to the critics. Remembrance, in whatever form Indigenous communities conduct it, is important in dealing with loss and grief.

Conclusion

While this discussion had to gloss over issues such as the difficulty researchers have been facing in collecting quantifiable data about HT (Evans-Campbell 2008), the full implications of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) (Breske 2018), and the colonialist past of museums (Barringer and Flynn 1998) to name a few, it is clear that culture has a key role to play in the healing of communities and identities.

Many Indigenous communities lack access to their own culture and its material manifestations (Peers 2013: 140-141) since their cultural objects and bones of their ancestors reside in museums and collections all over the world (Thornton 2002:19-20). Different models have advocated the return of custody over items, access to items held in museums (Peers 2013) or return of knowledge (Pullar 2009:114), rather than physical return of objects back to Indigenous communities. What is clear is that the continuing lack of control over their cultural heritage is seen by many Indigenous communities as

a continuous insult and injury (Atkinson 2010:18, Thornton 2002:18).

Affirming the right of indigenous people to own objects sourced from them in questionable and creative ways in the past also affirms their human and cultural rights. Repatriation becomes an important symbol of larger claims of sovereignty (Breske 2018:347, 365), which has been shown to help in the process of combating HT (Weasel Head 2015:179). Museums should become part of the process, and instead of viewing returns and repatriation as proof of their increasing disempowerment, should embrace them as opportunities to restructure the power balance and become important in different ways.

Many museums continue in their incessant focus on preservation, which results in limited physical contact (Pye 2007:22). However, some are gradually increasing collaboration with Indigenous communities (Peers 2013, Peers and Brown 2003). Access and collaboration, however, are not enough. They may facilitate better relationships (Peers and Brown 2003:1-11), but indigenous communities should receive the right to own their own culture, not just an invitation to collaboration. Granting access does not change the power dynamic (Lynch and Alberti 2010:29), as the museum still owns the object, and decides the parameters of the relationship (Peers and Brown 2003:8-10). This inequality of power in schemes that allow Indigenous communities to interact with indigenous objects, or be part of consulting process in creating exhibitions, has been extensively highlighted (Harris 2018, Lynch and Alberti 2010). In many of these collaborations the museum still benefits more than the historically excluded community (Peers and Brown 2003:2,8). Even within certain repatriation processes, especially those tied to NAGPRA in the USA, this imbalance of power is still present, as museums decide which claims are legitimate, are in control of the information published about any returns, and do not have to justify their decisions (Colwell 2015). This all points to the idea that museums, which are not neutral spaces, have been reluctant to share their power

with indigenous communities (Lynch and Alberti 2010:15), instead allowing them only superficial involvement (Peers and Brown 2003:2).

It cannot be denied that museums have a social function (Harris 2018:196). The display of objects, and the way exhibitions are structured promotes a certain kind of interpretation (Preziosi 2009:489, Barringer and Flynn 1997) In the past, museums have functioned 'to reinforce for some the feeling of belonging and for others the feelings of exclusion' (Carrier 2006:40). While collecting in museums in the past emphasised 'keeping the cultures alive', we can now see that this is an inherently racist view, informed by colonial ideologies (Barringer and Flynn 1998). Moreover, keeping a culture alive cannot purely consist of preserving objects. Indigenous culture is a 'living and dynamic practice' (Janke and Iacovino 2012:168). By transferring control over the objects, museums can facilitate creative processes that will not only keep Indigenous cultures alive, but help them to grow. Creativity, and building on and interacting with the works of others are key cultural processes (Lessig 2004:9,12). Moreover, without their context, and the cultural practices that gave them meaning, (Carrier 2006:47) the objects change. Controlling cultural objects is not equal to preserving a culture. Museums should ask themselves what they are really preserving?

If museums really want to keep cultures alive, they should return objects to communities of origin. The return of their cultural objects could help many people reconstruct their fragmented identities and allow their communities to revive their traditions. There is sufficient evidence (Gone 2009, Quinn 2007, Weasel Head 2015) that this can lead to more self-determination and self-governance and therefore heal some of the ills Indigenous people suffer as a result of their HT. Material culture helps Indigenous communities in restructuring their identities, communities, and rituals. Museums can help to keep those alive by sharing their power.

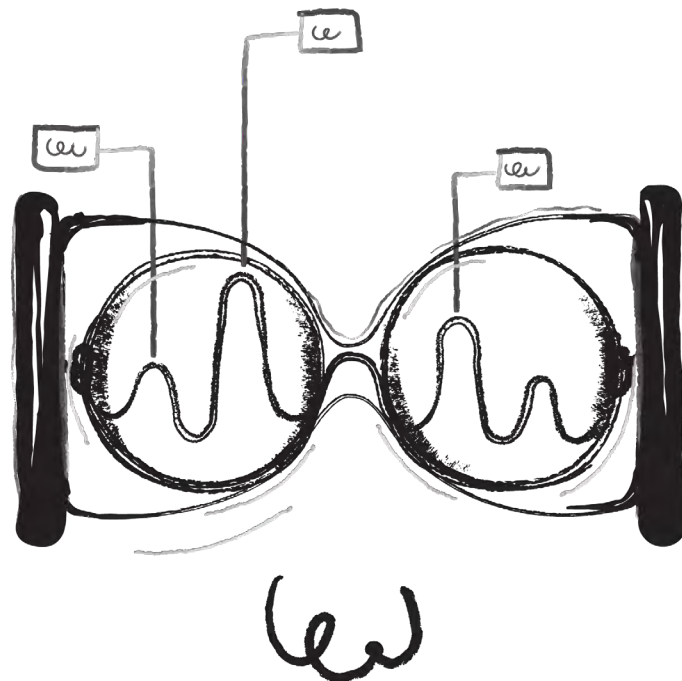
Bibliography

- Atkinson, H. (2010) 'The Meanings And Values Of Repatriation' in Turnbull, P and Pickering, M. (eds.) *The Long Way Home: The Meanings And Values Of Repatriation*: 15-19. New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books. Available at: <https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/Product/Index/395129?page=0> (Accessed 10 August 2018).
- Barringer, T., Flynn, T. (1998) *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*. Routledge, London. Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gla/detail.action?docID=1099368> (Accessed 07 May 2019).
- Batty, P (2005). 'White redemption rituals: repatriating aboriginal secret-sacred objects'. *Arena Journal* (23). Available at: <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A132866570/EAIM?u=glasuni&sid=EAIM&xid=e58ec1f8> (Accessed 15 August 2018).
- Besterman, T. (2014). 'Crossing the line: restitution and cultural equity' in Tythacott, L. and Arvanitis, K. (eds.) *Museums and restitution: New Practices, New Approaches*: 19-36. Farnham and Burlington, Ashgate. Available at: <https://www.dawsonera.com/readonline/9781409435648> (Accessed 13 August 2018).
- Blum, H. P. (2007). 'Holocaust trauma reconstructed: Individual, familial, and social trauma'. *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 24(1): 63-73. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0736-9735.24.1.63> (Accessed 31 July 2018).
- Brave Heart, M.Y.H. and DeBruyn, L.M. (1998). 'The American Indian Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief'. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 8(2): 60-82. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5820/aian.0802.1998.60> (Accessed 31 July 2018).
- Brave Heart, M. Y. H., Chase, J., Elkins, J., & Altschul, D. B. (2011). 'Historical Trauma Among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas: Concepts, Research, and Clinical Considerations'. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 43(4): 282-290. Available at: DOI: 10.1080/02791072.2011.628913 (Accessed 28 April 2019).
- Breske, A. (2018). 'Politics of Repatriation: Formalizing Indigenous Repatriation Policy'. *International Journal of Cultural Property* 25: 347-373. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0940739118000206> (Accessed 06 November 2019).
- Carrier, D. (2006). *Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries*. North Carolina, Duke University Press. Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gla/detail.action?docID=1169313> (Accessed 12 December 2018).
- Chandler, M., and Lalonde, Ch., (2008). 'Cultural Continuity as a Moderator of Suicide Risk Among Canada's First Nations' in Kirmayer, L. and Valaskakis, G. (eds.) *Healing Traditions: The Mental Health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*: 1 - 28. Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press. Available at: <http://web.uvic.ca/~lalonde/manuscripts/2004Transformations.pdf> (Accessed 31 July 2018).
- Connolly, A. (2011). 'Healing the wounds of our fathers: intergenerational trauma, memory, symbolization and narrative'. *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 56(5): 607-626. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5922.2011.01936.x> (Accessed 31 July 2018).
- Colwell, C. (2015). 'Curating Secrets: Repatriation, Knowledge Flows, and Museum Power Structures'. *Current Anthropology* 56: S263-S275. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/683429> (Accessed 06 January 2019).
- Colwell, C. (2019, April 4). "As Native Americans, We Are in a Constant State of Mourning": The return of ancestors and artifacts can become a form of restorative justice'. *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/04/opinion/can-museums-heal-historys-wounds.html> (Accessed 08 May 2019).

- Conaty, G. T.(ed) (2015). *We Are Coming Home: Repatriation and the Restoration of Blackfoot Cultural Confidence*. Athabasca, Athabasca University Press. Available at: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=uWCgBwAAQBAJ> (Accessed 06 May 2019).
- Cuno, J. (2008). *Who Own Antiquity? Museums And The Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage*. Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press.
- Denham, A. R. (2008). 'Rethinking Historical Trauma: Narratives of Resilience'. *Transcultural Psychiatry* 45(3): 391-414. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461508094673> (Accessed 13 August 2018)
- Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). 'Historical Trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska Communities: A Multilevel Framework for Exploring Impacts on Individuals, Families, and Communities'. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 23(3): 316-338. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260507312290> (Accessed 31 July 2018).
- Fogelman, E., and Bass-Wichelhaus, H. (2002). 'The Role of Group Experiences in the Healing Process of Massive Childhood Holocaust Trauma'. *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 4(1): 31-47. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1013933125734> (Accessed 11 August 2018).
- Fogelman, E., eds. (2001). 'The Evolution and Objectives of the Holocaust Restitution Initiatives Holocaust Restitution: Reconciling Moral Imperatives with Legal Initiatives and Diplomacy. November 1, 2001: Transcript'. *Fordham International Law Journal* 25: S-145. Available at: <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/frdint25&i=1590> (Accessed 12 August 2018).
- Gone, J. P (2009). 'A community-based treatment for Native American historical trauma: Prospects for evidence-based practice'. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 77(4): 751-762. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015390> (Accessed 31 July 2018).
- Gone, J. P (2013). 'Redressing First Nations historical trauma: Theorizing mechanisms for indigenous culture as mental health treatment'. *Transcultural Psychiatry* 50(5): 683-706. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461513487669> (Accessed 28 April 2019).
- Harris, B. (2018). 'Indigenous representation in the "moral museum": perspectives from classical ethical theory'. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 33: 195-211. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2018.1442738> (Accessed 06 January 2019).
- Hemming, S.J., & Wilson, C.J., (2010). 'The First "Stolen Generations": Repatriation And Reburial In Ngarrindjeri Ruwe (Country)' in Turnbull, P and Pickering, M. (eds.) *The Long Way Home: The Meanings And Values Of Repatriation*: 183-198. New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books. Available at: <https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/Product/Index/395129?page=0> (Accessed 10 August 2018).
- Hubert, J. (2003). 'Human Remains: Objects to Study or Ancestors to Bury at the Royal College of Physicians'. *Conference Transcript, Academy of Ideas* 19. Available at: <http://academyofideas.org.uk/documents/transcriptsandreports/HumanRemains.pdf> (Accessed 07 May 2019).
- Janke, T., & Iacovino, L. (2012). 'Keeping cultures alive: archives and Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights'. *Archival Science* 12(2): 151-171. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-011-9163-0> (Accessed 28 April 2019).
- Kellermann, N. P F (2001). 'Transmission of Holocaust Trauma - An Integrative View'. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 64(3): 256-267. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1521/psyc.64.3.256.18464> (Accessed 31 July 2018).
- Kelly, B. (2004). 'Human remains: objects to study or ancestors to bury?'. *Clinical Medicine* 4(5): 465-467. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7861/clinmedicine.4-5-465> (Accessed 13 August 2018).
- Kirmayer, L. J., Gone, J. P, & Moses, J. (2014). 'Rethinking Historical Trauma'. *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51(3): 299-319. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461514536358> (Accessed 31 July 2018).
- Lessig, L. (2004). 'The Creative Commons'. *Montana Law Review* 65(1): 1-14. Available at: <https://heinonline.org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/monthr65&i=7> (Accessed 28 April 2019).
- Lynch, B. T., & Alberti, S. J. M. M. (2010). 'Legacies of prejudice: racism, co-production and radical trust in the museum'. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 25(1): 13-35. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770903529061> (Accessed 03 May 2019).
- Meskell, L., & Scheermeyer, C. (2008). 'Heritage as Therapy: Set Pieces from the New South Africa'. *Journal of Material Culture* 13(2): 153-173. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183508090899> (Accessed 11 August 2018).
- Miller, D., & Parrott, F (2009). 'Loss and material culture in South London'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15(3): 502-519. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2009.01570.x> (Accessed 13 August 2018).
- Peers, L., Brown, A.K. (2003). *Museums and source communities: a Routledge reader*. London and New York, Routledge.
- Peers, L. (2013). 'Ceremonies of Renewal'. *Museum Worlds* 1(1): 136-152. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3167/armw.2013.010109> (Accessed 11 August 2018).
- Preziosi, D. (2009). *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Prussing, E. (2014). 'Historical trauma: Politics of a conceptual framework'. *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51(3): 436-458. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461514531316> (Accessed 31 July 2018).
- Pullar, G. (2009). 'Repatriation, Cultural Revitalization and Indigenous Healing In Alaska'. *UTIMUT: past heritage-future partnerships: discussions on repatriation in the 21st century* (Vol. 46): 108-115. Available at: <http://choicereviews.org/review/10.5860/CHOICE.46-6895> (Accessed 14 August 2018).
- Pye, E. (2007). *The power of touch: handling objects in museum and heritage contexts*. Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press, .
- Quinn, A. (2007). 'Reflections on Intergenerational Trauma Healing as a Critical Intervention'. *First Peoples child & Family Review* 3(4): 72-82. Available at: https://fncaringociety.com/sites/default/files/online-journal/vol3num4/Quinn_pp72.pdf (Accessed 31 July 2018).
- Shapiro, D. (1998). 'Repatriation: A Modest Proposal Symposium Issue: Art Wars: International Art Disputes'. *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 31: 95-108. Available at: <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/nyuilp31&i=103> (Accessed 12 August 2018).
- Shariatmadari, D. (2019, April 23). "They're not property": the people who want their ancestors back from British museums'. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/apr/23/theyre-not-property-the-people-who-want-their-ancestors-back-from-british-museums> (Accessed 06 May 2019).
- Simine, S.A., (2013). 'Difficult Pasts, Vicarious Trauma: The Concept of "Secondary Witnessing" in Simine, S. (ed.) *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia*: 36-43. London, Palgrave Macmillan UK. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137352644_6 (Accessed 06 January 2019).
- Simon, R. I., Rosenberg, S., & Eppert, C. (2000). *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*. Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Simpson, M. (2009b). 'Museums and restorative justice: heritage, repatriation and cultural education'. *Museum International* 61(1-2): 121-129. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0033.2009.01669.x> (Accessed

31 July 2018).

- Stutz, L. N. (2013). 'Claims to the Past. A Critical View of the Arguments Driving Repatriation of Cultural Heritage and Their Role in Contemporary Identity Politics'. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 7(2): 170-195. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2012.714243> (Accessed 31 July 2018).
- Thornton, R. (2003). 'Repatriation as healing the wounds of the trauma of history: cases of Native Americans in the United States of America' in Forde, C., Hubert, J., and Turnbull, P. (eds.) *The Dead and their Possessions*: 17-24. London, Routledge. Available at: <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.4324/9780203165775> (Accessed 07 May 2019).
- Turnbull, P., Pickering, M., (Eds.). (2010). *The long way home: the meaning and values of repatriation*. Oxford, Berghahn Books.
- Weasel Head, F. (2015). 'Repatriation experiences of the Kainai' in Conaty, G. (ed.) *We are coming home: repatriation and the restoration of Blackfoot cultural confidence*: 151-182. Edmonton, AU Press. Available at: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=uWCgBwAAQBAJ> (Accessed 15 August 2018).
- Wilding, M. (2019). 'Museums grapple with rise in pleas for return of foreign treasures'. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/feb/18/uk-museums-face-pressure-to-repatriate-foreign-items> (Accessed 03 May 2019).
- Wiseman, H., Metzl, E., & Barber, J. P. (2006). 'Anger, Guilt, and Intergenerational Communication of Trauma in the Interpersonal Narratives of Second Generation Holocaust Survivors'. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 76(2): 176-184. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.76.2.176> (Accessed 03 May 2019).



[Dis]embodied Voices: War, Conflicting History, and the Interpretation of Plantation Museums through Community Involvement

By Kristin Barry

Abstract

The American Civil War remains fundamental to modern discussions of heritage and the interpretation of American history for both a domestic and international audience. Museums integrated into antebellum architectural heritage sites (plantations and open-air architectural complexes) are consequently forced to address often conflicting and contested histories or heritages associated with the two sides of the war. In a modern context where the removal of Civil War-associated ephemera is central to current American politics, the objective interpretation of these sites is integral to the continuing narrative or conversation surrounding how to authentically address conflict in a museological setting. By involving descendant communities in these discourses and the interpretation of antebellum history or heritage, the public can become participatory members in the continuing history of a particular place, re-empowering the museum as an institution and reinforcing previously disembodied voices within a modern public discourse.

Keywords

Heritage Interpretation, American Civil War, Plantations, Slavery, Community Involvement

Museums represent powerful institutions of interpretation, providing visitors with information and narratives which often represent controversial histories. For antebellum plantation museums inherently connected to the American Civil War, these histories are complicated by the dual heritages of the descendant populations who once inhabited the complexes and may represent different sides of the war. Historically, the interpretation of these sites has emphasised the heritage of the white controlling plantation owners, and neglected the stories and histories of the enslaved peoples, disembodied the voices of the majority residents and presenting a biased and inauthentic representation of the plantation history itself. Recently, some plantations have sought to rectify this inequity by engaging slave descendant communities in the interpretation, encouraging active

participation in the presentation of the site, and refocusing attention on the previously marginalised population. Despite the lasting biases associated with the American Civil War, active community engagement presents a method through which to interpret controversial and traumatic histories for the modern public and spur social discourse on continuing race relations in the United States.

The American Civil War

The American Civil War remains a defining period in the development of American social and economic politics. Waged from 1861-1865, the war saw two sides, defined primarily as the North/Union and the South/Confederacy, clash over the abolishment or retention of slavery and its associated economic consequences. While the South relied

heavily on plantations, and therefore slave labour, for its economy, the more industrial North did not have as much of a need for the economic benefits. The conflict eventually led to the secession of several southern states and the forming of the Confederate States of America, with the Confederacy and the Union each gaining additional allies as the conflict progressed. By the time that all southern generals had surrendered, over half a million people had died, either from battle or disease and slaves had been declared free following the Emancipation Proclamation and the victory by the North. The newly reformed country was also left with the enormous task of recovery and reconstruction.

The Reconstruction period, following the war from 1865-1877, saw the first attempts of the nation to grapple with the physical and economic damage that the war had caused, but also with the remaining deep discord among participants and descendants of the Union and the Confederacy. While slaves had been freed, many plantation owners in the south needed to return to their homesteads to re-establish economic viability, and attempt to retain a workforce, slave or not. Though the national laws dictated that slavery was now illegal, the economic and social status of former slaves in the south changed very little, particularly with the establishment of the Black Codes, developed after the antebellum Slave Codes, a rigid set of laws that controlled black citizens (Dickerson, 2003: 43-44). These laws became the precursor for the southern Jim Crow laws, upheld until 1965, which authorised racial segregation in public facilities in the former Confederate States. The laws represented a new form of control perpetuated by white leaders that ensured racial disparity prevented black and American Indian citizens from having a significant voice in government or, particularly, the development of a personal heritage narrative (Morison, 1965: 725).

The elimination of slave and former slave voices in the antebellum period and following the Civil War began shortly after the war ended, and the perpetuation of the 'Lost Cause' began. Suggested initially as a defence

and rationalisation of the southern secession by Edward A. Pollard in his 1967 publication *The Lost Cause: The Standard Southern History of the War of the Confederates*, the so-called Myth of the Lost Cause was used to present slavery as a minor contributor in the conflict and paint southern life as the Idealised Home Front, complete with happy slave life on the plantations (Nolan, 2000: 11-29). For those subscribing to the myth, the view of slave life in the south as contented or part of continuing southern heritage superseded the historical accuracy of antebellum life and was perpetuated primarily by white southerners, effectively erasing African American memory or narrative from the discourse, particularly as slavery was removed as a cause of the war according to the myth.

The southern reverence for the Lost Cause and the Confederacy continued into the early twentieth century, forming a lasting heritage association with the descendants of Confederate soldiers and sympathisers and resulting in the dozens of Confederate monuments that today still feature in the southern United States. As William C. Davis writes:

'Out of any conflict, the losers create more myths than the winners. It is hardly a surprise. After all, winners have little to explain to themselves. They won. For the loser, however coping with defeat, dealing with it personally and explaining it to others, places enormous strains on the ego, self-respect, and sense of self-worth of the defeated' (1996: 175).

The Lost Cause myth stemmed from a justification not only of the war itself, but of the Confederate loss, resulting in a perpetual post rationalisation and social compensation for sympathisers and southern citizens. The myths stemmed from the war, and were nurtured by veterans and descendants, overshadowing other southern voices or narratives impacted by the war, including those of slaves and their descendants.

Plantation Interpretation in the United States

Until, and many might argue following, the American Civil Rights Movement, the white population controlled the narrative of the southern position in the Civil War and its

associated physical heritage. Even as plantations turned to hospitality or tourism for economy, the interpretation of these sites for the public focused on the idea of genteel southern living, often glossing over the history of slaves at the site and their significance in daily plantation life. By the early twentieth century, the public presentation of idyllic southern antebellum life became a method of promotion and draw for tourism to the old plantations in the south. Advertisements suggested that 'Pilgrims to the Deep South' would 'discover an unique and interesting section of their native land,' and that 'Romance and color of the Old South blended with the progress of the "New South"' (in Hoelscher, 2003: 658). The romanticising of the South reinforced the positive portrayals of antebellum life and downplayed slavery and later racial disparity. As many plantations later either demolished or converted slave housing to sharecropper housing, the realities of the antebellum and postbellum periods were not always architecturally present by the time plantations began encouraging tourism, leaving the 'Big House' or plantation owner's house as the sole piece of visual heritage present to represent life on the plantation.

The architectural layout of plantations was developed to reinforce the dominance of the master over those that he owned. Plantations were designed to be efficient and functional, with dependencies articulating out from the Big House by degrees of necessity (Lewis, 1985). While the Big House exhibited the height of architectural contemporary style, slave quarters or cabins were devoid of architectural ornamentation or often any comfort. The disparity in the social contract of slaves and masters was mirrored in the architecture itself, which was meant to be purposefully demoralising. It highlighted the disparity in environmental conditions, even going so far as to create division between those slaves who worked outside the house and those who worked within. While the Big House represents all the glamor of wealthy antebellum life, the slave cabins, if still standing, represent the opposite: a lack of comfort, space, and independence. Many plantations still feature the Big House in contrast to

the Slave House, with little architectural connection, and with little interpretation of the architectural disparity beyond a tour or informational signage (Vlach, 1993).

Jessica Adams recalls the romanticising of the Big House on a tour of Longwood, an unfinished plantation house near Natchez, Mississippi:

'Unlike the many tours that claim to reveal plantation houses as they were when planters lived in them, a tour of Longwood offers the infrastructure of the house as the primary attraction...The scaffolding and tools, their purpose aborted, have been preserved in order to dramatize the Civil War's effects on the southern economy—this is, to mourn the planter's rudely interrupted lives. The tour does not acknowledge that the scaffolding was erected and the tools set down by enslaved carpenters' (2007: 61)

While Longwood did not survive the war to be completed, other plantations that did survive following the war also perpetuated the romanticism of the Big House over the total history of the plantation, complete with slavery. In the case of Boone Hall plantation outside Charleston, South Carolina, the placement of the 1843 slave quarters parallel to the long drive entrance of the plantation visually reinforced the entrance to the Big House. The relative size difference and architectural difference between the slave quarters and master's quarters made the Big House that much more impressive to visitors (Vlach, 1993: 21). The inequality of architectural space was essentially weaponised and used to the benefit of the master as both a sense of personal self-aggrandisement and a form of oppression to the slaves, with architectural artefacts left to help interpret the inequity for the modern public.

Eichstedt and Small's 2002 study of slavery representations specifically at plantation museums analysed several southern sites in a comparison of trends of

interpretation. Their study found that the general focus of the tours was on the Big House and the lifestyle of the plantation family, with significant focus on the Romanticism of the era or of the southern upper-class heritage. Eichstedt and Small point out that many of these sites (25%) fail to mention slavery at all in their interpretation, and that about 30% mention slavery one to three times in the tour process (2002: 108). While they acknowledge differences in the way that public and private plantations are interpreted, as well as differences by state or region, Eichstedt and Small do not suggest that the tour guides consciously minimise or trivialise the slave history, but are instead focused on the dominant narrative of the Big House. They are also careful to state, however, that whether the annihilation or trivialising is purposeful or not, the point remains that the slave history lacked appropriate interpretation (2002: 148).

Until the late twentieth century, the romantic Big House dominated plantation interpretation for the public, with visitors coming to experience the grandeur of antebellum life. The late 1970s and 1980s, however, saw some of the first introduction of slave life back into the interpretation of plantations. Since then, many plantations sites have introduced specific interpretative programs dedicated to slave life in an effort to engage additional audiences and bring in new descendant perspectives. Colonial Williamsburg, a living history open-air museum and living town in Virginia that was partially restored back to its pre-American Revolution identity, began introducing slave narratives into its interpretive program in 1977, where slavery was incorporated into three broader themes (Handler & Gable, 1997: 115-6). In 1979, Black actors were employed for the first time to play roles as part of the living history interpretation, and by 1988, the Williamsburg Foundation had established the Department of African American Interpretation and Presentations (Bograd & Singleton, 1997; Ellis, 1989). The early interpretations, particularly a 1994 'slave auction' re-enactment, resulted in mixed reactions, as some viewed the performances as trivialising or exploiting African American heritage, while

others defended it as educational and a way of humanising the experience for modern visitors (Jones, 1994: 1-2). In some ways, the interpretation gave a method of voice or expression to the participants, and spurred the conversation surrounding best practices for interpreting traumatic or controversial histories for the public.

As with Williamsburg, Thomas Jefferson's plantation, Monticello, began working toward interpreting slave histories in the late twentieth century with the introduction of slave life tours and the interpretation of Mulberry Row, a series of slave cabins on the property. The area had no on-site interpretation prior to 1990 and originally featured several wooden cabins with dirt floors (Stanton, 2012). In 2015, two of these were reconstructed as part of a greater effort to interpret the Hemings Cabin/Servants House T, known housing of the family of Sally Hemings, one of Jefferson's slaves, who bore several of his children. Despite the substantial evidence of the relationship between Jefferson and Hemings, it was not a part of the interpretation until recently and was updated in 2018 to include an exhibit dedicated to Hemings in the rediscovered room that may have been her living quarters in the house.

While Monticello has made strides to begin interpreting slave life at the plantation, the Sally Hemings living space exhibit highlights the mid-twentieth century mentalities around the acknowledgement and interpretation of slavery, particularly at sites of prominent American white figures. The possible Sally Hemings living quarters, close to Jefferson's bedroom in the main house, were initially converted into a men's restroom in 1941 and later renovated in the 1960s. The slave cabins at Mulberry Row had been demolished and the area partially covered with a parking lot. Both renovations made way for additional tourists to visit the site, but effectively eliminated parts of the substantial slave history to accommodate the crowds.

Community Participation in Museum Interpretation

Museums have often struggled with the interpretation

of traumatic or conflicting heritages, particularly as related to the American Civil War and descendants from both the Union and the Confederacy. The trauma of slavery and its connection to modern racism remains ever-present in American society, making the interpretation of historical slavery paramount to a continuously progressing narrative of the African American experience, and as an educational opportunity for current and future generations.

The increasing popularity of tourism to plantation sites in the south, therefore, necessitates a re-interpretation of the slave narrative as integral to the total understanding of the history of plantations. Stories and evidence that were purposefully covered up in favour of promoting more ‘mainstream’ histories (such as the Sally Hemings’ living space recently reintroduced at Monticello) are now receiving better representation as part of the overall interpretation. While the shift in acknowledging the heritage of all residents of these sites is moving in a more diverse and inclusive direction, the new interpretation serves to highlight the lack of transparency in a museum’s past, calling into question the authenticity of the narrative. This suggests that the museum has the opportunity to evolve as a catalyst for social discussion surrounding current events, by providing important historical context, as well as promoting discussion and civil discourse around histories or heritages that come into conflict, or historical and modern inequities in power and control.

Carol McDavid (1997) cites the perpetuation of racial attitudes and this disparity in power and control as a contributing factor in changing the heritage interpretation at the Levi Jordan plantation in Brazoria County, Texas. The site represents a complicated and often contested history, with power struggles not only between the former masters and former slaves, but also in multiple sides of the descendant controlling families, all of which is centred at the historic site. After acknowledging the negotiation of control that descendants of the African American and European American descendants of the plantation still face, McDavid provided the opportunity to mediate these voices and histories through

proposed interpretation of the associated heritages, giving an opportunity for future representation at the site.

McDavid’s interviews with different heritage community descendants represents one way to engage communities in heritage and historical discourse. Encouraging the active participation of heritage descendants in the narrative presents plantation museums with opportunities of engagement and a way to ensure an authentic voice or narrative in the interpretation. While in the past this has included the descendants of the enslaving family or the owners of the plantation, expanding the engagement to descendants of slaves brings a more comprehensive voice to the narrative and a diversity to the shared experiences. This also serves to engage a broader and more diverse audience in the history itself, as it helps to humanise the experience of slaves on the plantation and promote memory as a way to introduce modern civil discourse.

The active participation of all descendant heritage communities helps to reinforce a comprehensive interpretation for the total history of the plantation site, but identifying and acknowledging these heritage communities can be difficult. While history is seen as objective, heritage can be considered more subjective, as individuals and groups choose heritages and their associated artefacts with which to identify. Heritage and descendant communities associated with plantation sites could include former owners, inhabitants, or masters of plantations, as well as slaves or servants who lived there, sharecroppers who worked there, or the local and regional communities who feel connected to the property through shared memory. To tell the full story of the plantation, it is important to involve as many of these communities as possible in order to give a voice and understanding to all aspect of life on the plantation. This ensures as authentic a portrayal as possible, with equal emphasis placed on all participants of plantation life, and begins to transition away from an emphasis on only the romanticised Big House lifestyle that was the focus of early interpretation. Jackson suggests that heritage is one way of engaging in or assessing the past, so

making that heritage accessible to the public is of the utmost importance when helping visitors connect with educational material at plantation museum sites (2012: 23).

One particular plantation museum that has involved descendant communities in the interpretation is Boone Hall Plantation. The complex offers a wide variety of activities, including the traditional tour of the Big House, but also features several types of slave interpretation as well, including a storytelling/narrative session with a Gullah descendant and interpretive material in the former slave/sharecropper cabins.

The Gullah Geechee people define themselves as an ethnic and heritage community descended from enslaved west Africans who were brought to the region to work on plantations (Matory, 2005). As a result of the relative isolation in the area where they were enslaved, the Gullah Geechee maintained independent language and religious practices that help to define the group (Cross, 2008). Many of these practices represent unique heritages that have been passed down to Gullah descendants, including songs and stories that were an influential part of slave living on plantations. The Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor is defined as a US National Heritage Corridor, which recognizes Gullah/Geechee sites from Florida to North Carolina.

South Carolina in particular has grappled with a split heritage of former Confederate families and sympathisers and the descendants of slaves since the Civil War, which has resulted in underrepresentation for Black South Carolinians at many of the plantation museum sites. The city of Charleston is home to the Old Slave Mart Museum as well as the Confederate Museum, which simultaneously represent the city holding onto the white heritage past while attempting to interpret the horrors of slavery, a direct correlation to many plantation museum sites. While the balance had previously weighed toward the interpretation of the white controlling family, new interpretations and representations of slavery have begun to shift the focus toward a more comprehensive presentation. As direct descendants of slaves from the region, the Gullah heritage community can bring a representative

authenticity to the interpretation of plantation sites, and give a voice to a previously underrepresented community.

While Boone Hall's interpretative methods do include a tour of the Big House, the additional focus on slave residents helps to provide a glimpse into the slave heritage at the site and connect visitors with the associated narratives. A Slave Street and History Presentation that is offered discusses the architecture of the so-called Slave Street, the row of cabins that sit alongside the long drive to the Big House. Although the original wooden cabins that once sat there did not survive, they were eventually replaced with brick cabins that were used by sharecroppers following the emancipation of slaves. During a 2016 visit by the author, the historian leading the discussion provided a description of the original cabins and how they differed from the sharecropper cabins, specifically in comfort. Each of the cabins also features interpretive signage for self-guided tours, and includes information about archaeological research conducted along Slave Street, typical lives of slaves on the plantation, and Black History in America, which serves to tie together the history of slavery in ongoing themes of racism and discrimination.

As an additional form of interpretation, Boone Hall employs Gullah descendants as interpreters in sessions titled Exploring the Gullah Culture. Gloria, a descendant and performer from August 2016 spoke about her grandmother and great-grandmother who were both Gullah women and passed down stories and songs related to slavery in the region. Oral histories are inherently connected to slave life on the plantations and serve to provide a direct narrative of experiences. As the number of written histories from the perspectives of slaves is limited, these oral histories provide a direct link to the past in a similar way and therefore can become the basis of interpretation.

While the Boone Hall museum site provides a case study in the interpretation of the lives of all inhabitants of an antebellum plantation, it is not alone in its attempt at better representation for previously underrepresented populations. Jackson's 2011 and 2012 studies of interpretation at

antebellum plantations mention several that have begun to make the shift to include slave descendant narratives in their interpretations, including the Charles Pickney National Historic Site, which changed its charter in the late twentieth century to include an interpretation of all residents at the site (Blythe, 2000). The McLeod Plantation Historic Site, run by the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission, opened in 2015 with a focus on African Americans from 1851-1990 (Halifax, 2018). As these sites of dual heritage begin to make the shift toward empowering underrepresented populations through community involvement, they provide a precedent for inspiring other disembodied narratives in similar museums.

Re-empowering Museums in Social Discourse

Museums can be powerful negotiators of social discourse, balancing education and entertainment as a way of relating knowledge to the public. A 2008 study conducted by the Australian Research Council found that respondents to the survey felt that museums can be paramount in mediating controversial topics and presenting issues that should challenge society (Gallas & Perry, 2015). For museums dedicated to or involved in the interpretation of traumatic or controversial histories, negotiating this discourse through community engagement is one way of helping to humanise the history and narrative being presented, and facilitate modern generational understanding and empathy with people of the past. The museum, therefore, becomes the mediator and agent of change, by encouraging discussion and re-examination as part of the evolution of interpretation.

Museums specifically dedicated to history or heritage present a unique opportunity to provide an example for utilising descendant narrative representation to initiate conversations around historical accuracy, authenticity, and bias. Although history is seen as objective, the documentation of history is inherently biased by the author's voice. Additionally, visual culture can present falsehoods or emphases, becoming iconic as part of a landscape. While narratives also represent one

person or community's experience, a collection of narratives provides a human account of history that can lead to a discussion surrounding parallels of modern and historical experiences. Additionally, where marginalised communities have historically been denied a voice in the historical record, museums and careful curation present the opportunity for social inclusion.

While plantations and other antebellum and postbellum sites transition to emboldening the voices that were lost in initial interpretations, there is much to be learned from community participation in other museums related to trauma, particularly how to engage communities in a modern social discourse. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum's program to connect visitors with art therapists reported that visitors responded positively to the program, suggesting that it encouraged understanding, empathy, and catharsis, connecting the historical human experiences with modern emotions (Betts *et. al.*, 2015). These types of programs emphasise the study of history as a method of understanding modern emotion and bias, and initiate conversations around traumatic or controversial histories where personal narratives play a key role in interpretation.

Leveraging modern community and descendant voices in plantation interpretation could be used similarly to spur social discourse and promote empathy and understanding related to continuing racism and bigotry. As the United States has seen a significant increase in hate crimes in recent years (Eligon, 2018), museums related to racial inequality could play a vital role in the discussion and resolution of long-held prejudices. This presents an opportunity for museums to become active agents in social change and discourse, as opposed to passive institutions of display. With the discussion surrounding the future of Civil War Confederate monuments ongoing (Cooper, 2018), plantation sites in particular represent a way for different heritage communities to discuss and debate personal impacts of the Civil War legacy on descendants and how best to mediate the contentious history.

Engagement Strategies for Underrepresented Populations

Museums or social institutions may be hesitant to engage topics of significant social disagreement, but can employ specific strategies to encourage respectful participation as a way of overcoming controversy. Social scientist Kurt Lewin presented the concept of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) in the 1940s as a way to utilize research communities to advocate for societal change (Holkup *et al.*, 2004). The framework, which relies on cooperative community partnerships in the development of ideas, is described by Shalowitz, *et. al.* (2009) as an ‘ethical approach to research injustices against disadvantaged communities,’ particularly with regard to historic medical experimentation and modern underserved populations, but is also relevant to underrepresented heritage communities. CBPR has been used extensively with indigenous populations as a way to decolonize Eurocentric methodologies of research and encourage collaboration and reciprocity (Stanton, 2014; Tobias *et. al.*, 2013). Israel *et. al.* (2001, 1998) expand on Lewin’s work to outline core values/principles in CBPR that can be used to develop strategies for employing community-based interpretation. These include ensuring that the CBPR project: is empowering, participatory, cooperative, collaborative, and equitable, and recognizes the community as a social entity with an identity rather than as a setting or location. Each of these also represents the value system inherent in cultural heritage or historic site management, and should be primary to the strategies for engaging populations in heritage interpretation.

One of the most effective strategies to ensure representations and empowerment is inviting the participation of underrepresented voices in updating and planning interpretations, ensuring that stakeholder communities are diverse and inclusive, and that the subject matter is relevant to a diverse social experience. Heritage and descendant communities are able to identify the themes and histories that are most relevant to their experiences, and are, therefore, integral to the planning process. The voice of the heritage or

descendant communities should be first and foremost in the interpretation, not relegated to an afterthought. Employing programs, such as a lecture series, that ask for the sharing of experiences by underrepresented voices can bring narratives to broader and potentially unfamiliar communities.

For histories or narratives that can be seen as contested, confronting history can be traumatic and emotional, and interpreting slavery can be particularly challenging because of its intrinsic connection to modern oppression and racial injustice. Gallas & Perry (2015) recommend institutional investment and staff training to confront the conflicting narratives internally to allow for a frank and open interpretation for visitors. Providing staff with support and the skills to deliver honest narratives ensures that any living history or guided tour guides will not be caught off guard by visitor questions, and will interpret materials from equal perspectives.

Using the museum as a way to encourage therapeutic participation through art is another strategy to engage indigenous or underserved populations in expression and provide a visual component to narratives expressed in the interpretation. Providing a space to patrons to create art related to social discourse, racial inequity, or collective trauma utilizes the museum as an agent in the continuing creation of heritage, and offers a safe space for visual dialogue. In a similar project at the Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Rock Art Centre in New Zealand, the Ngāi Tahu Māori Trust hosts events for children to create new art, and features a gallery at the end of the exhibit with art produced by modern Māori artists. The art is seen as a continuation of indigenous traditions and an expression of modern heritage. As with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, art can also be utilized in a therapeutic way to encourage empathy with heritage groups.

Future Opportunities and Challenges

As museums and historic sites become increasingly more engaged in broader communities, they present the opportunity for social discourse and modern interpretation of

difficult or traumatic themes. They strive to present authentic narratives of history and life for the public, providing a valuable resource for visitors to engage with people and conflicts of the past. As museums continue to evolve, the presented interpretations represent both opportunities and challenges for social involvement.

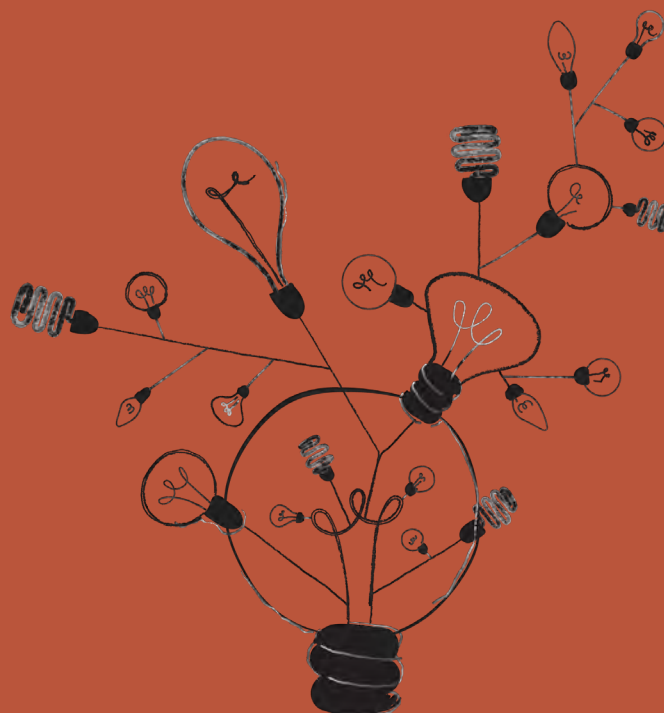
For antebellum plantations and open-air museum sites, social involvement presents the opportunity to engage different descendant populations in the interpretation, giving the narrative additional authenticity and promoting understanding and empathy. The ever-changing modern political discourse and constantly evolving histories or heritages, however, represent several of the challenges faced by these sites as they continue to build new programs for visitors. Additionally, the disappearing living memory of descendants also makes adding authentic voices a challenge. The further removed the interpreting event becomes, the fewer descendants with living memory there may be to assist in the interpretation, suggesting that the recording of these narratives is imperative to the operation of the site.

While plantations in the South still have a significant way to go in order to represent all their descendants and histories, the strides made by several plantations show that applying some of the community engagement strategies helps to balance the presented narratives and provide an emboldened voice for those communities that were previously disembodied. In a national political environment that has seen a perpetuation of racism and bigotry, striving for equality of narrative is more paramount than ever, presenting history museums with the opportunity to play a crucial role in civil discourse.

Bibliography

- Adams, J. (2007). *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory and Property on the Postslavery Plantation*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.
- Betts, D. J., Potash, J. S., Luke, J. J., and Kelso, M. (2015). 'An art therapy study of visitor reactions to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum', *Museum Management and Curatorship* 30(1): 21-43.
- Blythe, R. (2000). *Charles Pickney National Historic Site Historic Resource Study*. Atlanta, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.
- Bograd, M. D. & T. A. Singleton (1997). 'The Interpretation of Slavery: Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Colonial Williamsburg', in Jameson, J.H. (ed.) *Presenting Archaeology to the Public: Digging for Truths*: 193-204. Walnut Creek, Altamira Press.
- Cooper, A. (2018). 'The History and Future of Confederate Monuments,' transcript, *60 Minutes*, 15 July. Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-the-history-and-future-of-confederate-monuments/> (Accessed 17 January 2019).
- Davis, W. C. (1996). *The Cause Lost: Myths and Realities of the Confederacy*. Lawrence, University of Kansas Press.
- Dickerson, D. L. (2003). *The Reconstruction Era*. Westport, Greenwood Press.
- Eichstedt, J. L., and Small, S. (2002). *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*. Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Eligon, J. (2018). 'Hate Crimes Increase for the Third Consecutive Year, F.B.I. Reports,' *The New York Times*, 13 November. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/13/us/hate-crimes-fbi-2017.html> (Accessed 17 January 2019).
- Ellis, R. M. (1989). *Presenting the Past: Education, Interpretation, and the Teaching of Black History at Colonial Williamsburg*. PhD dissertation, School of Education, College of William and Mary, Ann Arbor.
- Evans, W. M. (2009). *Open Wound: The Long View of Race in America*. Urbana, University of Chicago Press.
- Fesler, G. (2010). 'Excavating the Spaces and Interpreting the Places of Enslaved Americans and Their Descendants', in Ellis, C.E. & Ginsburg, R. (eds.) *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*: 27-49. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Halifax, S. (2018). 'McLeod Plantation Historic Site: Sowing Truth and Change,' *The Public Historian* 40(3): 252-277.
- Hamp, S. K. (2006). 'The Value Exchange: Museums and Their Context,' *Curator* 49(1): 45-53.
- Handler, R. & Gable, E. (1997). *The New History in an Old Museum*. Durham, Duke University Press.
- Hoelscher, S. (2003). 'Making Place, Making Race: Performances of Whiteness in the Jim Crow South,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93(3): 657-686.
- Holland, J. J. (2016). *The Invisibles: The Untold Story of African American Slaves in the White House*. Guilford, Rowman & Littlefield.
- Jackson, A. T. (2011). 'Shattering Slave Life Portrayals: Uncovering Subjugated Knowledge in U.S. Plantation Sites in South Carolina and Florida', *American Anthropologist* 113(3): 448-462.
- Jackson, A. T. (2012). *Speaking for the Enslaved: Heritage Interpretation at Antebellum Plantation Sites*. Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press.
- Jones, T. (1994). 'Living History of Undying Racism Colonial Williamsburg "Slave Auction" Draws Protest, Support', *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter* (1)3: 1-3.
- Lewis, K. E. (1985). 'Plantation Layout and Function in the South Carolina Lowcountry,' in Singleton, T.A. (ed.) *The Archaeology of Slavery and Plantation Life*. London, Routledge.
- Matory, J. L. (2005). *Black Atlantic Religion*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- McDavid, C. (1997). 'Descendants, Decision, and Power: The Public Interpretation of the Archaeology of the Levi Jordan Plantation', *Historical Archaeology* 31(3): 114-131.
- Morison, S. E. (1965). *The Oxford History of the American People*. New York, Oxford University Press.

- Nolan, A. T. (2000). 'The Anatomy of the Myth', in Gallagher, C.W. & Nolan, A.T. (eds.) *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Orser, C. E. Jr., & A. M. Nekola (2016). 'Plantation Settlement from Slavery to Tenancy: An Examples of a Piedmont Plantation in South Carolina', in Singleton, T.A. (ed.) *The Archaeology of Slavery and Plantation Life*. London, Routledge.
- Phillip, M. C. (1994). 'To Reenact or not to Reenact? For Some, Williamsburg Slave Auction Shows Discomfort of Humiliating Past', *Black Issues in Higher Education*; *Reston* 11(18): 24.
- Singleton, T. A. (ed.) (1985). *The Archaeology of Slavery and Plantation Life*. London, Routledge.
- Stanton, L. C. (2012). *"Those Who Labor for My Happiness:" Slavery at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello*. Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press.
- Vlach, J. M. (1993). *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.



Within and Without: Inclusions and Exclusions in Folk and Tribal Museums in India

By Sarita Sundar

Abstract

This paper examines the curatorial approaches used to display art and artefacts associated with intangible heritage at two museums, the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat (CKP) in Bangalore and the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) in Bhopal. Curation at CKP seems to be influenced by an art connoisseur's gaze, giving primacy to aesthetics rather than to the socio-religious contexts of objects and their relationship with communities. The IGRMS, on the other hand, engages in a pluralist vision of inclusivity by involving communities in creating exhibits. The paper also examines the success of new models of museological practice and contemporary anthropological ideologies in addressing issues of inclusion and representation in Indian museums. It questions whether these practices have managed to realign power imbalances in museological approaches by shifting them away from a legacy of paternalistic stewardship, exoticism and 'othering'.

Keywords

Indian Folk and Tribal Museums, Postcolonial, Intangible Heritage

'... the leather puppets they preserved were extremely beautiful. When we asked if they would part with the puppets, they said they would let us know after consulting with their men folk. We went to the house a month later with a lot of hope and expectation. They led us to the well in the outskirts of the village and told us they had thrown the puppets into the well. We were shocked that their belief not to part with the puppets was so deeply entrenched, and disappointed for having lost a treasure trove. Those who could be described as conservative and obstinate among our village folk insist on continuing certain rituals, regardless of their relevance to modern times.' (Rao, 2000)

'I helped create a Gond exhibit. We built a house and brought in all kinds of things you find in a village home. We made a Gond house. Everything was in it as it is in the village, but it still felt strange to me. It wasn't home. I wouldn't feel comfortable

sleeping inside it.' (Gond artist, Bhajju Shyam, referring to an exhibit at the IGRMS, in Wolf et al., 2015)

Nanjunda Rao's disappointment at being unable to convince the puppeteers to part with their puppets seems to echo an indigenous imitation of colonial discourse – of the West's hegemonic curatorial practices taking primacy over local knowledge systems in the production of museums. Exhibits at the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya in Bhopal, on the other hand, created with folk artists like Bhajju Shyam as part of a participatory museum practice, appear alien and distant to the artist himself.

The collection of leather puppets that Nanjunda Rao alludes to is exhibited at the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat (CKP), a visual arts complex in Bangalore. Rao was part of a group of private individuals – art collectors and historians – who initiated the setting up of the complex in 1960. Over the years the CKP, while remaining a non-

government trust, has been substantially funded by the state – eventually being declared a ‘public authority’ in 2016. Today it houses a Folk and Tribal Art Museum and contemporary art galleries. The leather puppets collected by Rao from 1966 onwards, as part of a research project, were documented into a book, *Karnatakada Togalu Gombe*, or *Karnataka Shadow Puppets* in 2000. In 2007, the puppets were showcased at The Folk and Tribal Art Museum in CKP with panels of interpretative text from Rao’s book.

Bhajju Shyam, according to art-historian and author Jyotindra Jain, is one of the most important, innovative artists from the Gond tribe of central India (Jain, 2002). He, along with other tribal artists from across India, was invited to participate in the conception of exhibits at the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS). IGRMS is a state-owned museum located in Bhopal, the capital of the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. The mandate of the IGRMS is two-fold: to present the evolution of mankind in India and to act as a centre of research in museology. The IGRMS belongs to an alternative model – a product of the global New Museum Movement of the 1970s (Wolf et al., 2015: 9; Vergo, 1989) and the 1988 Guwahati Declaration in India that followed the conference on ‘New Museology and Indian Museums’ (Thiagarajan, 2016).

It was Bhajju Shyam’s expression of discomfort with the exhibit he created that initiated a workshop in 2010 organised by Tara Books, a publishing house, and the IGRMS (Wolf et al., 2015). At the workshop, 38 folk and tribal artists responded visually to questions on what a museum meant to them. Their responses in the form of traditional artworks were interspersed with conversations in *Between Memory and Museum: A Dialogue with Folk and Tribal Artists* (Wolf et al., 2015).

This paper examines the curatorial approaches used to display art and artefacts associated with intangible heritage at the two museums, the CKP and the IGRMS. The CKP exhibition seems to be influenced by an art connoisseur’s gaze, giving primacy to aesthetics rather than the socio-religious

contexts of objects and their relationship with communities. The IGRMS, on the other hand, engages in a pluralist vision of inclusivity by involving communities in creating exhibits. The paper also examines the success of new models of museological practice and contemporary anthropological ideologies. Using the framework of postcolonial writing (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988), this paper questions whether these practices and ideologies have managed to realign power imbalances in museological approaches by shifting them away from a legacy of paternalistic stewardship, exoticism and ‘othering’ (Spivak, 1985). Said (1978) writes on the construction of ‘the Orient’ by the West as an exotic ‘other’ in a reductionist, fixed and distancing manner. Rao’s comment on the villagers’ lack of understanding on the value of the artefacts is very close to the social differentiation that Spivak comments upon in *Rani of Sirmur* (1985), where she highlights the sociological aspect of ‘othering’ in an archival letter written by a British army officer – referring to a ‘highlander’ in India as displaying a lack of ‘knowledge of refinement’.

The History of the Museum in India

To understand the state of contemporary museology, it is important to place it within the history of museums in India. The word for museum in Hindi is *ajabgah*, literally wonder house, and historically India has had versions of repositories for curiosities and treasures in its *citrasalas*, or picture galleries. These were often within temples or palaces – art and artefacts were rarely seen in a vacuum, out of their cultural environment of social rituals (Guha-Thakurta, 2004: 79). Craftsmen guilds would store ritual objects in an area that could only be visited by artists who have been ‘initiated’. Damaged or old artefacts were often discarded after a ritual.

In pre-Independence India, with the establishment of art colleges and galleries under the British, the tenets of Western aesthetics and art determined the selection of indigenous cultural objects within museums, irrespective of their inherent utilitarian or ceremonial values, and ‘the ethnographic object began to be aestheticised as art’ (Jain,

2002:16). The first institutionalised museum model in India was the establishment of the Indian Museum in Kolkata by the British in 1814 ‘to excavate, classify, catalogue, and display India’s artifactual past to itself’ (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1999: 409). After Independence, the newly formed nation set up several institutions and models with varying types of governance: national and regional museums, privately owned galleries, museums run by trusts and temporary displays in festivals (Goetz, 1954). Though the interpretation of heritage in each of these models varied depending on social, political or economic agendas, they were unified in their aim to preserve the nation’s heritage and strengthen its identity through the preservation and display of visual artefacts from the past. Museums under the newly independent state continued the mandate set by the British to source objects from folk and tribal communities in villages and shift them to urban museums (Guha-Thakurta, 2004: 79).

Rao terms the collection of shadow puppets as a ‘treasure trove’ seemingly referencing the Treasure Trove Act of 1888 that bestowed authority to the British Indian government to legally acquire the vast collection of objects or ‘treasures’. The primary intent of the Act was to assert the ‘indefeasible rights’ (Guha-Thakurta, 2004: 79) of people with authority in government museums to conserve and retain these objects within the country and to check ‘vandalism and offences against treasure troves’ (Guha-Thakurta, 2004: 79). Though Rao was not a government official, he takes on the onus of responsibility to acquire the shadow puppets for preservation in a public museum, so that artists and researchers can appreciate and study these objects. With an object-oriented approach, the shadow puppet gallery at The Folk and Tribal Art Museum at the CKP in Bangalore treats the artefacts as static and not-evolving, firmly encased in glass. This approach is an antithesis of Ben-Amos’ articulation of folk culture as ‘mobile, manipulative, and transcultural.’ In a catalogue, Rao states that there is hardly any ‘authentic’ art and the skills or interest to carry forward the tradition is no longer found in the present generation – or has been diluted by the pressures

of commodification (Kejriwal, 2003). His concern for a lost authenticity in many ways echoes a nostalgia found amongst British colonialists, who systematically portrayed India as an idyllic, unchanging pastoral landscape – removed from the commercial demands of industrialisation (Mathur, 2007: 11).

New Museum Models in India

The global New Museum Movement was a call to involve indigenous communities in the decision making process of setting up museums. In India the Movement had also taken on an additional mandate of decolonising the museum from its long tradition of colonial and anthropological leaning by challenging existing ways of representation (Dutta, 2010). The ecomuseum, a New Museum Movement model, celebrating and reflecting diverse heritage and using contextual or *in situ* preservation models (Davis, 1999), did not take off as one would expect in a pluralistic India (Dutta, 2010). This may have been because heritage management was not yet ready to radically break free of an authoritarian colonial legacy and because the global economy offered up alternative avenues for the commodification of heritage (Dutta, 2012).

Aditi: The Living Arts of India was a seminal exhibit in its manner of displays and provocative interpretation techniques, part of the ambitious ‘Festival of India’ that travelled across museums and cultural centres in the United States in 1985 (Kessler, 1985). If the colonial perspective was to treat the subjects and objects of museums as petrified, selected on the basis of their exotic, almost alien nature – this exhibition was an early attempt to decolonise museum exhibits using the concept of a ‘living’ museum, showcasing traditional Indian crafts as alive and in context, with the participation of folk artists in the exhibit. The catalogue from the exhibition states, ‘Like the potter at his wheel, we have tried to place the object and the skill (through demonstration wherever possible) in its context (the marriage). We then go further to suggest the link between the object and the maker and its contemporary usage’.

Aditi orchestrated a mediated experience around

rural Indian traditions. Life in an imagined Indian village was simulated, with visitors being able to walk around mock-ups of mud huts and mingle with craftsmen and performers who were flown in from across India to become ‘part’ of the exhibit. A Washington Post review sums up the hyper-reality of the experience, ‘costumed performers sitting in the corners suddenly come alive like fantasy figures in Disney World. Itinerant jugglers, acrobats, puppeteers, balladeers and magicians wander here, as well as two impersonators, actors likely to lurk in a darkened corner and start chanting at you’ (Kessler, 1985). Cantwell (1993:63), referring to the exhibit, suggests that the ‘spurious disingenuous quality of the artificial settings’ with living beings, rather than reversing, brought to focus the ‘objectification and domination’ that the exhibition was trying to move away from.

Notwithstanding these reservations, the exhibition was a successful diplomatic initiative to present Indian culture in a new light – and back in India, heralded a call to involve representation from indigenous and village communities in heritage practices. Spurred by the worldwide New Museum Movement and The Conference of New Museology and Indian Museums in 1988, the 1988 Guwahati Declaration formalised these new ideas into mandates for Indian museums to follow. The IGRMS was one of the earliest state-run museums to take these ideas forward (Thiagarajan, 2016).

The 2015 charter of the National Mission on Intangible Cultural Heritage of India states:

As heritage is a dynamic process, the definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage needs to be flexible and open-ended rather than conclusive. It is a social process. It is a state of constant evolution and therefore should not be viewed merely as expressions/products (or items produced) that need to be safeguarded.

The charter, while emphasizing the importance of looking at intangible aspects of heritage, does continue

to acknowledge the role of material objects as vehicles to convey the intangible. While directives have been laid out as canons in official charters, what is on the ground is often quite different; it has not been easy for heritage professionals to shake an inherited post-colonial, paternalistic attitude of a petrified preservation of physical objects and visuals. Creating a false dichotomy of ‘native or rural’ inferiority, curators and collectors often take on a moral responsibility and superiority; psychologically, and unilaterally, authorising themselves to assume a civilising mission to enlighten, guide and culturally assimilate the weaker ‘other’.

The interpretation at the galleries at the CKP

HK Kejriwal, a private collector and co-founder of CKP along with Rao, bequeathed a substantial collection of art to set up The Museum of Folk and Tribal Art at CKP. His purpose is clearly stated in the panel at the entrance: ‘for researchers and students of art and culture – a knowledge base where national and international, rural and urban, high art and folk art can be seen in unison allowing for cross-cultural linkages, new conversations in the study or art’. Kejriwal recalls his childhood (in a conversation with the author) in pre-independence Kolkata, where from the synthesis of British and Indian culture, as described in an introduction to *An Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, ‘a new type of Indian arose: urban, professional or entrepreneurial, newspaper-reading, Anglophile’ (Jack, 2001: viii). Kejriwal’s concern over ‘the degeneration of folk art and of a simple people’ is voiced in a panel in the museum – suggesting that he is not entirely free of a colonial legacy of paternalistic stewardship and ‘othering’.

The interpretation at the galleries at the CKP is a matrix of negotiations between the various actors: the collector-donor’s personal vision, the curator’s conceptual thought, the art historian’s critical review and the commercial and political agendas of the management with minimal or no consultation with artists-craftsmen in the creation or planning of displays. The interpretation tends to veer towards

an art-oriented approach, transitioning smoothly from the contemporary art gallery – a possible reflection of Kejriwal's conviction that 'there should be no boundaries between art and craft, that there is no "high" or "low" art' (Kejriwal, 2003) (Figure. 1). Sculptures are interspersed between artworks on the walls and there is a casual scattering of staged scenarios of rural life: a wooden palanquin, a hut within a larger room, and a tableau of a craftsman's house. There is very little interpretative content in the form of text, archival pictures or oral histories of the communities to assist a visitor understand the social realities surrounding the art.

In the museum, puppets are sandwiched in glass cases and illuminated with a view to shimmer and display the aesthetics and workmanship of the craft (Figure. 2). Yet, as a visitor, one cannot escape the feeling that the puppets are imprisoned. Rao's comment about the puppeteer's reluctance to part with their puppets reveal many nuances in the relationship between collectors and craft communities. Of the several subtle implications, two stand out immediately and in sharp contrast to each other. First, there seems to be an inherent power that bestows a moral superiority to those authorised with heritage discourse (Smith, 2006) and there appears to have been a colonial transfer of curatorial authority. Second, there are strong, almost familial, ties that connect folk performers to their objects.

What prompts a family to hurriedly destroy objects that were once core to their livelihood rather than enclose them in a distant museum setting? Relegating traditions to a fossilised past is in many ways alien to the thinking of folk and tribal communities not just in India but globally (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1999: 407).

Locked behind glass, they seemed to beckon him into their secret, Lilliputian world — and also to cry for their release (Chatwin, 2005:17).

'An object in a museum case', he wrote, 'must suffer the de-natured existence of an animal in the zoo. In any museum the object dies — of suffocation

and the public gaze...' (Chatwin, 2005:17).

The *thogalu gombayata* (shadow puppets) performers formally bid farewell to old and unused puppets by releasing them in water, usually in a river, in a ritual that resembles Hindu death ceremonies. For Rao, who sees the objects as a 'treasure trove' to be conserved for posterity, the act of drowning the puppets in a well is not relevant, but for community members these rituals are a way to 'free the souls' of the objects, rather than have them 'die of suffocation — and the public gaze' in a museum. Chatwin's fictional character Utz seems to echo what the shadow puppet community feels about the puppet's plight at the CKP and what, across the world, some Native American communities feel about their masks — that they get lonely in museums (Archambault, 1993).

A Participative Model at the IGRMS

The IGRMS is an experiment that takes a project of preservation and turns it into one of creation, with communities converting oral narratives into works of art across exhibits and mock-up villages. Across 200 acres, various folk and tribal communities have collaborated with museum officials to recreate houses with wall art, utilitarian and ritual objects as found in their villages. Baiga artist Ladlibai says, 'This is not a *sangrahalay* (museum), but our *ghar* (home). Here, our children and grandchildren will know what our culture, past and present, means.' (Ramnarayan, 2013). There is a sense of ownership and spontaneously a new language of conceptual installations is emerging. These new museums also act as repositories of knowledge and skills for younger community members.

The museum has been successful in creating opportunities for community authorship within a collaborative framework and democratising the uneven space that traditional museums occupied; here, the 'objects or subjects' have been able to 'seize the means and media to describe themselves' and 'return the gaze' by creating their own auto-



Figure. 1
Gond art displayed at the Folk and Tribal Art Museum at the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat transitions smoothly from the Contemporary Art Galleries, 2015, by the Author



Figure. 2
At the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat, shadow puppets are sandwiched in glass displays that shows the object's material qualities, but do not convey the context of the performance or their narrative potential, 2015, by the Author

ethnographic text (Martineau, 2001). These dialogic models are inclusive not just for communities but also for visitors. By challenging and subverting the modernist/colonial singular, authoritative curator point of view, they create frameworks for the decolonial/multiple points of view.

Bhajju Shyam, echoing what the puppet family may have felt (and quietly protested against by drowning the puppets), speaks of his objection to the representation of objects in a museum: 'What is displayed as a token or symbol of our culture, let's say a drum, has a soul. This soul is submerged and dampened behind the glass. You should be able to pray to it; the display is a problem. Some things shouldn't be on the ground and some shouldn't be hung on the wall. The way they are kept and used also has meaning for us' (Wolf et al., 2015: 31). The intent behind museums like the IGRMS has been to involve community members as narrators and guides – with museum professionals only providing support as facilitators. However well intentioned and diligent the collaborative efforts have been at the IGRMS – the best representations cannot be a replacement for reality. And Bhajju felt a strangeness – a lack of authenticity in the exhibit he created. It is important to ask whether this is because the power balance still remains with dominant groups authorised to engage in heritage discourse – who have made decisions unilaterally on the selection of objects or experiences – or it is because the interpretation of the exhibit and the way in which they came to being needs to be re-examined.

The new museums and exhibits therefore have their own issues. Isolating a single performance from its original context into commodified bytes of experiences end up becoming the spectacles Debord speaks of that 'invert reality' (1983). Recreating 'stage-less' environments where spectators and other elements come together against the horizon of a village ground or urban street is not always feasible.

While 'folklore is true to its own nature when it takes place within the group itself' (Ben-Amos, 1971: 13) and it is ideal to situate all folk art *in situ*, there is an argument to be made for displaying cultural art practices in metropolitan

centres such as Bhopal. Displays such as *Aditi*, which travel to urban centres far from their place of origin, do increase an awareness of craft traditions and indirectly help craftsmen sustain their livelihoods. However, in creating spectacles that are highly mediated and border on being artificially synthesised, it is important to be sensitive to the possible anachronism of situating native cultures – and people – in urban and alien settings.

Performances or live art displays by artists are organised regularly on the IGRMS premises. Traditionally however, artworks on the walls of houses in villages are not created as one-time installations, but are ceremonial events; the process of creation a performance in its own right. For visitors without the benefit of experiencing performances in their original context, these replica houses with their visuals and objects tend to have a desolate and mediated feel (Figure. 3). Artists like Bhajju recognise the lack of spirit in such replicas. These environments run the risk of being tinged with nostalgia, connoisseurship and elitism, or of recreating earlier paternalistic patterns of curatorship.

The Evolving Museum

Museums such as the IGRMS have laid the groundwork toward the creation of participative, inclusive museums in India, even if implementation is slow and labored (Sebastian, 2015). What is reassuring is that these museum models, like the intangible heritage they represent, are also evolving; even more reassuring are the self-reflective and self-critical discourses that aim to better what has already been done.

'The museum has our designs on canvas, up on the wall. But there is not much about our lives – the fact that we are nomads, the way we move through forests to reach villages'. This comment, by folk artist Shanti Bai Marawe, points to how a celebration of art and craft that 'feeds the cult of the marvelous' (Greenblatt, 1991) often disregards or gives scant importance to the context of their lives. Rajendar Shyam imagines what the entrance to a museum could be

through his visual response. He asks for an articulation of the current issues and struggles they face: 'I thought of it as a symbol of what the museum holds within and what it keeps out' (Wolf et al., 2015). Even if 'the gap between lived life and its iconic representation can never completely be bridged' – representing a community need not to be seen as a futile exercise (Wolf et al., 2015); while speaking of the histories of the communities and the craft traditions it is equally important to convey the evolving present.

Heritage institutions do not always follow the guidelines laid out in their charters that stress a move towards the protection of processes and communities and not just objects. Often it is more immediate and commercially beneficial to use material or visual manifestations, easier to safeguard a tangible thing in a glass case or to document images in archives, than to safeguard an intangible activity. Nonetheless, for the long-term sustenance of intangible heritage, there is a need to facilitate the transmission of heritage practices, and however difficult, to create action plans that invite collective consensus from all the stakeholders. While the process of change may be slow – continuous and dynamic evaluation is critical. Local, nimbler, self-sustaining organisations have to be birthed and networked with national ones.

Museums mostly cater to the expectations of an assumed urban audience. National sensibilities are respected, the exploits and connoisseurship of dominant groups celebrated. For artists like Bhajju and the puppeteer family, the aesthetics of display are not as important as how the object is 'treated' in its new environment and how people engage with it. It may be more important to explore the place that the objects have in the lives of *contemporary* community members, than to display fossilised, lifeless pieces from the past – and to acknowledge that they are also audiences in these spaces.

How does one breathe life into the mute puppet in a museum interpretation? In many ways the 'wonder-creating' potential of a shadow puppet is immense, justifying the creation of purely experiential spaces that 'shine light' onto

the object with minimal contextual information (Figure. 4). Could an audio-visual installation showcase the dynamism and vibrancy of the art and enthrall viewers? Will an embodied installation that displays the sheer mastery and ingenuity of the craft encourage an appreciation of not just the material qualities of the object but also the larger context it is part of; the lives of the craftspeople and their environments?

Galleries should aim to create engaging spaces by recreating the *essence* of the *embodied* experiences at performance sites rather than attempting to reconstruct visualisations of the performances – to create spaces as Greenberg says 'as much in an audience's mind as in the physical' (Greenberg 2005: 226), engaging with all the senses, not just sight. With no physical division, spectators surround the performance in folk and popular festivals, and in so doing they break the theatrical 'fourth wall'. By deconstructing boundaries in museums, spectators could be invited into the narrative and to be part of a shared performance experience. Without attempting to create replicas of performances, the museum then becomes an enactment space that in some way dissimulates rather than simulates (Baudrillard, 1981); it recognises the reality of experiences that are outside of the walls of the museum, rather than negating their existence.

In conclusion, even if the rigid and generic frameworks such as those listed in national charters have not always worked due to the complexity and diversity in India, this paper calls for a few broad guidelines to be put in place to ensure the sustainability of heritage. Firstly, systems of informed and appropriate consent should be formulated when engaging with communities within heritage spaces in India. A concerted attempt to ensure that knowledge systems, as Mignolo asserts, are 'geographical in their historicity' by retaining the voice of interpretation with local and originating communities – will help decolonise the museum (Mignolo, 2000:67; Bhabra, 2014). Keeping channels open with all parties, being both contributors and beneficiaries, will not only allow for explorations into new curatorial approaches, but will also make space for disruptive innovation.



Figure. 3
A deserted hut at the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya village display. (Picture Credit: Palash Vaswani <http://www.dsource.in/resource/tribal-habitats/habitat-exhibition/jharkhand/index.html> Accessed July, 2015)



Figure. 4
Tholubommata, the shadow puppet art form from Andhra Pradesh is performed in village squares. The puppets dance behind a fabric screen to the accompaniment of music and light installations that render the characters with a vibrant and emotive quality, 2012, by the Author

There should be recognition that folk and other indigenous art forms are not trapped in a mythical past but are continuously evolving. What follows naturally from this is that museums need not always strive towards an ‘achieved’ position, but could attempt to remain comfortable in a state of contestation and process. Theatrical approaches and new media technologies, or ‘fifth wall’ techniques (Koepnik, 2007), can create environments that mark a shift from prioritising the material and the static towards recognition of process, transience and temporality – allowing visitors to see beyond the walls of galleries – and recognise traditions as being dynamic, transient and fluid.

The goal should be to facilitate environments that encourage respect for other systems of meaning; this could mean a completely different way of looking at traditions rather than as monolithic art-centric models. While acknowledging the importance of the poetics of museum exhibitions and displays, this paper calls out the importance of not discounting the political and historical contexts under which community ideologies are shrouded. In tribal and folk memory houses, objects have a particular significance for community members; these understandings should be taken into consideration when planning interpretation.

The purpose of this paper is to assert that even if the constraints of budgets, existing collections, and points of view veer the choice towards a single curator approach, forums for dialogue should be facilitated in order to even out relationships and unravel local processes of knowledge production. Organising more participative workshops, such as the one at IGRMS, will help work through the binaries between local and universal belief systems; preservation of artefacts versus the relationships that communities have with their objects; and debates on ownership and value. Ultimately this much is certain, even if charters lay out guidelines, folk and tribal museums must evolve in much the same way that the art itself does. Quite simply, while some may view glass boxes as a form of cultural imprisonment, others may see them as a way of preserving heritage and showcasing

inspiration for future generations. Just as publications such as *Between Memory and the Museum* have become platforms for community voices, museums should go beyond their traditional role of merely displaying objects to become spaces that encourage debate, promote dialogue and inspire critical enquiry.

Bhajju’s concern was that the house he created for the museum was not true to an ideal original and Shanti Bai’s was that there was not enough about their lives in the museum. However, shouldn’t a museum go beyond an accurate and complete documentation of lived lives? Shouldn’t it instead aim to create opportunities that inspire wonder and encapsulate spirit – not as much to feed the ‘cult of the marvelous’ – but to encourage a sensitivity and respect to the ‘others’ around us?

At IGRMS, Bhajju Shyam, Shanti Bai and other artists have built houses and exhibits representative of their own homes. As replicated imitations, they lack the soul and authenticity that Bhajju feels a home should have. In *Between Memory and the Museum*, artists freely responded using their own art and conceptual tools to depict concepts that break away from existing norms. Their responses are varied and vibrant: they depict museum doorways with elephants and horses – to show what is within and what is outside of a museum; they use metaphors of great banyan trees with a multitude of interconnected lives weaving in and out; they see the museum as beehives that collect and store honey as a metaphor for knowledge and tradition; they show the museum as a festival, alive with people celebrating and sharing ideas. In many ways, they have already put together blueprints of ‘houses of thought’ as suggested by Mignolo and Walsh (2018), paraphrasing Audre Lorde (1984): ‘using not the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house’, but their own conceptual tools to build museum houses of thought and possibility. This paper asserts that these visualisations, should be given the opportunity to take on tangible forms that reverse, displace, and seize agency with engagement and reflection, dialogue and empathy – ensuring the sustenance of

heritage with spirit and soul.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the late Mr HK Kejriwal for taking me through his collection and sharing his vision. Thanks also to Shobha, Akshaya and Tanya for their comments and editing assistance.

Bibliography

- Appadurai, A., Breckenridge, C.A. (1999). 'Museums are Good to Think: Heritage on View in India' in Boswell, D., Evans, J. (eds) *Representing the Nation: A Reader: Histories, Heritage, and Museums*: 404-420. New York, Routledge.
- Archambault, J. (1993). 'American Indians and American museums', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 118 (H.1): 7-22.
- Bal, H.B. (2013). 'A River Runs Through It', *Yahoo News* 18th November 2013. Available at: <http://in.news.yahoo.com/a-river-runs-through-it-062425087.html> (Accessed 2 January 2014).
- Baudrillard, J. (1981). *Simulacra and Simulation: The Body in Theory* translated by Glaser. S. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.
- Ben-Amos, D. (1971). 'Toward New Perspectives in Folklore', *The Journal of American Folklore* 84 (331): 3-15.
- Bhambra, G.K. (2014) 'Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues', *Postcolonial Studies* 17(2): 115-121. Available at: DOI: 10.1080/13688790.2014.966414 (Accessed 2 January 2014).
- Cantwell, R. (1993). *Ethnomimesis: Folklife and the Representation of Culture*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.
- Catalogue. (1985) *Aditi: The Living Arts of India*. Washington DC, Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Chatwin, B. (2005). *Utz*. London: Vintage.
- Davis, P. (1999). *Ecomuseums: A Sense of Place*. Leicester, Leicester University Press.
- Debord, G. (1983). *Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit, Black and Red.
- Dutta, S. (2010). *Ecomuseum: Perspectives in India*. Delhi, Agam Kala Prakashan.
- Dutta, P. (2012). 'The Other Ecologies: Why There is no Ecomuseum in India'. in Lira, S., Amoeda, R. Pinheiro, C., Davis, P., Stefano, M., Barcelos, G.C. (eds) *Ecomuseum 2012: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Ecomuseums, Community Museums and Living Communities, Portugal: Green Line Institute for Sustainable Development*: 103-107.
- Eco, U. (1986). *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*. San Diego, Harcourt Brace.
- Goetz H. (1954). 'The Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery', *Museum International* 7 (1): 15-25.
- Government of India. (1889). 'Treasure Trove Act' *Proceedings of the Revenue and Agricultural Department, Archaeology Branch*.
- Greenberg, S. (2005). 'The Vital Museum' in MacLeod, S. (ed) *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*: 226-237. London and New York, Routledge.
- Greenblatt, S. (1991). 'Resonance and Wonder' in Karp, I., Lavine, S.D. (eds) *Exhibiting Cultures: the Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*: 42-56. Washington D.C. and London, Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Guha-Thakurta, T. (2004). *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000). 'Objects and Interpretative Processes' in Hooper-Greenhill, E. (eds) *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*: 116-119. London, Routledge.
- Jack, I. (2001). 'Introduction' in Chaudhuri, N.C. *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*: v-xi. New York, The New York Review Books.
- Jain, J. (2002). 'Folk Artists of Bengal and Contemporary Images: A Case of Reverse Appropriation' in Dalmia, Y. (ed) *Contemporary Indian Art* 53 (3). Mumbai, Marg Publication.
- Kejriwal, H.K. (2003). *Arts of the Earth*. Bangalore, HK Kejriwal Foundation.
- Kessler, P. (1985). 'Aditi: A Passage from India', *The Washington Post* (June 7th 1985). Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1985/06/07/aditi-a-passage-from-india/e425329f-99f1-4797-9e32-fd368a251d49/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.018398ff30ad (Accessed 8 January 2019).
- Koepnick, L.P. (2007). *Framing Attention: Windows on Modern German Culture*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lorde, A. (1984). 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*: 110- 114. CA, Crossing Press.
- Mathur, S. (2007). *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display*. Los Angeles, California University Press.
- Martineau, J. (2001). 'Autoethnography and Material Culture: The Case of Bill Reid', *Biography* 24 (1): 242-258.
- Mignolo, W. (2000). 'The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101(1).
- Mignolo, W., Walsh, C. (2018). *On Decoloniality*. Durham and London, Duke University Press.
- Ramnarayan, G. (2013). 'The Art of the Adivasi', *The Hindu Newspaper* (July 13 2013). Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/features/magazine/the-art-of-the-advasi/article4912171.ece> (Accessed 20 December 2013).
- Rao, M.S.N. (2000). *Leather Puppetry in Karnataka*. Bangalore, Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat Trust.
- Said, E.W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York, Pantheon.
- Sebastian, V. (2015). 'Adivasis and the Anthropological Gaze', *Economic and Political Weekly*. L (40) Available at: <http://www.epw.in/perspectives/advasis-and-anthropological-gaze.html> (Accessed 20 December 2015).
- Shyam, B. (2004). *The London Jungle Book*, Chennai, Tara Books.
- Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*. London, Routledge.
- Spivak, G.C. (1988). 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Nelson, C., Grossberg, L. (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*: 270-313. London, Macmillan.
- Spivak, G.C. (1985). 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *Theory and History* 24(3): 247-272.
- Thiagarajan, D. (2016). 'Bringing Tribal Art Into the Mainstream Arena', *The Wire*. Available at: <https://thewire.in/books/between-memory-and-museum-a-book-review-exploring-the-changing-world-of-tribals> (Accessed 3 March 2016).
- Vergo, P. (1989). *The New Museology*. London, Reaktion Books Ltd.
- Waterton, E., Smith, L. (2010). 'The recognition and misrecognition of community heritage', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16 (1-2): 4-15. Available at: DOI: 10.1080/13527250903441671 (Accessed 12 February 2015).
- Wolf, A., Wolf, G. (2015) *Between Memory and Museum: A Dialogue between Folk and Tribal Artists*. Chennai, Tara Books.
- Zimmer, H. (1992). 'Eternity and Time' in Campbell, J. (ed) *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.




University of Leicester
School of Museum Studies
19 University Road
Leicester, LE1 7RF, UK

e: museologicalreview@leicester.ac.uk

w: www.le.ac.uk/museological-review

 [/uniofleicester](https://www.facebook.com/uniofleicester)

 [uniofleicester](https://www.instagram.com/uniofleicester)

 [@LeicsMusReview](https://twitter.com/LeicsMusReview)