Museological Review

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

Museological Review

Table of Contents

Note from the Editors

Dear readers,

Welcome to the latest issue of Museological Review. This year's theme was change in the museum, which we deemed appropriate in order to follow the interesting discussions that took place on the 5th and 6th of November 2013 in the PhD conference Museum Metamorphosis: the Adaptable and Changing Museum. An important first note that we would like to put forward here is that some of the articles contained in the current issue were originally presented during the conference; however, they were reworked and edited by the authors after a peer-review process. Other articles are presented here for the first time and several pieces have been written especially for the issue.

A second note is that with this issue we have managed to accomplish a two year renewal process that started in 2012. Museological Review is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year and we wanted to give it a new lease of life. As you might have read from the previous issue, the editorial board worked in order to strengthen the internal operation of the journal within the PhD community of the School, but also, in its external presentation and approach to readers and authors. As part of this change, the website of the journal has been updated, the information about the aims and spirit of the journal made more visible and, more importantly, the design (including general layout and logo) have been renewed. The change was not only organisational and visual but also contents-wise. The aim is therefore to present a dynamic and varied journal which welcomes different contexts, visions and writing styles, thus incorporating new sections beyond traditional academic articles.

Finally, we would like to thank all the authors, peer-reviewers, academics and colleagues that have made MR possible throughout the years. Museological Review's main purpose is to turn academic publishing into a constructive and positive learning experience for both authors and editors.

We hope that our readers will enjoy the issue and feel inspired to change their approach to museum research and practice. We also hope that in the near future they will not only be readers but also active contributors to this space for dialogue.

Happy reading!

Editorial Board:

Laura Crossley

Margarida Melo

Sarah Plumb

Cintia Velázquez Marroni (Editor-in-chief)

INTERVIEW

Christopher Barnatt, Associate Professor of Strategy and Future Studies, Nottingham University, 21 February 2014

Laura Crossley
PhD Researcher, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester
lfc10@le.ac.uk

Biography

Christopher Barnatt is Associate Professor of Strategy & Future Studies in Nottingham University Business School. His research is in the area of future studies, with his most recent books including *3D Printing: The Next Industrial Revolution* (2013), *Seven Ways to Fix the World* (2012) and *25 Things You Need to Know About the Future* (2012). Christopher also runs ExplainingTheFuture.com and its associated YouTube channel.

You have written a book about 3D printing. Do you feel this has a role in museums?

Absolutely. Firstly, 3D scanning and 3D printing mean that collections can be made available online, so allowing actual or potential visitors to print surrogate copies at home that will enable them to interact with exhibits in a new way. The Smithsonian are now scanning their collection, and already have 300dpi laser scans of objects ranging from woolly mammoth skeletons to gunboats available for free download. Outside the museum sector, Honda are doing a similar thing by putting concept cars online – designs for models that did not make it to production – so allowing people to 3D print them at home, meaning you can own a model of a very interesting car!

I expect that 3D printers will be widely available in people's homes in five years' time. However, these domestic printers will be limited to producing fairly low resolution plastic objects – great for holding a 3D printout of a fossil in your hand, but not for producing most final products. This said, most people will be able to deliver a digital file to a high street or online 3D printing bureau to obtain professional quality printouts in a wide range of materials, including metals and ceramics.

Due to the educational potential, the large 3D printing companies like 3D Systems and Stratasys are very keen to get their 3D printers into schools. You can imagine schools printing off museum objects from an online source, which will allow pupils to interact with collections.

Museums can also utilise 3D printers to create high quality replica objects and exhibits. For example, staff at The Tower of London have used 3D printers to produce replicas of objects that are too fragile to handle, and at the London 2013 3D Printshow, visitors came face to face with life size 3D printed dinosaur heads courtesy of Creazaurus and Archetype 3D (1).

3D printed dinosaur heads courtesy of Crezaurus and Archetype 3D, London 2013 3D Printshow. Photograph by Christopher Barnatt

In your book *Seven Ways to Fix the World*, you advocate for action to fix the world and shape a better, more sustainable, future. How do you think museums can contribute to this?

We know the issues that are facing the world, for example, that urgent action needs to be taken to tackle future shortages of energy, food and fresh water, and that climate change is happening. We also know the sorts of solutions that will be required, like living more locally and consuming less energy. So the actual challenge we face is altering values and perceptions to bring these solutions to reality.

Museums can help the world to think differently. They need to be part of the conversation about how to change the narrative of society to one about the issues that we're facing, what we can do to tackle these, and how we can live in the world of the future. For example, museums can encourage people to value objects and become less materialistic; we are moving to a society where we'll possess fewer objects and own them for life.

There's a debate about whether the cultural sector should reflect the world or proactively change the world. Of course, it's not easy to do the latter, but cultural organisations have an ability and a responsibility to communicate, and to help people understand a new, more sustainable narrative.

Do you feel that museums, as trusted public spaces, are well placed to communicate this narrative and debate environmental change?

Yes, as trusted spaces, museums can add weight to an issue. Museums are also in the unique position of being able to help us understand and prepare for the future by looking at the past.

I was struck by your thoughts on crowdsourcing and using collective intelligence in a transformative way. Do you feel crowdsourcing could be a way for museums to become more participatory and share power with the public?

Visiting a museum 'feeds the soul' of visitors and inspires creativity. In addition, museums are not simply places to which visitors go to look at exhibits; they are a co-created experience, like attending a football match. The combination of being able to both inspire people and enable social interaction means museums are extremely well placed to utilise crowdsourcing.

The idea of the 'co-created experience' is one that needs to be more fully developed and capitalised upon by museums. At the moment, museum visitors appear to interact more with the exhibits than they do with each other. Interaction between people needs to be encouraged. After all, our memories are often about who we experienced something with, just as much as what we saw. Museums are about engendering emotional engagement, and that has to involve human interaction.

Crowdsourcing is already helping museum staff to find out more about objects in their collections. Some museum professionals feel threatened by the idea of taking objects outside the physical museum space by putting them online. This fear needs to be overcome to enable this approach to be utilised more widely in the museum sector.

Museum professionals can also use crowdsourcing to learn from each other and from other cultural organisations, such as theatre companies. For example, online crowdsourcing could support cultural organisations to have global discussions about how to attract visitors at a time when cultural visits are threatened by people having less free time, less money and more online distractions.

You have spoken about the use of Augmented Reality (AR) as a means to learn more about buildings, people and other things we are looking at. Could this be a way to open up access to museums, particularly in the future when we are unable to take as many trips by plane as we currently do?

I've seen AR at the Science Museum; James May of Top Gear appears in a gallery and talks about the objects.

The problem with AR is that it can become the offer, rather than the tool that helps visitors understand the offer. To be used effectively, AR has to add value to a core offer.

AR and digital technologies could be used to carry out and interpret visitor research. For example, I recently heard about a trial in which one museum used labels on exhibits to track where visitors had been and what they had looked at first, and created a live narrative out of this.

Digital as well as physical collections will start to become the norm, and we'll become used to accessing 3D objects on computers, smartphones and tablets. Museums need to embrace this by making their collections accessible online. The question is how to do this to ensure that content can be accessed in years to come using future technologies, such as 3D printing.

Many current apps worry me because I feel they take away from content, with the app becoming more important than the exhibit. Instead of focusing on app creation, I think that museums should devote more time to digital content creation via activities such as high quality digital scanning - which will be much cheaper to access in the future - or taking video of collections using high-resolution video cameras that are already available. It's not appropriate to evaluate the importance of 3D printing and other new technologies based on usage of this technology now; we need to plan our digital archival activities based on likely future technologies, and to ensure more than anything that captured digital content is as high a quality as possible.

The case should be made to funding bodies that putting resource into future-proofing collections so they can be accessed digitally by future generations is essential. In my experience, funding bodies in the cultural sector are already sometimes more amenable to funding projects that demonstrate an awareness of digital curation and legacy technology issues.

You describe future gazing as imagining events and states of the world that are yet to happen, and encourage us to future shape by taking actions today to select and work towards the possible future we most desire. Do you have any practical tips for how to undertake future shaping in practice?

One exercise that museum professionals could learn from futurist practice is to look far into the future and think about how the world will work, then look back at today and consider how you will fill that gap; what do you need to do now to ensure you're relevant in the future? One needs to think about what the world will look like in 20 years and use this as a model to plan current work.

Every now and then, many people find themselves making a decision where they are choosing between two options of equal merit, and it is in these kinds of situations where a futures perspective can be brought into decisions right now, rather than always taking a short-term perspective. It's not appropriate to use futurist thinking all the time, but it's important to have an awareness of where we're going in order to stay relevant.

Using a practical example, one issue museum professionals could start thinking about is how they will utilise museum space in the future when our food and energy will be increasingly produced locally. What, practically, are museums doing about that now, and what will they do in the future? For example, could museums start to allow urban farmers to grow crops on their roof? Simple things like that will make a difference to society. By becoming more environmentally active, museums could become a beacon, leading where others follow. Environmental actions don't have to be on a big scale. Museums could do something simple like starting a press campaign in which they ask the local community how they can work with each other to make their locality more environmentally sustainable in light of climate change. In doing this, museums may positively hijack the climate change and other debates of our time, whilst also integrating themselves into their local community.

Notes

1. A video of Dave Marks exploring London 2013 3D Printshow can be seen at
http://3dprintshow.com/london2013/3d-printshow-london-2013-full-report/ Video by Christopher Barnatt.

Art Turning Left including the Tucumán Arde installation curated by History of Art students at Liverpool John Moores University at Tate Liverpool. © Tate Liverpool 2013

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making 1789 – 2013 , Tate Liverpool

Sarah Plumb
PhD Researcher, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester
sp227@le.ac.uk

Can art be for everyone? The exhibition *Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making 1789 - 2013* at Tate Liverpool (8 November 2013 – 2 February 2014) sets out to interrogate this provocative question, examining the relationships between art, everyday life and left-wing ideologies. Presenting works dating from the French Revolution through to contemporary practices the exhibition takes key leftist values, such as the quest for social progress, equality for all and collectivism, as its point of departure.

In *Art Turning Left* we are invited to view the artworks on display *not* as finished singular products echoing certain political messages, but as reflections of a changing narrative of how artworks were made, distributed and experienced, resulting from the influence of leftist principles.

Art Turning Left avoids a chronological line, it takes a thematic approach that is structured in seven sections, each addressing a question: Can art affect everyone? Do we need to know who makes art? Can pursuing equality change how art is made? How can art infiltrate everyday life? Does participation deliver equality? How can art speak with a collective voice? Are there ways to distribute art differently? The artworks in each section aim to offer alternative and diverse solutions to these issues, drawing attention to the similar dilemmas artists faced across different historical periods and geographical locations.

The use of questions to demark thematic sections and act as room headings is a novel approach and reflects some of the ideologies put forward, such as providing a discursive platform, encouraging audiences to generate their own responses and participate in their own meaning-making. The juxtapositions of the artworks under thematic questions are well considered and have been inspired by Bertolt Brecht's photobook *War Primer* (1939

Bertolt Brecht, *Original collage for the War Primer Kriegsfiebel* 1939 – 1955, Collage on paper, Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv, © Eulenspiegel Verlag, Image courtesy of Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv

Jaques-Louis David, *The Death of Marat* 1793, Oil paint on canvas, 1113 x 856 mm, Musée des Beaux-arts, © Musée des Beaux – Arts. Photo: C.Devleeschauwer

– 1955), also featured in the exhibition. Here Brecht juxtaposes official war photographs and newspapers cuttings with his own four-line poems modelled on funeral epigrams, providing a subversive, alternative caption that forces the viewer to reconsider what they are looking at. The groupings, to an extent, successfully mimic this method, provoking viewers out of passive consumption, fostering active and critical engagement with the political ideals presented in the exhibition.

That said, I find these groupings and categorisations problematic in relation to experiencing individual artworks. The oldest artwork in the exhibition is Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Marat* (1793), a significant oil painting which depicts French Revolutionist Jean-Paul Marat murdered in his bath by a royalist sympathiser. David asked for the work to be mass-reproduced and distributed across France paying tribute to Marat as a martyr and spreading the revolutionary message. At Tate Liverpool the painting is displayed with four of the mass-reproduced prints and presented alongside Zvono Group's videos of performed actions and public interventions in *Sarajevo Art and Soccer* (1986) and *Mondrian Street Action* (1986). Both David and Zvono Group brought art to the masses and into everyday life, the juxtaposition shows the conceptual connection between the works, but the groupings do not sit comfortably together. The works are hemmed in, not enough space is allowed between works for them to be experienced individually, and as a result great works of art are at risk of becoming merely illustrations to the thematic points in the show.

How the audience experiences the artwork is a key concern of many of the artists in the exhibition and although some of the artworks are not presented in the best light, as described above, one section is dedicated to the experience of artworks beyond that of just looking. 'Does participation deliver equality?' focuses on artworks that encourage the audience to interact with or participate in the work, in some cases becoming fundamental in the completion of the work. David Medalla's work *A Stitch in Time* (1968 - 1972), an evolving textile piece, is one such example. Medalla invites the audience to pick up a needle and sew an image or name onto a large golden cloth hung in the gallery space. Bringing the work into the contemporary realm of interaction and participation the audience is invited by Tate to take a photograph and share this on Twitter. The audience become collaborators in the artistic process, which in theory, enables them to sit on a level platform with the artist. However, this form of participation and relationship between artist and audience/participant is not equal as the artist dictates the terms of involvement.

Left and right: David Medalla, *A Stitch in Time* 1968 – 1972, Cotton, wood, steel and hemp, 12000 x 370 mm, © Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London. Photo © Stuart Whipps

Where a more effective form of participation does take place is in *The Office of Useful Art*, a working office and education centre situated within the exhibition. Part of a long-term project the office is open throughout the exhibition centre and acts as a base for talks, debates, workshops and activities for the public, and local groups and societies. The office also functions as a recruitment centre for the *Asociación de Arte Útil* (the Useful Art Association), a membership organisation initiated by Cuban artist Tania Bruguera promoting and creating useful art. Although when I visited the show there were no activities taking place, traces of participation were left on display, including various co-produced works in the form of William Morris inspired block prints, along with event documents and the office's mission statement. Inviting local groups to occupy the office and adapt the space to suit their particular need goes some way towards breaking down the traditional hierarchical nature of the artist-audience relationship and in this case gallery-audience relationship as well.

This collaborative and non-hierarchical methodology is threaded throughout the exhibition with key artworks by artist collectives such as Group Material and the Guerilla Girls challenging the arts market and the romantic tradition of the artist as individual genius. The processes undertaken during the exhibition conception and production is again aligned with the left-wing value of collectivism. *Art Turning Left* was conceived by Collaborative PhD Researcher Lynn Wray and co-produced with the team from Tate Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University. History of Art students from the University also curated an element of the show documenting the background, values and actions of the Argentinian arts group Tucumán Arde (1996 – 1968), through archival material displayed in an interactive installation.

Zvono Group, Art and Soccer 1986, Video of performance, 4 minutes, 11 seconds, © ZVONO
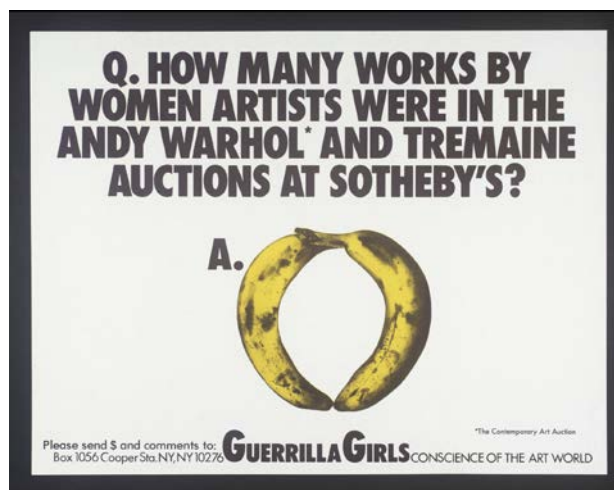
Guerrilla Girls [no title] 1985-90, Screenprint on paper, 430 x 560 mm, © courtesy www.guerrillagirls.com. Image courtesy Tate

Art Turning Left is described as an 'exhibition project' indicating that this is far more than a straight-forward thematic display of artworks. The importance of research and collective debate is clear and echoed throughout this highly ambitious exhibition, perhaps most fervently through *The Office of Useful Art*. With over 300 artworks at times the exhibition is overwhelming and is certainly too dense, yet nonetheless *Art Turning Left* is fascinating and timely. The exhibition highlights how political ideologies can stimulate profound transformations in artistic form and process, as well as condition reception of artworks. I left the exhibition without a strong connection to specific artworks, but felt engaged, provoked, challenged and ultimately considering what my own political values are.

CONFERENCE REVIEW

Museum Metamorphosis: the Adaptable and Changing Museum, University of Leicester, 2013

Alex Woodall
Conference Manager and PhD Researcher, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester
acw18@le.ac.uk

'There is nothing permanent except change' (1)

In July 2013, the UK Museums Association (MA) published its vision document, *Museums Change Lives*. Amongst its proposed actions for increasing the social impact of museums, are calls to 'reflect', 'listen', 'involve', 'research', 'innovate', 'celebrate', 'seek out and connect with suitable partners', and 'encourage wider participation'(2).

At the same time, and thanks to generous funding from the AHRC's Collaborative Skills Development Student-Led Award, we were in the midst of a year long PhD-led programme entitled *Creative Partnerships: bridging academic and museum practitioner communities through collaboration*. In a spirit similar to that envisioned by the MA, this award enabled PhD researchers in the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester to come together with colleagues from a variety of museums and other creative and academic organisations, to learn about, reflect on, and put public engagement into practice by developing a conference and related exhibition.

Working in partnership with Leicester Arts & Museums Service, the project included a series of study visits (to Manchester Museum, Manchester Metropolitan University, and to the *Connecting with Collections* symposium at the University of Cambridge) and a practical workshop on creative approaches to evaluation by CAPE UK. It also encouraged constructive dialogue through a 'dragon's den' style critique of current displays in Leicester by PhD students for museum staff. Throughout this activity, ideas for our collaborative conference and its management were emerging. A close-knit conference committee regularly met, tasks were shared, and the University's Graduate School Researcher Development Fund kindly provided further funding.

One theme kept returning: museums are paradoxical places. Often perceived as shrines to the unchanging, they are also places of constant ebb and flow. Heraclitus was right. Change, it seems, is inescapable. And so it was, that with these thoughts in mind, we developed our conference theme: *Museum Metamorphosis: The Adaptable and Changing Museum* (3).

The culmination of our year of collaboration, this 2-day international conference was held at the School of Museum Studies on 5-6 November 2013. Building on the successes of previous PhD-led symposia in the School, our aim was to involve museum professionals as well as academic researchers and students. With over 70 submissions resulting from our call for papers, our chosen topic clearly had resonance with colleagues from around the world and we were delighted to welcome over 80 people to Leicester to participate in *Museum Metamorphosis*.

During the event, our two keynote speakers (Sharon Heal, editor of the *Museums Journal*, and Matthew Constantine, Collections, Learning and Interpretation Manager for Leicester Arts & Museums Service) shared their visions for macrocosmic sector-wide and microcosmic institutional change. We heard provocations from our own members of staff (Dr Suzanne MacLeod, Professor Richard Sandell and Dr Sheila Watson), participated in energetic creative workshops led by Dr Nick Winterbotham, Ariane Karbe and Lisa Jacques, and we enjoyed social activities including pre-conference tours of New Walk Museum & Art Gallery led by its staff, the opening of the *Museum Metamorphosis* exhibition with a speech by Dr Janet Marstine and refreshments kindly sponsored by Ashgate publishers, and an excellent conference dinner.

Over the two days, some 20 papers were divided into five sessions. On the first day, 'Coming to terms with our terms' enabled Jane Nielsen, Rikke Haller Baggesen and Dr Rachel Souhami to define and theorise what we might mean by metamorphosis in the museum context. 'Changing spaces, changing epistemologies' involved papers from Stephanie Bowry, Pandora Syperek, David Francis and Mario Schulze, all discussing historical shifts in the meanings of displays. 'Art and change' closed the first day with papers from Sarah Punshon, Ioanna Zouli

and Catharina Hendrick whose case studies involved innovative arts practice acting as a catalyst for institutional change.

The second day began with a session looking at radical social and participatory practice from museums in the US, Australia and Europe: 'Adapting community dialogue' included dynamic papers by Tasha Finn, Judith Dehail, Emily Pinkowitz, Erin Bailey and Laura Liv Weikop. 'Metamorphosis and identities' was our final session during which Lefteris Spyrou, Joel Palhegyi, Alice Christophe, Melissa Forstrom and Dr Eureka Henrich shared examples of museums in Greece, Croatia and Hawaii, as nation- or culture-shaping. Exhausting, yet exhilarating, it felt like we had travelled around the world. An excellent live-blog by Dr Jenny Walklate captures something of this whirlwind journey (4).

The concurrent exhibition *Museum Metamorphosis* was curated by PhD students and displayed in the School between 26 September 2013 and 10 February 2014. Five Leicester-based artists, Peter Clayton, Michelle Morgan, Elisa Panerai, Ruth Singer and Lucy Stevens, were selected to reimagine objects of their choice from New Walk Museum & Art Gallery, exploring the idea of change to stunning visual effect.

The legacy of such a project goes well beyond its concrete outpourings. We have all learnt so much from the experience. From fundraising and sponsorship, to partnership working, event management, live blogging, curating exhibitions, producing calls for papers, selecting abstracts, designing logos and websites, working with external agencies, organising catering, collaborating across institutions, chairing sessions, reflecting on the research of delegates, and making new friends, we have all benefitted hugely from the process. In fact, it would be fair to say that as a result we have all changed and of course will continue to do so.

"Take the risk. Start the change. You won't ruin it. I promise."(5).

Notes

(1) Attributed to Heraclitus in Plato's *Cratylus* 402a

(2) Museums Association, 2013 *Museums Change Lives* (London), p.15. Also available online at http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives

(3) http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/museum-metamorphosis

(4) http://msphdconf.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/over-last-couple-of-days-participants.html

(5) Simon, Nina (2013) 'Foreword' in Janes, Robert R. *Museums and the Paradox of Change*, London, Routledge, xv-xviii, p.xviii.

Museum Metamorphosis à la Mode

Rikke Haller Baggesen
PhD fellow, University of Copenhagen, Royal School of Library and Information Science
rhb@iva.dk

Abstract

Museums are steadily changing. Yet analogising this development with biological or mythological metamorphosis could imply an elevation or naturalisation of events, which is potentially problematic. This paper therefore suggests a supplementary perspective, arguing that certain changes in modern day museum practices correspond to the logic of fashion. Where Foucault once described museums as heterochronias; places representing an 'other-time', museums now strive to be both of their time and in time with the Zeitgeist. As a consequence, they must keep up with the speedy cycles of technological advancements and cultural change, and not only deliver, but also stoke the desire for, novel experiences. The paper explores the current vogue for fashion exhibitions as a case in point, arguing that this trend serves to promote the museum as fashionably current, but can also support novel formats for cultural reflection.

Keywords: change, fashion, commercialism, engagement

Metamorphosis à la Mode

That museums are changing is evident. Curatorial programs and exhibition technologies are changing to cater to revised histories and modern tastes; impressionable audiences are changing into expressive users; and museum architecture is being changed from temples into forums, in order to reflect and sustain the inclusive creed of modern day institutions. Viewing these changes through the conceptual lens of metamorphosis gives us a handle for considering the mechanisms and manifestations of this transformation, tangled as they are with developments in society, technology and academia at large. However, the concept carries a rich set of connotations, which are far from neutral.

The link to biology, and common association of metamorphosis with the transformation from larvae to butterfly, can thus be understood to imply a fulfilment of an inherent quality, or a transition from a lower to a higher level of evolution. In this understanding, as we tend to accept natural evolution as smart, metamorphosis is by implication rightful, inevitable and logical. Seeing the transformation of museums as analogue to the biological metamorphosis is therefore problematic, as it naturalises the current status as well as indicating completion. On a very different note, the literary references found in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Ovid's *The Metamorphoses*, point to notions of destiny and supernatural interventions. Granted, an understanding of the change in museums as completely random or eerily Kafka-esque, is perhaps unlikely to be proposed. But also mythologising what are still rather mundane developments carries a risk of moralisation or aggrandisement, neither of which is productive for continued development.

To counter such an elevation or naturalisation of events, this paper proposes another perspective, arguing that the changes we see in modern-day museums correspond to the logic of fashion. This perspective sees the myriad changes in museums as transitory phases, sometimes even frivolous fads, rather than as a rightful evolution or heroic feat. It suggests that change in museums is not only driven by inner logics, rational objectives or museological ideals, but is also influenced by greater cultural trends as well as by the personal whims of key actors. As the experience economy demands that museums keep abreast of public interest, and not only justify their existence by reflecting current issues, but also interest the audience in new experiences in order to stay financially viable, this responsiveness to the Zeitgeist is a positive attribute. Still, while opening a string of interesting possibilities, it also comes with implications that need our consideration.

Seeing the ongoing changes in museums through a fashion perspective, as proposed in this paper, of course also has its limits. It is therefore to be read not as a corrective but as a supplement to other interpretations of the ongoing development, pointing to particular aspects of museum practice and processes. However, if we accept that institutional persuasions, like fashions, follow the flows of cultural change, we might refrain from becoming too reverential of current developments or from preaching current ideals as eternal truths. Such a view will then allow for reflective critique, but also for appreciation of topical as well as long lasting outcomes.

In the context of this paper, fashion is addressed as, respectively, a material subject field, a sociological phenomenon, and an academic perspective. To clarify these understandings of fashion, a brief outline is given in the following. Employing Foucault's concept of *heterotopia*, the paper will then address how modern-day museums have come to favour the transitory and how this relates to fashion. Subsequently, fashion exhibitions are shown as an illustration of a current museum trend, leading to a summary of key developments in fashion museology. Finally, through the example of a recent fashion exhibition, the paper will argue that embracing current fashion phenomena, museums can stage cultural connections that reach beyond the institution and engage the public with the complexities of fashion in new and relevant ways.

Understandings of fashion

Our most common association of fashion is to items of clothing and styles of dress. It corresponds to the definition by fashion historian Valerie Steele, stating that 'Fashion is a particular kind of clothing that is 'in style' at a given time' (1997:3). This is also how we generally understand fashion in a museum context: as a material field. Specifically, the fashion collection or fashion department curates items of dress that adhere to a clothing fashion system, whereas a collection of costume could refer to ethnographical or historical vestimentary systems. A key feature of this fashion system is a continual changing of styles, which however does not necessarily imply radical shifts or a straight dichotomy of *in* vs *out*, but is rather to be understood as gradual mutations of styles and tastes (Mackinney-Valentin 2010). In the fashion-clothing field, this process or mechanism of fashion is readily apparent in the formalised seasons or the rapid change cycles of 'fast fashion', but also in the material manifestations of commercial or subcultural trends. Studies of fashion processes therefore often choose fashion clothing as their empirical object, and interpret it according to sociological, psychological, economic or art historical understandings, to name some of the most prominent theoretical approaches in the field (Mackinney-Valentin 2010, Taylor 2010).

While fashion is thus strongly linked to material culture, the decisive significance lies in the immaterial properties. What makes an item of clothing an article of fashion is not an inherent quality, but rather a symbolic and communicative construction around the material objects. Hence, the production of clothes may take place in couture ateliers or in Far Eastern sweatshops, but the production of fashion is handled by other stakeholders, such as the fashion media, the retailers, and the consumers (Kawamura 2005). In the same way, fashion as a concept or process is not exclusive to the fashion clothing industry. Indeed, social philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky argues that

> [t]he dominant feature of our societies [...] is precisely the extraordinary generalization of fashion: the extension of the "fashion" form to spheres that once lay beyond its purview, the advent of a society restructured from top to bottom by the attractive and the ephemeral – by the very logic of fashion (1994:27).

And although his enthusiasm for this development is not universally shared, others agree that almost all aspects of life, 'from pets to politics', have come to adhere to a fashion logic to some extent, including changes in academic interests and approaches (Mackinney-Valentin 2010, Svendsen 2006). This can also be witnessed within the museological field.

Our perceptions and practices change not necessarily because we become wiser, but also because we crave the dynamism of change, and wish to belong to the present rather than the past. Perpetual change and a thirst for the new are therefore central tenets also when speaking of fashion as a general, societal phenomenon. However, as explained by sociologist Fred Davis,

> the fashion process cannot be explained in terms of any single psychological motive, human propensity, or societal exigency. As process it is sustained through some complex amalgamation of inspiration, imitation, and institutionalisation (1992:123).

Deciding how or why a certain trend is adopted, adapted and diffused is therefore virtually impossible. Nevertheless, we can easily see that fashion processes are at play in society. That not only the way we dress or do our hair, but also how we live our lives, as well as our cultural, political and professional interests and ideals, are affected by societal trends.

Therefore, a fashion perspective is relevant for museums, not only when applied to the domain of fashion clothing, or for considering developments within other museum subject fields (Melchior 2013), but also, as

argued here, for reflecting on the development of the museum itself. Although the mechanisms that affect museums function on a different level than the symbolic constructions and cycle mechanisms found in the fashion industry, certain parallels can arguably be found. Not only has the seasonal fashion system had an imprint on museum's display schedules, as argued by fashion museologist Alexandra Palmer (2008); the communicative production of museum as brand (Sten 2010), a strategic concept and a marketing ploy in the experience economy, is similar to the conceptual production of fashion described by Kawamura (2005), referenced above. Thus reliant on the help of external stakeholders, museums adjust to the times and 'dress themselves' as current with the latest technology and trendy exhibition programmes, to appear modern in their appeal to the public and the media.

Heterochronia, museology and modernity

The society structured by the attractive and the ephemeral, as depicted by Lipovetsky above, is a product of modernity, which again is closely linked to fashion. The shared etymology of the French/Scandinavian/German *mode/Mode*, and the words modern, modernity and modernism speak to this point. Accordingly, fashion historian Elisabeth Wilson claims fashion to be 'essential to the world of modernity, the world of spectacle and mass-communication' (1985:12). By this token, fashion is also essential to the modern-day museum, itself an institution born of modern ideas.

Foucault addresses this origin in his 1967 lecture, 'Of Other Spaces' (*Des espaces autres*), stating that:

> the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, […] this whole idea belongs to our modernity. The museum and the library are heterotopias that are proper to western culture of the nineteenth century (1967(1986):26).

His concept of *heterotopia*, an other-place or place of otherness, is described as 'a kind of effectively enacted utopia' (ibid.:24), with the museums presented as a *heterochronia*; an other-time variant of the other-place. Projecting ourselves into this representation of otherness, or other-time, we may get a clearer view of ourselves, and the world we live in, he suggests.

Yet, while these traditional museums, born of ideals of enlightenment, might belong to modernity, by today's standards they are everything but modern. Their voice of authority became problematic, the exhibition technologies outdated, and the architecture fell out of fashion. As a result, the traditional museum came to be regarded not as a valuable *heterochronia*, but as an anachronism. And nowhere has the problem of anachronism been felt more strongly than within the museum community. Accordingly, the museological turn in the latter half of the 20th century broke with tradition and called for a museum that operates within its own time, not least as a way to future proof the institution (Mairesse (2007) 2010). A museum that not only preserves and presents the past and conserves culture for posterity, but one that produces culture for the present.

Rather than continuing to 'accumulate time' - as collections may provide some resistance in the curatorial process (Melchior 2011) - many museums today therefore model themselves not on the time capsule *heterochronia* suggested by Foucault, but on another type, which he describes as linked:

> to time in it's most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival. These heterotopias are not oriented toward the eternal, they are rather absolutely temporal (ibid.:26).

No longer relying on permanent collections to attract visitors, museums offer a steady stream of special exhibitions, not unlike the seasonal cycles of the fashion system. And just like the fashion clothing industry boosts sales with a steady trickle of additional items, museum programmes are now peppered with live events and pop-up displays to ensure that there's always a new thing to see, a new reason to visit.

In this way, museums are not necessarily betraying the Enlightenment ideals of their origin, but it is another aspect of modernity that is now foregrounded: the excitement about dynamism and urban 'culture vulture-ism', the appreciation of the ephemeral and a thirst for change. This is how museums have come to follow the logic of fashion: by committing to the present, even when representing the past, and not only delivering on, but also stoking the desire for the new. However, the commitment to being in time also comes with a risk of becoming out-dated. To adhere to the logic of fashion you have to keep up. As put by philosopher Lars Svendsen (2006: 24):

> Modernity liberated us from tradition, but it made us slaves of a new imperative, one precisely formulated by Arthur Rimbaud towards the end of *Une saison en enfer*: "We have to be utterly modern".

Fashionable exhibitions

Under this imperative, fashionable exhibitions are key to keeping current and to attracting audiences, which has become the overriding yardstick for institutional success. Indeed, exhibitions of fashion are definitely in fashion these years, as has been recognised not only within the field (Steele 2008, de la Haye 2010, Melchior 2011) but also by the general media (e.g. Foreman 2013, Harries 2012, Fabrikant 2011). One could hope that the respect that the fashion field is finally enjoying will be sustained. Still, the influx of exhibitions with a fashion twist, also in museums without fashion collections, is an example of how trends of interest run through the museum world, and of how following such fashions serve to promote the museum as trendy and up-to-date.

In 2013, apart from exhibitions in dedicated fashion museums (e.g. The Kyoto Costume Institute, MoMu in Antwerp and the Fashion Museum in Bath), examples could be found in shows such as *Club to Catwalk* and *David Bowie is* at the V&A in London; *PUNK: Chaos to Couture* and *Impressionism, Fashion and Modernity* at The Metropolitan Museum in New York (the latter originating from Musée D'Orsay in Paris and showing later in the year at the Art Institute of Chicago); and in the traveling exhibition *The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier* which showed in Rotterdam, Stockholm and Brooklyn that year as part of a longer world tour. The trend is thus also apparent outside the grand institutions and leading fashion capitals. In Copenhagen, for example, Arken Museum of Modern Art showed the exhibition *India : Fashion Now*, while crossings between fashion and art were exhibited in Gl. Holtegaard's *Out of Fashion* exhibition and seen in fashion designer Henrik Vibskov's art installations at Gl. Strand. In addition, museums and galleries are routinely used for runway shows during the city's biannual fashion week, which could also be said to strengthen the ties between fashion and museums. The impressive success of the Anglo-American and international blockbuster shows, as well as the tendency that sees fashion spilling into art spaces, illustrated in the Danish examples above, testifies to a significant shift in the status of fashion within museums. In the words of fashion curator Amy de la Haye, 'the Cinderella media of the museum have, since the late twentieth century, become the jewel in its crown.' (2010: 2).

Other museum trends, say, the current proliferation of museum apps and Instagram profiles (replacing recent must-have technologies like touch-tables and Second Life exhibitions), might have served to exemplify this point without risk of confusing the various fashion perspectives laid out in this paper. However, this paper will retain a fashion focus in order to address some of the interesting developments, problems and ensuing potentials in this particular field. Thus, the ephemeral and commercial nature of fashion as phenomenon, combined with the fragility of textile and dress as museum objects pose some specific challenges to curatorship. However, these challenges can also inspire innovation, and lead the way for novel types of mediation, as we will see below. In addition, the history of fashion museology (which can only be briefly summarised in this context) serves to illustrate that trends are not entirely arbitrary, but tied to developments on a grander scale.

Although collections of dress have a long history in museums (Druesedow 2010), fashion only made an entrance in the 20th century (Melchior 2011). As suggested by dress historian Lou Taylor (1998), this marginalisation is likely rooted in the fact that the study of dress and fashion history has been, and still is, dominated by women, which has been seen to confirm the common association of fashion with the female sphere. Historically, fashion, in the eyes of the male curators, was simply too much of a female folly, too frivolous and too commercially vulgar, to be given serious consideration in the museum. Even for this *heterotopian* institution, if we follow Foucault, the feminine realm was deemed too 'otherly' and inferior.

It is therefore no coincidence that the rise of the fashion exhibition since the 1990's reflects the parallel consolidations of 'new' fashion history and 'new' museology (Anderson 2000), both following in the wake of feminist scholarship. As the former gained a stronghold in academia, the latter reflected a shift in orientation from practice and materiality to theory and discourse, and insisted on greater diversity and democratic representation in collections and exhibitions. Consequently, the former history oriented and object-centered approach to fashion and dress, rooted in the museum tradition, has increasingly been superseded by a meaning and theory-centered approach, stemming from the universities. While differing orientations within the field are significant enough for Taylor (1998) to speak of 'the Great Divide', the shift is not absolute, and often the traditions are fruitfully merged. Hence, the merits of the artefact-centred approach are still strongly demonstrated and propagated by esteemed scholars such as Taylor (1998, 2004) and Steele (1998), who have

also shown that material studies and bold scholarship are not in opposition, and together can produce a strong curatorial foundation. However, thematic or designer-led exhibitions, have shown to have a greater appeal to the public and the media, and have therefore become the dominant form.

In this context, the grand spectacles staged by Diana Vreeland, former editor of *Vogue* magazine and consultant to the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in the 1970's and 1980's, have been very influential. Although her penchant for favouring the visually stunning over historical accuracy meant that her curatorship was strongly criticised, her shows were also hugely popular with the audience and set new standards for staging fashion in museums. It is thus clear that a third factor, namely, the growing impact of the rationale of the experience economy on museum strategies (Skot-Hansen 2008), also plays a significant part, when it comes to explaining the current success of the fashion exhibition. In short, 'fashion at the museum brings in the crowds' (Harries 2012). Accordingly, fashion exhibitions are not only designed to cater to an audience with a special interest in fashion but also to the much larger public who takes delight in sartorial splendour, and not least to the media, who loves the great imagery that fashion provides. In return, the museum gets to bask in the spotlight and rub shoulder pads with the fashion set. Although the heavy costs of staging a fashion exhibition means that this will not always be a profitable enterprise, the attention garnered serves to raise the institution's public profile, as described by Danish fashion researcher and museologist Marie Riegels Melchior (2011). She terms the tendency 'fashion museology'; an approach that takes a special interest in contemporary fashion, and happily embraces the fashion industry in order to create spectacular displays. This approach, says Melchior, not only allows the museums to circumvent the strict handling procedures for dress dictated by ICOM (1), but also serves to present the museum as 'dynamic and engaged in ordinary society's interest in consumer and celebrity culture.' (ibid.:6).

Exhibitions of fashion, and fashionable approaches to museology, can then serve to heighten the museum's profile and attract a larger audience. However, an unfortunate consequence could be a tendency to focus on the stories that sell rather than on the stories that need telling. So even though fashion exhibitions appeal to the public as they identify with clothes in a very immediate way, which makes the museum overall seem both approachable and fun, we should beware of becoming too dazzled by the glitz. As both Melchior (ibid.) and Palmer (2008) point out, all too often, designing for hype and visual pleasure leaves us with exhibitions that do little to help the viewer understand or reflect on the complexity of fashion. At the end of the day, dumbing down the complexities of a cultural field, by omitting to address the dilemmas of the fashion industry, for instance, is doing both audiences and museums a disfavour. However, as evident from the following example, clever curation of current cultural phenomena can also help to illuminate such problems.

All department stores will become museums...

In the spring of 2013, the Museum at Fashion Institute of Technology in New York showed an exhibition entitled *Shoe Obsession* (2). The exhibition, curated by Valerie Steele, focused on the very current craze for shoes as 'it' items: not just something to wear on your feet or compliment your outfit, but something to be cooed over or indeed obsessed about. This phenomenon featured prominently in, and was thus further popularised by the TV series *Sex and the City*, and was also promoted in contemporary fashion media. Reflecting this currency, the exhibition included shoes from the latest designer collections, lent by and simultaneously on sale at the exhibition's sponsor, the department store Saks Fifth Avenue.

Collaborations of this sort are often a prerequisite for exhibiting contemporary fashion. Still, the inherent risk of foregoing curatorial integrity in order to satisfy brand interests in these mergers of commerce and culture has rightfully been the subject of much interest in academia as well as in the media. Silverman's (1986) scathing criticism of Vreeland's 1983 exhibition devoted to the genius of Yves Saint-Laurent, which Silverman saw as an exercise in political and commercial advertising rather than museum education; and the controversy surrounding the Georgio Armani retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim museum in New York in 2000-1 (Potvin 2012) are notable examples of this. It is a problem that should not be overlooked. Fiona Anderson, however, makes a strong argument for the necessity of facing up to rather than evading the issue. Conceding that

> [i]t is undeniable that the motivation of designers to co-operate with curators in having their work displayed in museums is largely about prestige, self-promotion and profit.' (2000: 375).

she moves on to assert that

scholarly curatorial work must embrace an acknowledgement of the commercial character of the fashion industry. Attempts to avoid or eliminate this aspect will only lead backwards to approaches which decontextualise objects (ibid.).

In the case of *Shoe Obsession*, the link between the museum and current commercial culture served to provide this context in a very concrete way, affording a unique experience for those willing to explore the connection.

The similarities in display techniques in the museum and the department store were startling. Both presented single shoes as precious relics, making it unclear who was imitating whom; a fulfilment of Warhol's prediction that '[a]ll department stores will become museums, and all museums will become department stores' (quoted in Potvin 2012:47). However, while at the museum, the objects were necessarily behind glass, in the department store one could try on a pair of shoes from the same batch as those in the exhibition. Cultural artefacts in one context, commercial products in the other. A visitor continuing from the Museum at FIT to Saks was thus able to feel for herself the quality and craftsmanship of these luxury goods, and experience the physical effect of such exquisite heels on her posture, her walk, and psychologically on her sense of self. In other words, what had at the museum been a curatorial claim could become a lived experience. What's more, the detached aesthetic objects of the exhibition became grounded in a very concrete material and social context in the shoe department. Price tags in the four-figure dollar range are also a significant part of this cultural story.

Even if a cross-institutional itinerary was not explicitly suggested by the museum, although the curator did have this potential in mind (Steele 2013), and notwithstanding that the sponsor was undoubtedly seeking promotion rather than Marxist criticism from the partnership, the curator's decision to tap into a current craze and showcase commercial products in the museum still allowed for an unusual and thought-provoking experience. Not only was the museum turning itself into a hotspot for shoe aficionados; the exhibition also managed to transform the department store into a space for cultural reflection, if only for those in the know. While the exhibition in and of itself did not stand out in its illuminative power, the juxtaposition of the museum context and the commercial context made a holistic understanding of the complexity of these cultural objects possible.

Shoe Obsession thereby became an example of the transformative power of museums. But it also speaks of how the museum institution itself is undergoing transformation, in this case by building bridges and blurring boundaries between museum culture and commercialism, and by framing (fashions of) the present rather than the past. Not least, it illustrates how embracing current trends does not necessarily run counter to making room for reflection. Rather, addressing the here-and-now opens up some great opportunities for engaging with the world outside the museum, and thereby illuminating culture in new and inspiring ways.

Perspectives

Still, museums could go even further to explore current fashions in all their complexity and engage the public in their curatorial questions. After all, the design – the creative process as well as the aesthetics and functionality – of fashion articles is only part of the fashion spectrum. Issues pertaining to production, distribution, reception, consumption and use are still largely overlooked, but could be addressed by rethinking the scope for fashion museology. Of course, staging museal experiences outside the museum is a challenge. But as the commercial and social spaces that we experience in our daily lives are ripe with stories and meaning, it may still be worth a try for the curator, who understands her role as not just a keeper of things but also a mediator of knowledge. To this end, as suggested by Anderson, 'capturing some of the essence and the impure, perverse and contradictory medium of contemporary dress may require the adoption of a range of different approaches' (2000:280), not only with regard to collaborations, subject matters and academic perspectives, but also when it comes to communication strategies and platforms used for museum mediation.

Seeing what already surrounds us in a new light may require a new lens or filter – one that could be provided by mobile media, pushing information, prompting action or stimulating observations wherever we encounter fashion. Also, for curators of fashion, social media represent a rich source of knowledge as the public chronicles their favourite outfits and dream purchases online. Within the field of fashion, amateur bloggers have long been regarded as key players (Rocamora 2011), reflecting on and affecting reception and consumption and, in return, the design and production of future styles. Whether on traditional blogs; visual platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest, which currently enjoy the greatest popularity; or fashion-specific forums like Polyvore or Pose; uploads to social media platforms convey the transitory nature of fashion as the ultimate remix culture. Here, collection pieces, often already quoting fashion history or drawing on other cultural references, are mixed

with vintage and high street items into personal looks. By tapping into existing social media forums, or by inviting their audiences to contribute personal content to digital archives, museums may gain a deeper understanding of the context and significance of their collections and subject field, as well as an opportunity to enrich the presentation of artefacts with user-generated storytelling.

Inviting the expertise of the users thus seems an unmissable opportunity for creating engagement as well as meeting curatorial objectives. Furthermore, such a move would tie in neatly with the ongoing transformation of museum audiences into participating cultural agents, as noted in the introduction, and general adaptation of social media by museums. However, blindly latching on to such cultural trends without carefully considering the aims and implications is not in itself enough to hold up a mirror to our times. Establishing a heterotopian space for reflection still requires curatorial consideration, and while approaches with up-do-date credentials may well support the vision, they are not solutions in themselves. By the same token, making museums trendy should not become an objective in its own right.

Being sensitive to the influence of fashion mechanisms on communicative or curatorial strategies and museum developments, as implied by the perspective presented in this paper, could perhaps help us see museum trends for what they are: not imperatives, but possibilities. This way, we may more freely decide which fashions to follow and which to forego. After all, whichever strategy is chosen, even our most successful efforts will probably wind up falling out of fashion sometime, as museums continue to change.

Notes

(1) http://www.costume-committee.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17&Itemid=24

(2) https://www.fitnyc.edu/13787.asp

References

Anderson, F. (2000). 'Museums as Fashion Media'. In *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, edited by Stella Bruzzi, 371-389. London: Routledge

Davis, F. (1992). Fashion, Culture, and Identity. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press

de la Haye, A. (2010). 'Introduction: Dress and Fashion in the Context of the Museum'. In *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, Volume 10 - Global Perspectives. Part 5: Dress and Fashion Ressources Worldwide. Oxford: Berg Publishers. Accessed 14.03.2013: http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bewdf/BEWDF-v10/EDch10039a.xml

Druesedow, J. (2010). 'Dress and fashion exhibits'. In *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*. Volume 10 - Global Perspectives. Part 5: Dress and Fashion Ressources Worldwide. Oxford: Berg Publishers. Accessed 14.03.2013: http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/BEWDF/EDch10042

Fabrikant, G. (2011, April 20). 'Museums are finding rooms for couturiers'. *The New York Times* online, Fashion & Style section. Accessed 29.02.2014: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/21/fashion/21MUSEUMS.html?_r=1&ref=costumeinstitute

Foreman, L. (2013, September 23). 'Fashion museums are à la mode'. *The New York Times* online, Fashion & Style section. Accessed 29.02.2014: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/24/fashion/As-Popularity-Grows-So-Do-Fashion-Museums.html

Foucault, M. ((1967)1986). 'Of Other Spaces' original lecture in French 1967, this version translated by Jay Miskowiec and published in *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1. (Spring, 1986), pp. 22-27

Harries, R. (2012, January 1). 'Fashion at the museum brings in the crowds'. *The Independent* online, Life & Style/Fashion section. Accessed 29.01.2014: http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/news/fashion-at-the-museum-brings-in-the-crowds-6283812.html

Kawamura, Y. (2005). *Fashion-ology*. Oxford & New York: Berg

Lipovetsky, G. (1994). *The Empire of Fashion*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press

Mackinney-Valentin, M. (2010). On the Nature of Trends, PhD dissertation, Copenhagen, Kunstakademiets Designskole. Accessed 10.12.2013: http://www.re-ad.dk/files/32759522/Mackinney_Valentin_OnTheNatureOfTrends2010.pdf

Mairesse, F. ((2007) 2010): 'The term museum'. In Davis, Mairesse & Desvallées (eds.) *What is a Museum?*. München: Verlag Dr. C. Müller-Straten for ICOM

Melchior, M. (2013, July 2). Proposition put forward in workshop at Designmuseum Danmark, as part of the author's ongoing PhD research into museums, fashion and mobile mediation.

Melchior, M. (2011). 'Fashion Museology: Identifying and Contesting Fashion in Museums'. Full paper draft, presented at *Fashion. Exploring critical issues* conference, Mansfield College, Oxford, September 2011. Accessed 2.11.2013: http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Oxford_fashion_exploring_critical_issues_PAPER_MarieRiegelsMelchior.pdf

Palmer, A. (2008). 'Untouchable: Creating desire and knowledge in museum costume and textile exhibitions'. *Fashion Theory* Volume 12, Issue 1, pp. 31-64. Oxford & New York: Berg

Potvin, J. (2012). 'Fashion and the Art Museum: When Giorgio Armani went to the Guggenheim'. *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, Vol 1, No 1. Intellect Ltd pp. 47-63

Rocamora, A. (2011). 'Personal Fashion Blogs: Screens and Mirrors in Digital Selfportraits'. In *Fashion Theory*, Volume 15, Issue 4, pp. 407–424. Oxford & New York: Berg

Skot-Hansen, D. (2008). *Museerne i den danske oplevelsesøkonomi - når oplysning bliver til en oplevelse*. Frederiksberg: Imagine

Steele, V. (2013, March 21). Response to the author following public lecture. Full response quoted in blogpost: http://blatryk.wordpress.com/2013/03/22/obsessing-about-shoes/

Steele, V. (2008). 'Museum quality: The rise of the fashion exhibition'. In *Fashion Theory*, Volume 12, issue 1 pp. 7-30. Oxford & New York: Berg

Steele, V. (1998). 'A museum of fashion is more than a clothes-bag'. In *Fashion Theory*, Volume 2, issue 4, pp. 327-336. Oxford & New York: Berg

Steele, V. (1997). *Fifty Years of Fashion*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press

Sten, U. (2010): 'When the Victoria and Albert became the V&A'. In *The Art of Having an Audience*. Journalistic summary from a Nordic conference on working strategically with audiences. Accessed 11.02.14: http://www.riksutstallningar.se/sites/default/files/user23/KOP_2011_rapport.pdf

Svendsen, L. (2006). *Fashion. A Philosophy*. London: Reaktion Books

Taylor, L. (2004). *Establishing Dress History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press

Taylor, L. (1998). 'Doing the laundry? A reassessment of object-based dress history'. In *Fashion Theory*, Volume 2, issue 4, pp. 337-358. Oxford & New York: Berg

Wilson, E. (1985): *Adorned in Dreams. Fashion and Modernity*. London: Virago

Transformations in the Postmodern Museum

Jane K Nielsen
PhD Candidate in Museum and Gallery Studies, University of St Andrews
jkn2@st-andrews.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper discusses the idea of the postmodern museum in terms of epistemological definitions and futurology theories. The postmodern museum has been a museum concept of visitor focus, interaction and participation. However, as museums are increasingly facing new and different kinds of pressures and responsibilities, the role of especially the curator is changing significantly. This have a major impact on how museums operate, interpret and communicate. By looking at some of the theoretical perspectives of the postmodern museum and at how curators are in fact dealing with broader responsibilities in their daily practices, this paper seeks to identify how these changes influence both museum practice and theory. It sums up the challenges by introducing a new museum model; The Transformative Museum revolving around concepts of transformation, futurology, and museums' needs to constantly transform knowledge and become museums of the future.

Keywords: Modernism, Postmodernism, Transformation, Futurology.

The concept of the postmodern museum has been used for a long time in museological literature and research. The concept was particularly useful because it identified how museum professionals worked and thought about their work, purposes and visitor communication (Hooper-Greenhill 2000). It was also a good starting point for addressing further developments. This paper seeks to define the directions in which museums are developing through the following questions: Is the concept still useful for today's museums? Is the idea of the postmodern museum still benefiting the pressure, purposes, and aims that museums face today? Are there other disciplines or practices that museums could benefit from in order to create a more relevant experience for both staff development and visitor interaction?

In the current climate of financial hardship, many museums find it difficult to manage increasing responsibilities of conservation, research, interaction and participation, which may be why museum professionals still discuss whether prioritising visitor participation compromises conversation and vice versa. It is therefore appropriate to identify new approaches of development. There may be an answer to many of the challenges museums face in academic disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and futurology and in practices connected with storytelling and staff development. Many museums are already using elements from these disciplines in their daily practices. However, these activities are also shaping a totally new type of museum, which requires specific attention to be paid to concepts of flexibility, creativity, participation and transformation not previously addressed by the postmodern museum. In other words; a museum that is ready to transform knowledge, information and activity into all kinds of communication and interpretation.

This paper discusses some of the challenges and transformations of the postmodern museum and proposes a new transformative museum model based on futurologist Richard Slaughter's theory of The Transformative Cycle (Slaughter 2004). Slaughter's theory identifies the different phases of innovation that every new concept or idea has to go through. This makes the theory particularly interesting in terms of museological transformations and directly connects transformations with futurology. Futurology is a relatively recent academic discipline involving systematic and explicit thinking about alternative futures. The exact origin of futurology is unknown as possibilities and predictions have always been part of academic disciplines and research (Bell 2009). Futurology can be seen as a trend developed as part of foresight awareness. It should be made clear that futurology is neither about predicting the future nor about future facts. It is essentially about demystifying the future and makes people think about it in order to assist the present. By applying these theories and perspectives to the latest museum development and museological discussions it is possible to identify a new model of museum development that directly addresses issues of transformation and flexibility; The Transformative Museum.

Defining the intangible

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (Hooper-Greenhill 2000) first mentions the post-museum and defines a new museum concept revolving on postmodern principles (ibid: 152-

153). She defined this new phase of museum philosophy by stating: 'The great collection phase of museums is over. The post-museum will hold and care for objects, but will concentrate more on their use rather than on further accumulation. In addition, the post-museum will be equally interested in intangible heritage' (ibid: 152). The concept of 'intangible heritage' has been difficult for museums to deal with; although most museums seem to consider the 'intangible heritage' to be part of visitor communication, involvement or participation, very few have considered what 'intangible' may encompass, as the concept is never fully defined or explained in policies or strategies. The term has even found its way into official museum definitions. The two following definitions from ICOM are from 2001 and 2007 and although they look very similar there are a few significant changes:

The International Council of Museums' definition, 2001:

> A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, **material evidence of people and their environment** (1).

The International Council of Museums' definition, 2007:

> 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 (1).

It is interesting to note that changes between 2001 and 2007 revolve around 'material evidence' and 'tangible and intangible heritage'. Not only have museum definitions in general shifted from being functional to being about the purpose of the institution, in ICOMs definition it also adds 'intangible heritage' to its core functions. Intangible also seemed to be the term that identified the postmodern museum more than anything else; from a strong focus on collections and objects, museums began to focus on visitor learning, activities and interaction. The term therefore seems to have made its way into definitions as part of postmodern developments and approaches. This article suggests that this has especially affected the curator's role.

The postmodern museum curator

> But many museums today seem torn in all directions and unable to define for themselves why they are here, let alone broadcast this to their potential audiences. Lack of certainty of purpose can only bode ill for future survival (Black 2012: 4).

It has long been discussed whether prioritizing visitor communication and interaction at museums might compromise collection management and conservation (Black 2012; Heal 2012) In fact, it sometimes appears that discussing communication and learning is an attempt to de-emphasise collections or objects. As Black mentions, this has torn museums and made many unable to define their purpose and relevance. Discussions rarely focus on how interlinked the disciplines really are: 'To write interesting and engaging texts, to interpret, explain and engage, and to understand the world around us, we need to understand collections' (Heal 2012: 4). Editor of the *Museum Journal*, Sharon Heal, also stresses that there are many other things museums need to understand: 'We need to understand the public: who they are, why they come, and why they don't. We need to know about their interests and their learning styles, what stories they have and the connections that they make to collections. And there shouldn't be a conflict between that and collections knowledge' (ibid: 4).

It can appear strange that the 'collections versus visitors' debate has turned into the argument it has because there should not be a conflict between them, as Heal mentions. However, it is also an expression of how enthusiastic most museum professionals are about their own areas of expertise. Instead of protecting one's own expertise, it could be interesting to turn this enthusiasm into something that is more beneficial for the museum. Most curators are already broadening their expertise to visitor communication and front-of-house work – this has been the case at smaller museums for a long time. However, in the March 2013 issue of *Museums Journal* John Holt, who had interviewed a group of curators from different museums, describes how many curators feel their work is under threat: 'In the face of cuts and cost savings, one-time specialists are increasingly expected to be multi-tasking generalists' (Holt 2013: 30). Whether due to financial cuts or the education of new generations of curators and research communicators which seem to be more visitor and communication focused, there can be no doubt that the curatorial role is under transformation. The changing role of curators will undoubtedly influence museums' formulation of purposes, aims and strategies in the future. This calls for a new model that

acknowledges these transformations and provides room for them to take place as natural developments of museum research and communication. It will be necessary for some museums to leave their comfort zone by developing new ways of engaging communities, broadening visitor participation, or transforming research in order to suit interaction with various users simultaneously. This can naturally seem very daunting in times of financial hardship and when many museums have experienced a reduction of staff. However, the prospects also pose some interesting new perspectives of curatorial work:

- Brendan Carr, curator, Reading Museum: 'Some people think that curators are a fount of all knowledge; that's fine but I don't think you should just be a human Google and you should, instead, direct inquirers to make discoveries for themselves' (ibid: 30).
- Michelle Brown, community curator, London Transport Museum: 'One day I might be accessioning posters, the next working with artists' (ibid: 33).
- Mark Macleod, operations and projects curator, Museum of the University of St Andrews: Curators can no longer think of themselves as 'the experts' without being able to qualify it. It's probable the Wikipedia model will infiltrate the museum sector providing multiple theories for an object that will provide the viewer with a much larger context about it' (ibid: 32).

Museum functions are undergoing transformations as both visitors' and professionals' idea of the curator's job change. Visitors' requests are broadening the curator's role to be one of specialist, communicator, teacher and motivator. More importantly; curators also have to 'qualify' these roles (ibid: 32). This is causing the concept of the postmodern museum to change as attention shifts to what visitors request and how professionals can transform their knowledge to suit these requests. It is also interesting to note that two of the quotations above mention *Google* and *Wikipedia*. Visitors' interests are clearly shaped by online media and how we communicate through them.

Changes are necessary for all organisations to survive. However, what exactly is it that museums strive to do today? What sort of interaction, interpretation and knowledge is it they want to provide to visitors? Some museums are beginning to experiment with their visitor practices to address future thinking.

Transforming past and present for the future

As the future cannot be a repeat of the past, futurology becomes relevant for both individuals and organisations. Futurology can create the proper tools for people or organisations to feel confident instead of overwhelmed about the future. It involves analyses of possible futures and seeks to discover possibilities early on by acknowledging differences in history, culture, aims and opinions using the future to change the present thus creating innovation. For organisations this can be an essential help to strategic planning and purpose definitions. Futurology is about understanding the alternative possibilities for the coming future and about actively seeking to encompass them. Futurology should therefore be seen as an interdisciplinary field that can open up for alternative views, discourses and challenges (Bell 2009). Futurists often view the different angles of the field from various academic fields such as history, sociology and learning, for example.

Futurology presents a wide variation of systematic, participatory, strategic and interpretative analyzing methods. Some apply to organisational analysis, some to social, personal or methodological approaches. This paper will take a closer look at one particular theory that may enhance museums' possibilities of defining aims, purposes and future strategies; The Transformative Cycle.

The Transformative Cycle (T-cycle) looks at the processes of implementing changes by identifying the different phases of new ideas, concepts or innovations. It was developed by futurist Richard Slaughter in the early 1980s and further studied by him, Luke Naismith and Neil Houghton at The Australian Foresight Institute at Swinburne University of Technology (Slaughter 2004; Naismith 2004; Houghton 2004). One of Slaughter's key points is that social systems always resist change - often for very good reasons. As stated by Michel Foucault (1972: 89-141); a system will often first recognise changes when it comes across a disturbance. This disturbance can be seen in the four phases of The Transformative Cycle (Slaughter 2004: 6):

- Breakdowns of meaning
- Re-Conceptualisations
- Conflict and Negotiation
- Selective Legitimation

What the T-cycle seeks to define is the four phases which every innovative concept has to go through:

Once a problem is identified it is often causing a breakdown of meanings; '…it refers to understandings, concepts, values and agreements that once served to support social interaction but which now, for one reason or another, have become problematic' (ibid: 6). Many breakdowns can of course be seen as problems and therefore dysfunctional. However, they can also be seen as complex formations of ideas, understandings and meanings that could once be taken for granted but now cannot anymore. This definition is particularly close to Foucault's definitions of epistemes which define the values, codes, languages and meanings of a culture - the shift from one episteme (or concept of understanding) takes place when 'a breakdown' occurs. Apart from the breakdown of specific ideas, museums have, for a long time, struggled with overall aspects of communication methods, new ways of exhibiting and interpreting collections. Requirements of social inclusion, community engagement and increasing visitor numbers collided with a period of financial hardship. This is causing museums to not only change their strategic approach to visitor communication and exhibition interaction; they also have to find new ways of dealing with changing requirements. Some museums have responded to this by setting up projects aimed at specific visitor groups or by attempting new exhibition approaches of flexibility like, for example, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum (Morgan 2013; Sharp 2012).

When a breakdown occurs there will be many ideas and proposals for changes through a range of media. They do not necessarily concern the future, yet they set out to offer future solutions to what may be considered problems. For many museums the use of new technology has provided an opportunity to develop new communication approaches like the use of QR codes, online games and interactive exhibition features, for example. There has also been a specific focus on museums' own role and purpose as museums often focus on their relevance on websites, in exhibitions or on social media. These discussions have become more open and are less frightening for museums to engage in.

New ideas will inevitably cause conflicts and require negotiations. Some conflicts will never reach the stage of negotiations; to negotiate requires that two opposite sides are willing to listen or view each other's opinions as equals. The path from conflict to negotiation can thus be very long and complex and it will require persistence and support to reach the level of negotiation. Sometimes an idea has to be given up or sometimes modified. Experimenting with new approaches will lead to both failures and successes. Some museums have experienced new successful ways of including visitors, presenting collections and communicating their main fields of expertise. Others may have experienced less interaction and may feel they are compromising their collections by focusing on communication. From these conflicts and negotiations come a number of different strategies and approaches; some created for the individual museum and some as part of a broader museum discussion.

Selection is essentially about implementing new ideas or concepts; far more ideas or proposals are generated at one time than can be taken up. However, selection criteria cannot be guaranteed to be neither fair nor adequate in social systems. Therefore it might not always be the best ideas or proposals that are adopted (although the definition of best is naturally a matter of perspective too). The model does therefore not propose that this particular process of transformation corresponds with improvements. Sometimes it can result in regression. Selective legitimation depends greatly on who accepts new proposals and how proposals will be implemented. The process will often serve particular interests and validate meanings that work for the majority (Slaughter, 2004: 6-8). Museums often experience this in general debates between professionals and researchers. However, suggestions, ideas and approaches tend to be as varied as museums. A museum has to focus on its own purpose and identify this in research and communication approaches.

Slaughter believed that legitimated meanings will not usually return to the same breakdown process; time might have altered the original context thus incorporating a new meaning into other concepts. If a new idea is strong enough to receive wide support, new conditions will follow. It is also worth noting that re-conceptualisations may generate counter-processes that can take form of an inhibiting backlash. Also, conflicts may come and go and equally change focus (ibid: 9-10).

The T-cycle has proven particularly useful in three types of contexts (ibid: 11-12):

- As a general-purpose workshop and teaching tool
- As a tool for the analysis of change within specific institutions
- As a tool for research and cultural criticism

Interestingly, the T-cycle itself poses a disturbance or 'breakdown' that may lead to new meaning developments: 'The T-Cycle can therefore itself be understood as part of an approach to futures work that is centrally concerned with the recovery of meaning' (ibid: 12).

The processes of implementing new meanings do not happen quickly; ideas may therefore circle around in the T-cycle for a very long time going back and forth through different phases. However, almost all cultural innovations are a result of social innovations. The processes therefore involve social learning as well. Social learning often involves analyses of what does not work (and not just of what does work) as a way into a solution.

Transformation must be seen as a particularly important element of futurology and related disciplines: 'Transformation involves a holistic and deep change within individuals, organisations and societies. It covers both the inner change of people's attitudes and their belief systems as well as how these changes are expressed in behaviours at the individual and collective level' (Naismith 2004: 21). It can be argued that transformation is first and foremost about personal transformation as it often requires a change in ones inner perspectives before it is possible to change external factors. However, transformation can occur at a number of different levels. It can also occur at different times and will involve dynamic processes that continue before and after the transformation period.

The idea of the T-cycle can define a new approach for museums to plan their aims and strategies around.

The Transformative Museum

The term, The Transformative Museum (2), is undoubtedly one that will return in different connections as museums undergo transformations either as physical restorations, in mission statements or in learning and exhibition practices. I have chosen the term to focus on the necessity of transformation in museology, but also as a connection to the concepts of the T-cycle as an innovative process of development. I will here try to incorporate it as part of a development to the postmodern museum and in connection with the T-cycle in order to form a new methodological way of thinking about museum transformations.

Future thinking is not new to museums. However, the concept of change can be difficult for most museums to relate to: 'Society is changing much faster than we are. We must accept the need for rapid change in museum ethos and practice, even in times of financial hardship, in order to respond to twenty-first century demands - a big challenge for a profession that is notoriously resistant to change. For the necessary change to happen, we must all be futurists now' (Black 2012: 8).

A new way of thinking is clearly infiltrating museums. As inquiries and visitor expectations change, exhibitions are being designed to apply flexibility. Attempts are being made to add new information or include new objects as well as involving visitors. An example of this is the newly restored Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, which reopened in 2006 after a major refurbishment 3 (Morgan 2013; Sharp 2012). Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum sought to implement a more flexible display framework that would make it possible to evolve and change displays with changing public interests and also reduce the need for future financial investment in exhibitions (3). Although the museum has experienced some negative feedback on this (Sharp 2012: 26) this way of thinking about the future in exhibition design is a new approach and clearly demonstrates that museums are beginning to respond to visitors' changing interests and are even beginning to implement this in exhibition communication. Change in the use of technology, requirements of direct visitor participation and the need for changing display designs seem to be moving museums in the direction of future thinking, flexibility and transformation.

It should be made clear that in museum practice and theory there is a difference between *change* and *transformation*. It is not always necessary to change everything in order to develop. However, transformation can be about smaller or more complex changes as well as bigger and more general changes. Communication and learning develop quickly, and museums have to make the past and present relevant and useful to many generations at many levels simultaneously. They have to be enablers and transformation and flexibility become key. In this way, one object may *speak* to children or young people through an online game or a learning programme one day - the next day to elderly people at reminiscence courses etc.

Development of transformation can be defined through epistemological definitions of modernism and postmodernism too; where modernism was about making sense and using reason, postmodernism has been about creating relevance or making that sense and reason relevant. Transformation is about transforming the

relevant sense and reason that postmodernism defined. A transformative museum will be a museum that transforms postmodern sense and reason to the future and makes sure a transformation stays relevant through flexibility, discussion and participation. The transformative museum can therefore be seen as a new way of understanding. Research, knowledge and information have to be transformed in terms of learning and exhibition approaches, in terms of epistemological understandings and in terms of new practices and methods of communication such as, for example, storytelling, social media and museological debates.

In order for knowledge and information to make sense it has to be transformed and communicated to match different purposes, aims and objectives at different times. This is a process in constant activity. It will undoubtedly be the most important task of the transformative museum to be prepared for transformation of knowledge, information and research by using all kinds of theoretical, practical, technological and social approaches. This also means that there will be no subject or theme that a museum cannot approach or discuss. A museum in constant transformation will be a museum shaped by knowledge and traditions of the past, by debates, discussions and trends of the present and by ideas, thoughts and opportunities of the future.

Identifying transformation in museums

Looking at some of the changes that have happened between modernism and postmodernism and how approaches are changing towards a constant flexible and transformative way of thinking, we see that many essential terms of understanding are affected. These definitions are chosen subjectively by me to demonstrate the developments in museological thinking.

Essential developments in modern, postmodern and transformative understandings:

Modern	Postmodern	Transformation
1. Instructive Learning	Visitor Interaction	Visitor Influence
2. National Focus	Global Focus	World-Wide(Web)
3. Chronology	Storytelling	Participation
4. Objectivity	Subjectivity	Flexibility

1. Firstly, the more or *less instructive learning* style of the modern museum has transformed to a strong focus on *visitor interaction* in the postmodern understanding. However, we also see signs that it is not enough anymore for visitors to just interact. They want to have a direct *influence* of the learning process, the social and the personal experience of a museum visit.

2. Where the modern museum tended to focus on *national history* and a community's own origin, the postmodern museum became a very *global* museum where even smaller local museums had to define their purpose in global settings. Transformation is even wider than global; it has become *worldwide* and especially all-knowing as all types of information is always accessible through digital media. People join social websites like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, for example, because they can participate, make contributions and gain information quickly according to interests and choices. These types of communication shape how people gain new knowledge and how they want to participate and socialise. Visitors expect all kinds of information to be accessible either as part of an exhibition, event or via social media.

3. Many modern museum models presented their exhibitions through a certain *chronology*, order or classification. Archaeological and historical objects were often defined through age, size, material or use. The postmodern museum tends to focus on the *stories* behind the objects and often centres on historic themes. Transformation acknowledges this part of telling stories by adding *participation* to a very distinct degree. It is not just a question of letting visitors interact with objects or in activities, but all these things now have to be open to influences from visitors by letting visitors shape them. Visitors have to be given opportunities to form their own stories, find the information they themselves find interesting and shape activities and exhibitions by sharing and adding their own knowledge and experiences. They want to participate and they want their influences to be visible and useful.

4. The modern museum mainly presented collections in a so-called *objective* manner. This meant that there were only one or a few answers to questions regarding a nation's history and these answers were accepted as truth. The truth was taken as a given within museums. The postmodern museum made it possible for museums

(and sometimes visitors) to add their own voice in an exhibition. The transformative museum will open up to even more *flexibility* as visitors will seek their own ways around knowledge interests. This means that sometimes visitors will seek expert knowledge, sometimes social participation and sometimes digital interaction etc. Presentation, interaction and interpretation will become more flexible and in constant transformation as requests become broader and have to be aimed at all kinds of visitors.

Conclusion

The concept of the postmodern museum is undertaking such development that it is appropriate to talk about the implementation of a new museum concept. Museums have been under intense pressure during the last few decades - not just due to financial challenges but also as their areas of responsibilities have changed. The current museological discussions and developments in theory are not just asking for flexibility, but that museums encompass all types of visitors in their communication practices, that they are socially inclusive institutions where everyone can develop, and that they remain on top of their game by providing academic excellence. In order to fulfil all these requirements museums have to begin to think about their collections, visitor interaction, purposes, aims and relevance in a different way. They have to be museums for future generations, future research and future inclusion. These aspects require constant flexibility, creative thinking and, above all, transformation.

It is often discussed that museums should change or at least be prepared for change. However, this has not always been a particular useful concept. Firstly, museums already change according to visitor interests and requests. Secondly, change will be individual depending on each museum's aims, purposes and approaches. It is also important to note that not everything needs to change in order for museums to develop. However, museums are required to be able to transform their vast amount of knowledge, information and research into all kinds of interpretation, interaction, communication and participation. The role of the curator is becoming broader and much more socially inclusive; as well as being experts in their own fields, curators have to make their knowledge available, accessible and flexible to match all groups of visitors, new technological features, online communication and research. This requires transformation more than actual change. The more museums start to think transformative approaches into their theory and practice, the better prepared are they going to be for future challenges and possibilities.

Notes

(1) International Council of Museums (ICOM), Museum definition, http://archives.icom.museum/hist_def_eng.html, accessed 16 January 2012.

(2) The term, The Transformative Museum, was first used as a conference title in 2012 in connection with a conference held by DREAM (Danish Research Centre on Education and Advanced Media Materials): DREAM - Danish Research Centre on Education and Advanced Media Materials: The Transformative Museum Conference: http://www.dreamconference.dk/, accessed 19 March 2013.

(3) Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum: http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/kelvingrove/Pages/default.aspx, accessed 8 September 2012.

Acknowledgements

References

Bell, W. (2009). *Foundations of Future Studies. History, Purposes, Knowledge. Volume 1. Human Science for a New Era*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, Transaction Publishers.

Black, G. (2012). *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-first Century*. London and New York, Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London, Tavistock Publications Limited.

Heal, S. (2012). 'Editorial: It's not a case of the public or collections'. *Museums Journal*. Museums Association. December 2012. p. 4.

Holt, J. (2013). 'The Curators'. *Museums Journal*. Museums Association. March 2013. pp. 30-33.

Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000*). Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*. London and New York, Routledge.

Houghton, N. (2004). 'Futures and Complex Thinking: stepping through the doorstep of dialectics'*. Monograph Series 2004*, No. 6. Australian Foresight Institute, Swinburne University. pp. 47-60.

Morgan, J. (2013). 'Examining the 'flexible museum': exhibition process, a project approach, and the creative element'. *Museum and Society*, July 2013. Vol. 11, no. 2. pp. 158-171.

Naismith, L. (2004). 'Transformative Cycle'. *Monograph Series 2004*, No. 6. Australian Foresight Institute, Swinburne University. p. 21-45.

Sharp, R. (2012). 'Flexible thinking'. *Museums Journal*. Museums Association. October 2012. pp. 24-29.

Slaughter, R. A. (2004). 'The Transformative Cycle: a Tool for Illuminating Change'. *Monograph Series 2004*, No. 6. Australian Foresight Institute, Swinburne University. pp. 5-19.

Before Museums: The Curiosity Cabinet as Metamorphe

Stephanie Bowry
PhD Researcher, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester
sjb129@le.ac.uk

Abstract

The fascination with metamorphosis permeates collecting practice, long before the advent of the first public museums. Cabinets of curiosity – privately-owned collections of extraordinary objects, which proliferated in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – actively sought out objects which appeared to transgress the boundaries between nature and artifice, reality and fantasy, life and death.

Metamorphosis was also reflected in the cabinet's arrangement of objects into flexible categories, which illuminated the similarities, or correspondences, between materials (1).

This paper explores the cabinet as a key site of metamorphosis through its selection and ordering of objects, as well as its propensity as a fluid concept to change and be changed. It contends that the cabinet is best understood not as an embryonic museum, but as a form of cultural practice whose own metamorphosis has been more complex and multifarious.

Keywords: curiosity cabinet, art, metamorphosis, objects, taxonomies of display

Metamorphosis – the phenomenon of change, or transformation (2) – deeply informed collecting practice during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This paper explores how the concept of metamorphosis shaped the principles for the selection and categorisation of objects in the early modern curiosity cabinet. This study begins, however, not with the description of a physical collection, but with the formal and iconographical analysis of a seventeenth-century painting. Here, I argue that an understanding of early modern images of objects and collections as symbolic representations of the world furnishes a viable means of interpreting the visual and conceptual practices of early collections. Within this prelude I also present a brief definition of the curiosity cabinet, a problematic term for reasons I outline.

Following the introduction, the main body of the paper is divided into three parts, each of which examines a different form of metamorphosis. The first examines objects in early modern collections relating to or embodying metamorphosis, while the second explores how the idea of metamorphosis permeated the very systems and concepts that governed how objects were categorised. The final section considers how the cabinet itself has been subject to metamorphosis, and how it has reappeared in contemporary museums and galleries as a recognisable cultural object in its own right.

Consuming the World in the Seventeenth Century

To contemplate Dirck Hals' *Lustige Gesellschaft*, or, *Jolly Party* (1628), a small painting of a group of merry-makers (3), is to enter a very different world (Figure 1). Three exquisitely-attired couples are at the conclusion of a meal. The setting is a small, intimate room in which a number of objects appear: notably paintings, musical instruments, and a small table cabinet. Two men stand upright – one striking a self-consciously celebratory pose with one hand on his hip and one foot resting upon a stool – (4) while the rest of the company take their ease about the table. Rosy-cheeked and bedecked in silks, satins, and lace, four of the sitters turn their gaze outwards, and a woman to the right appears to beckon an unseen figure in. Their expressions are both contented and bemused, as if the spectator – you, or I – has stumbled in late, and missed all the fun.

Hals (1591-1656), a fashionable Dutch artist, gained fame for painting scenes of revelry known as 'merry companies' or 'conversation pieces', featuring youthful aristocracy at play in sumptuous surroundings (5). Paintings such as Hals' were popular amongst the prosperous middle-class citizens of Haarlem, especially between 1620-1635 (Biesboer 2001: 40), and reveal a world of luxury objects and the manner of their consumption. As such, they are a rich and appropriate place to begin a discussion of the curiosity cabinet, and have the potential to illuminate how a particular group of people attempted to represent their world through the manipulation of natural and artificial materials.

As observers of *Lustige Gesellschaft*, we can deduce how the artist represents his world from the context in which these fashionably-dressed sitters perform. Consider, for example, the remnants of a good meal on the

table, the fringed rug beneath the table cloth, heavy with embroidery and tassels, the landscape paintings on the walls, the collection of musical instruments hanging beside the pipe-smoker, the sword in its scabbard precariously balanced between a table and a chair leg, the flowers and oyster shells strewn upon the flagstones, and finally the table cabinet, its gilded edge and floral decoration just visible behind a red-stockinged-leg (6).

Figure 1 Dirck Hals' *Lustige Gesellschaft*, or *Jolly Party* (1628), Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf. By kind permission of and © Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast – ARTOTHEK.

These objects represent themselves, but they also stand in for much larger ideas: not simply for love of arts or wealth, but for the act of *consuming* the world, in which we, the spectators, as well as the sitters, are actively engaged. Paintings, music, food, and tobacco refer to different kinds, as well as different hierarchies, of consumption, and boxes, caskets, and cabinets refer to a popular means of display and containment which also speaks to the desire to arrange and to order as well as to possess (7). Certain objects also indicate change and decay – flowers and shells being commonplace symbols for transience and death in this period – and so literally bring the merry company down to earth with the promise of future corruption, a motif commonly found in still life and vanitas paintings of the same period (8). Moreover, all representation – and consumption – necessarily involves a transformation, or metamorphosis, of a kind. Here, the artist has transformed the world into an image or stage in which endless connections and interpretations are possible. The curiosity cabinet also performed this role during the same period: and it is to this world that we now turn.

What were cabinets of curiosity?

Cabinets of curiosity may be defined as privately-owned collections of extraordinary objects – that is, objects perceived to be rare, beautiful, strange, or ingenious. Cabinets typically contained both natural and artificial materials, and collections of this type arguably first appeared in late fifteenth-century Italy in the form of the *scrittoio*: a private space for study or contemplation (Arnold 2006: 14; MacGregor 2007: 12) which sometimes contained small objects. *Scrittoi* often included painted, *trompe l'oeil* objects such as astrolabes in the *scrittoio* of Federigo da Montefeltro (1422-1482) in Gubbio (MacGregor 2007: 12), as well as three-dimensional objects

such as the Aztec sculptures which inhabited the *scrittoio* of Cosimo I de' Medici (1519-1574) in Florence (Turpin 2006: 66).

Early collections were diverse in size and in type, and went by different names in a variety of languages, many of which are today conflated under the term 'cabinet'. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they were also known as *kunstkammern*, (art chambers), *wunderkammern*, (wonder chambers), and *musea*, although this term was not necessarily understood in the same way that it is today (Findlen 2004: 161). Moreover, these terms were not always used consistently. Although the term 'cabinet' was in use during this period, it was used by collectors to refer to several different things: to the pieces of furniture in which some objects were displayed, to the rooms or buildings housing collections, and to the collection itself. Sometimes, it was also applied to 'auxiliary' collections such as libraries and gardens (MacGregor 2007: 35-6).

Cabinets were owned mostly by men from elite but varying social strata: from princes to professionals such as physicians and apothecaries. The earliest-known image of a curiosity cabinet is that of Ferrante Imperato, a Neapolitan apothecary, from a catalogue frontispiece of 1599 (Figure 2). This engraving shows an example of a collection displayed in a single room, some of which is housed in finely-worked cabinets. While such images are not necessarily accurate representations of how a given collection appeared, but rather idealised visions of the cabinet project (Fabiański 1990: 122), they remain an invaluable source of information for how collectors envisaged objects and their relationships to each other and the wider world. Imperato's display is dense and populated largely by natural historical specimens, but tellingly, inhabiting the same conceptual space are books and artificial objects.

Figure 2 The cabinet of Ferrante Imperato, from an engraving of 1599. This image first appeared in Imperato's Dell'Historia Naturale and reveals a world in which significant groupings or constellations of objects were displayed in order to render the natural world intelligible. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 3 The Augsburg Art Cabinet, (1625-31), Uppsala University Art Collections. This object and some of its remarkable contents are on permanent display at the Museum Gustavianum, University of Uppsala, Sweden. Photo by kind permission of and © Uppsala University Art Collections.

The Augsburg Art Cabinet (Figure 3) represents a very different kind of collection. Gifted to King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden in 1632, it was designed by the merchant Philipp Hainhofer and its components built and assembled by specialist artisans from more than 30 different workshops in Augsburg between 1625-31 (Boström 2004: 543). Known as a *kunstschränk*, or 'art cupboard', it was filled with objects from Hainhofer's own collection, many of which still survive, from a monkey's claw to a pair of mechanical dolls (9). Essentially a curiosity cabinet in miniature, it was designed to function as a collection in its own right, but would also serve as the centrepiece to a larger collection (Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 120). Thus, while both Imperato's collection and Hainhofer's masterpiece constitute cabinets, they were very different in nature, purpose, and performance.

Cabinets of curiosity reached the height of their popularity in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There are several reasons for this. During the seventeenth century, not only were more objects being produced than ever before, but trade networks were expanding, and merchants were bringing back objects from further afield, including parts of Syria, China, Japan, India, South America, and Mexico (Scheurleer 1985: 117; Meadow 2002: 182). Many of these items were unfamiliar or entirely unknown to European collectors. One such object was the enigmatic 'Bracelet made of thighes of Indian flyes', which appears in the catalogue of the Lambeth-based collector John Tradescant the Younger (1656: 51). The collection and display of vast quantities of heterogeneous material represented a means of making sense of the ever-expanding world, as well as facilitating the assertion of a symbolic power over it.

Cabinets are often thought of as prototype museums (MacGregor 2007: 1) (10), yet this view can be reductive and rarely does justice to the complexity and sophistication of the cabinet phenomenon. However strange or improbable they may seem, many of these collections constituted serious enterprises, including the attempt not only to contain, but to order all known things. The purpose of collecting may thus be construed as an effort to dispel mystery, not to cultivate it, except through the genius of the collector. For, as English philosopher and courtier Francis Bacon stated,

> when all other miracles and wonders shall cease, by reason that you shall have discovered their natural causes, yourself shall be left the only miracle and wonder of the world (Bacon 1688: 54-5).

In Bacon's world, cabinets represented a kind of alchemical laboratory, turning base objects into knowledge, and knowledge into wisdom.

Metamorphic Objects

How was this kind of metamorphosis reflected in the physical objects cabinets contained? Today, the term 'metamorphosis' is applied in a wide variety of disciplines, from literature to biology and geology, and is often used to describe rapid and major structural change. Additionally, this term has evolutionary connotations – in particular, it has been used to describe the life cycle of insects from a larval to an adult state (Soanes and Stephenson 2005: 1103).

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one thing most collections had in common was their division into two broad categories: *naturalia* and *artificialia*: the products of nature and those of artifice (Boström 2004: 545). However, objects frequently straddled multiple categories, and the most highly-prized of all were those exhibiting both natural and artificial attributes. I therefore suggest that objects exhibiting metamorphic tendencies in the cabinet may thus be divided into the following broad categories (11):

1. Natural metamorphes (e.g. animals and plants)

2. Artificial metamorphes (e.g. automata)

3. Hybrid metamorphes (objects between the natural and the artificial)

To this list I add a fourth category: symbolic metamorphes; objects referring to the process of metamorphosis through allegory, for example. However, this category is often interwoven with one or all of the above.

Natural Metamorphes

Chameleons were one of the most popular natural specimens in cabinet collections. Collectors prized these creatures not only for their ability to change colour, but their capacity – alleged by Aristotle – to live upon air alone (Grinke 2006: 13). Indeed, their very name is suggestive of metamorphosis, from the Greek *khamai*, 'on the ground', and *leōn*, 'lion' (Soanes and Stevenson 2005: 286). While this may indicate that chameleons were once thought to resemble lions in some way, it also foregrounds the notion of similitude in nature, in which correspondences and relationships might be perceived, even between very different species.

The seventeenth-century collection of Dr. John Bargrave (1610-1680) supplies a rare example of a preserved chameleon (Figure 4). As a supporter of King Charles I during the English Civil War, Bargrave was in exile between 1646 and 1660, during which time he travelled mostly in France and Italy, but also in Austria, Germany, and Africa, and collected hundreds of small objects for his cabinet. Bargrave became Canon of Canterbury Cathedral in 1660 and was fascinated by the living chameleon which he acquired in Algiers, North Africa, on a diplomatic mission in 1662. This specimen was 'perfumed and stuffed' at Bargrave's request by the ship's

surgeon after it perished on the return voyage to England, and is now stored within Canterbury Cathedral Archives (Bargrave 1867 [1662]: 129).

Figure 4 The fragile remains of a chameleon from the collection of Dr. John Bargrave, 1662. Reproduced by kind permission of and © Canterbury Cathedral Archives.

Figure 5 Hans Schlottheim's ship automaton, 1585. By kind permission of and © the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien.

Bargrave was particularly interested in *how* the chameleon changed colour, and reported that an efficacious method of bringing this about was

> to anger it, and put it into a passion, by touching of it with a stick or a bodkin (12) [...] Then it would fetch great breaths, by which it made itself swell very much, and in its swellings out came the colours of all sorts, which changed as it was more or less provoked to anger. And when the passion was over, it would look as pale as a clout [sic] (ibid: 130).

Bargrave also noted that the contemporary belief that the chameleon's body was 'pellucid', or translucent, and therefore did not produce its own colours, was erroneous, as was the ancient belief that it lived upon air, for he had witnessed it eating flies. Moreover, Bargrave's description of this unfamiliar creature compares it to a lizard in appearance, but he also states that it moved slowly, like a tortoise, and had scales like a fish (ibid: 129). Establishing similitude to the known was a core function of cabinets of curiosity (13), in which many different specimens could be placed together and compared. Yet this search for patterns in nature also describes an allegorical approach to collecting in which the identity of objects was created by their perceived relationships to others.

In general, 'exotic' specimens such as this far outnumbered native species in early modern English collections (Hunter 1995: 144). This demonstrates that one of the key functions of the cabinet was to exhibit not only the wonders of nature, but the *variety* of forms nature was able to produce. The more an object deviated from what was known in nature, the more highly it was valued. Indeed, as Bacon had predicted, ascertaining (and documenting) the causes of natural phenomena such as metamorphosis became one of the grandest cabinet projects of all.

Artificial Metamorphes

Other kinds of object were lent metamorphic attributes by artificial means. This gilded and painted model of a ship (Figure 5) was created by Hans Schlottheim (1545-1625), one of the most well-known makers of clocks and automata in sixteenth-century Augsburg, in 1585. As a model, it boasts a wealth of intricate detail, from its painted sails featuring an allegorical battle between humans and centaurs to its delicate rigging and anchor. The double-headed eagle emblazoned on its flags and banners – the symbol of the Holy Roman Empire – indicates that it may have been made for Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612), a major patron of automata and the owner of a vast curiosity cabinet in Prague (Maurice 1980: 87). However, the ship also conceals a sophisticated clockwork mechanism which transforms it from a static model into a musical clock and plaything.

The ship's clockwork mechanisms can still be operated, following an elaborate sequence which sees the ship speed along hidden wheels to the merry tune of a company of painted and articulated metal drummers and pipers on the decks. These tiny figures turn from side to side and raise and lower their limbs as if beating drums and playing trumpets. At the end of its journey, the observer is hailed by a sudden broadside of cannon fire. Known as a *nef*, a type of medieval French galleon, these objects are thought to have derived from the most splendid objects on medieval tables: decorative salt cellars in the form of ships, salt being a precious commodity at the time (Lazslo 2001: 149-50). This remarkable object was intended as a table decoration to entertain diners, but clearly references its earlier incarnations as a functional container for edible substances, again revealing a link between consumption – both literal and metaphorical – and representation.

While the ship automaton, with its pipers and drummers, may not strike us immediately as a metamorphic object, through its imitation of lifelike actions, it transgressed the boundaries between inanimate object and the reality it strove to represent. Its ability to provoke surprise was also a key part of this, and immersed in the noise and smoke of its cannon fire, it would indeed have presented a startling display of human ingenuity. As Jonathan Sawday (2007: 191) has noted, the creators of these kinds of objects were often viewed in a manner consonant with the antique belief 'in the fabricator of machines as a magician or sorcerer of some kind, capable of creating mechanical life'.

Hybrid and Symbolic Metamorphes

The final object of this study is a particularly transgressive one, illustrating a complex and multi-layered relationship to metamorphosis. This section will begin with an examination of the object's physical properties before considering each interpretive layer in turn. A silver-gilt statue of a young woman in classical dress, this object was created by the famous goldsmith Abraham Jamnitzer in Nuremberg between *circa* 1579-86, possibly for Augustus, Elector of Saxony (1526-86), and now resides in the Dresden State Art Collection's Green Vault. Her graceful pose and resigned expression belie the fact that she appears to be in the process of a strange transformation. The figure's arms are raised, but her hands and wrists have been supplanted by a mass of red coral tines. Her head is crowned by a far larger piece of coral, which is approximately three-quarters the height of the figure.

The statue is at once a hybrid of natural and artificial materials transformed into a new kind of object. Early modern collectors were fascinated by materials which resembled other kinds of object – coral was especially popular due to its likeness to miniature trees and plants. Collectors were also fond of turning natural objects into cultured ones: for example by mounting ostrich eggs and nautilus shells on elaborate gold and silver constructions.

Coral, however, was significant in its own right because it was perceived to lie between the realms of the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms (Mauriès 2011: 89), and was therefore a difficult object for collectors to categorise. It also represented a curious object because there was disagreement between collectors as to whether it was living or dead. For example, in his report of a tour of Florentine collections in 1644, the English diarist and collector John Evelyn (1620-1706) reported, somewhat drily, that 'They also shew us a branch of Corall fix'd on the rock which they affirme dos still grow' (Pearce and Arnold 2000: 7).

In fact, Jamnitzer's statue is a copy of an earlier work by his father, Wenzel Jamnitzer, and both are thought to represent the nymph Daphne who, fleeing the sexual advances of the god Apollo, called upon her father to transform her into a laurel tree. The poet Ovid (43 BC-AD 17), who recounted the tale in Book One of his *Metamorphoses*, tells us that Apollo afterwards wore a laurel wreath in her memory (Ovid 1955: 44).

However, the figure of Daphne – like many objects produced for cabinets – also conceals a surprising secret. While Daphne appears to be a single object, she is in fact two. If the torso is grasped, the two halves of the statue part at the waist of the figure, and the lower half transforms into a drinking vessel (Figures 6 and 7), again linking together representation with consumption, although whether this object was intended only for display or to be used is another matter. The lower half of the torso also bears a fine arabesque design around the brim of the cup which is concealed when the object is whole.

Figure 6 Abraham Jamnitzer's *Daphne als Trinkgefäß* (*Daphne as Drinking Vessel*) in two pieces, made in Nuremberg, *c.*1579-86. The combined height of the piece is 68 cm. By kind permission of Grünes Gewölbe, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Photograph © Image Library, Grünes Gewölbe.

Figure 7 An alternative view of Abraham Jamnitzer's *Daphne,* showing the hollow drinking cup. By kind permission of Grünes Gewölbe, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, photograph © Image Library, Grünes Gewölbe.

 The statue of Daphne is therefore a work interlaid with multiple and overlapping concepts of metamorphosis. It was designed to showcase the skill of the *artifex*, the human creator mimicking the divine creation (Browne 1657: 250). Here, then, we begin to enter the territory, not only of metamorphosis, but of metaphor, and so, into the slippery fourth category of metamorphic objects. Metaphor derives from the Greek *metapherein* – meaning not to transform, but to transfer (Soanes and Stephenson 2005: 1103). For the seventeenth-century historian, poet, and rhetoritician Emanuele Tesauro (1592-1675), who wrote extensively on this subject, everything in the world was a kind of metaphor, and, he says,

> if nature speaks to us through these metaphors, it follows that an encyclopaedic collection, as the sum of all possible metaphors, must logically become the all-encompassing metaphor for the world (Tesauro cited in Mauriès 2011: 91).

 Metaphor and the cabinet both exist as lenses for examining the world, and functioned, as Michael Spitzer (2004: 2) has contended, as 'a model or a picture of something to which we can never have direct access': in this case, the mysteries of Nature. However, our perception of both metaphor and metamorphosis depends largely upon the systems of belief to which objects are subjected.

Systems of Ordering

How, then, did collectors categorise objects in cabinets? The arrangement of one's collection was a deeply personal matter; however, contrary to popular belief, many cabinets were arranged in a systematic fashion: that is to say, by concept. One of the most fruitful historical sources for this is Samuel Quiccheberg's*, Inscriptiones vel Tituli Theatri Amplissimi Complectentis*, or, *The Inscriptions or Titles of the Most Complete Theatre*, published in Munich in 1565. This short Latin text is the earliest known treatise to set out a model for collectors to follow, detailing what to collect, and how to organise and display it, along with recommendations for architectural features and auxiliary facilities such as a print workshop, a pharmacy, and a foundry (Meadow 2013: 72).

Quiccheberg, a Belgian physician, librarian, and custodian of collections, recommended the arrangement of all collectible objects into five classes, or categories. Each class was divided into ten or eleven 'inscriptions', or subcategories, which list the individual objects in that category. However, Quiccheberg's use of Latin is unorthodox and his meaning can be difficult to decipher as a result. Moreover, Quiccheberg does not explain his inclusion of certain objects in some classes and not others, so that scholars continue to debate the meaning and overall logic of his system.

The first class relates to the collector: it includes paintings of the collector and his family, genealogies and maps and images of the collector's realm. The second relates to artificial materials: from statues and paintings to furniture and patterns for imprinting upon precious metals, while the third relates to natural materials – Quiccheberg once refers to it as 'Incredible Animals' (Leonardis 2013: 34) – and it does contain animal specimens, but also those of plants and minerals. The fourth class relates to tools and instruments, from surgical instruments to writing implements. The fifth class – the hardest to describe – contains a variety of material which seems to be gathered together with the aim of representing the wider history of the world, and includes works of art, sentences and sayings, images of nobility and their insignia.

When focussing on the third class, 'Incredible Animals', something very interesting occurs. In this class, Quiccheberg places natural specimens; however, he also places here representations of animals

> made of metal, plaster, clay and any productive material whatsoever, by whatever technique, which look like they are alive because they have been skilfully fashioned, as for example lizards, snakes, fishes, frogs, crabs, insects, shellfish, and whatever is of that order, and can look real once painted (Quiccheberg 1565 cited in Pearce and Arnold 2000: 7).

Thus, representations of animals do not appear in his second class of artificial materials because what these objects represent is more important than the materials from which they are made.

Cabinets, then, did not apply taxonomic categories in the same way that museums do now. Rather, they used these categories to highlight the most valued or admired quality of an individual object, while recognising the idiosyncrasy of this approach: indeed this was actively encouraged, so that the collector might formulate their own significant connections between objects. Objects in cabinets then were subject to a continual process of conceptual metamorphosis. Within such a system, a narwhal tusk for instance could become a unicorn's horn, a means of detecting poison, or a scientific specimen, or indeed all three simultaneously.

Contemporary Resonances: The Cabinet in the Twenty-First Century

While many cabinets provided the foundational collections for early public institutions such as the Ashmolean and the British Museum, most of these early collections, sadly, do not survive. While there are remarkable survivals such as Bargrave and Augsburg, many others have been broken up and their contents lost, stolen, or widely dispersed. Often, all that remains is the shell: an empty room or piece of furniture that once contained objects. Furthermore, because attitudes towards the nature and purpose of collections have also changed, we now consume the cabinet very differently.

Until recently, an intriguing example of a twenty-first century museum display of a cabinet was situated at the top of a staircase in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (henceforth V&A). No photographic image of this object commissioned by the Museum exists at the time of writing. Now in storage, this intricate object, made in Milan between 1550-1600, and damascened with gold and silver, was then encased within a second, later cabinet of iron and glass. The first cabinet was displayed closed, and was set apart from other cabinets of a similar age and provenance in the V&A, in a rather liminal space. Its relationship to its surroundings was therefore not immediately clear.

At the time of the author's visit in 2011, the V&A provided minimal written interpretation for this object, mentioning only provenance, materials, and a brief iconographical note on the decoration as depicting scenes from Roman history. Ultimately, this object was presented as a decorative piece of furniture and example of artisanal skill, particularly with metalwork, but failed to give a sense of how this object was consumed during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Cabinets such as these were dynamic objects and sites of metamorphosis, meant for performance, not only static display. In this way, the apparatus for an early modern collection was itself transformed into a curiosity in a cabinet. Instead of being consumed, it had been subsumed by its new context and interpretation. There is thus a disjuncture between the interpretation of the cabinet by the museum and how artists and collectors intended for the object's viewing and experience in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Nevertheless, there has been a huge resurgence of scholarly interest in the curiosity cabinet during the last few decades, evidenced not only by publications and symposia, but also in the production of museum displays and artworks which appear to 'look back' to the visual aesthetic of the cabinet, such as this display cabinet from the *Enchanted Palace* exhibition at Kensington Palace in 2010 (Figure 8). Here, the cabinet aesthetic – here

recognisable as object-rich displays of heteroclite artefacts – is deployed as an artistic medium, and is used to make poetic connections between seemingly incongruous objects. The cabinet model being a flexible one, as we have seen from Quiccheberg, the curators have chosen the lens of fairy tales in order to shape this construction.

Figure 8 A contemporary 'cabinet' from the *Enchanted Palace* exhibition at Kensington Palace, London. Photograph © the author, 2010, with kind permission of Historic Royal Palaces.

This fascination with the historical cabinet is also paralleled in contemporary art practice, British artist Damien Hirst (1965-) being a prime example of this. His 2003 work *Creation Explored, Explained and Exploded*, for example, comprises a wood and glass geology cabinet containing rock and mineral specimens. Instead of simply replicating an older style of display, Hirst literally turns the cabinet upside down, and bisects it down the middle. In the midst of this rupture, the appropriated objects cling to their shelves, like stalactites. By referencing recognisable forms of collecting and display – the universal cabinet, natural objects, the museal vitrine – Hirst explores the very act of categorising the world and the artificiality of such attempts: the objects are seemingly unaffected by human efforts to contain or explain them. Just as museums such as the V&A have 'collected' the cabinet, conceptual artists such as Hirst have reclaimed it and lent it a new, critical relevance. Curiosity cabinets have also formed the springboard for many exhibitions of contemporary art including the recent exhibition *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing* at the Turner Contemporary in Margate in 2013.

Conclusion

At the start of this paper, we considered a painting in which the past appeared to gaze back, introducing a world in which the contemporary spectator is a latecomer and an interloper, ignorant of what had passed between its inhabitants. In a sense, this is also true of the curiosity cabinet as a form of cultural practice. Historians of the museum can never fully re-enter or experience the world of which the curiosity cabinet was a part, but by

extending our gaze further than the museum, and by considering the wider cultural and intellectual contexts in which early modern collections operated, we can approach an understanding of the concepts which governed them, including metamorphosis.

The concept of metamorphosis informed not only the contents, but the visual aesthetic and structure of the early modern curiosity cabinet. Far from being chaotic, cabinets attempted not only to represent, but to actively *perform* the entangled nature of objects through their selection and categorisation of material, and to experiment with the limits of representation by creating new kinds of objects.

In traditional histories of the museum, the cabinet is often perceived to seamlessly metamorphose into the public institutions we know today (14). However, here we should be mindful of Quiccheberg's categories: just because some of the objects contained within these early collections migrated into the first public museums, it does not follow that the systems which gave them meaning migrated with them.

The cabinet existed as a chimerical entity which contemporary curators and artists have appropriated, and has started to re-appear in new guises. While these do not attempt to represent the world to the same extent as the cabinet, which aimed to be universal, we should remember that all claims to representation, and to knowledge, are constructed and situated – they only operate within a very precise context.

This paper has explored only fragments of a much larger debate, and there are exciting signs that cabinet scholarship is moving in new directions, considering, for example, the influence of the cabinet on contemporary art and culture (15). As such, the study of early collections has the potential to contribute much to the field of museum studies, for in questioning the nature and purpose of these early collections we may better interrogate our own. Instead of looking upon cabinets as mere embryonic museums, museums and galleries could do more to engage with recent scholarship on the complexity of these early collections in their practices of display and interpretation, in the realisation that some four hundred years from now, it might be our own conception of the museum inhabiting a little glass box at the top of an obscure staircase.

Notes

(1) See Lyndel King and Janet Marstine, 'The University Museum and Gallery: A Site for Institutional Critique and a Focus of the Curriculum', in Janet Marstine, (ed.), *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 275.

(2) 'Metamorphosis' derives from a combination of the Greek words *meta*, denoting 'change', and *morphē*, meaning 'form', thus literally meaning to 'change form or shape'. See Catherine Soanes and Angus Stephenson, *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Second Edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1103.

(3) Dirck Hals, *Lustige Gesellschaft*, or *Jolly Party*, (1628), 30.5 cm x 40.4 cm, Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, Germany.

(4) See Harry Berger's work on poses and the act of self-representation in Dutch portraiture, in Harry Berger, *Fictions of the Pose: Rembrandt against the Italian Renaissance*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

(5) The 'merry company' or 'conversation piece' became a popular specialism within Dutch genre painting between 1620-40, and is thought to have arisen with Dutch artists active in Haarlem in *circa* 1610. See Pieter Biesboer, and Carol Togneri (ed.), *Netherlandish Inventories 1: Collections of Paintings in Haarlem, 1572-1745* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Trust, 2001), p. 38. Christopher Brown, on the other hand, points to a far earlier origin within calendar illustrations showing the changing activities of each month in late medieval prayerbooks. See Christopher Brown*, Scenes of Everyday Life: Dutch Genre Paintings from the Mauritshuis* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1999), p. 7.

(6) Not to be confused with a curiosity cabinet, a table cabinet such as this would probably have been used for the storage of luxury or precious items, such as linen or jewellery, and thus of an altogether more prosaic variety than the objects which inhabited cabinet collections.

(7) Painting was considered to be the highest art form during the seventeenth century, but was subject to its own hierarchy of consumption, with 'history' paintings at the top and still life painting at the bottom, reflected in the high prices buyers were willing to pay for the right kinds of painting.

(8) Eventually becoming a sub-genre of still life painting in its own right, the *vanitas mundi* was an expression of the 'vanity' and fleeting nature of all temporal things, and featured groupings of significant objects whose combined symbolism conveyed a moralising and often spiritual message. See Norbert Schneider, *Still Life: Still Life Painting in the Early Modern Period* (Köln: Taschen, 2009).

(9) The Augsburg Art Cabinet, and some of its extraordinary objects, are on permanent display at the Museum Gustavianum, University of Uppsala, Sweden.

(10) While MacGregor acknowledges the complexity of the cabinet phenomenon, he considers these types of collections to be 'proto-museums'.

(11) These categories are based on my own reflections on my PhD research into visual representation and the curiosity cabinet, and upon existing scholarly literature which recognises the first three categories as typifying the cabinet's own division of objects, but it is important to note that connections between curiosity cabinets and metamorphosis have been made before, notably by Marion Endt-Jones. See Marion Endt, 'Reopening the Cabinet of Curiosities: Nature and the Marvellous in Surrealism and Contemporary Art'. (PhD thesis, School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, Faculty of Humanities, The University of Manchester, 30 September 2008), via British Library Electronic Theses Online Service, http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=1&uin=uk.bl.ethos.493443 accessed 26/03/2014.

(12) A sharp, needle-like implement used to make holes in fabric, but sometimes worn by women as a hair ornament in the seventeenth century. See Mary Carolyn Beaudry, *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) p. 46.

(13) See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2002 [1970])

(14) According to Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb, 'Scholars have long recognized the cabinet of curiosities as the precursor to the modern museum'. Dilevko and Gottlieb also refer to cabinets' 'eventual metamorphosis into publicly accessible museum collections'. See Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb, 'The Museum-Library Hybrid Institution', in Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb, *The Evolution of Library and Museum Partnerships: Historical Antecedents, Contemporary Manifestations, and Future Directions* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004), p. 146.

(15) See, for example, James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, Revised Edition, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), and Stephen Bann, 'The Return to Curiosity: Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Museum Display', in Andrew McClellan, (ed.), *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

References

Arnold, K. (2006). *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums*. Aldershot, Ashgate.

Bacon, F. (2002 [1688]). 'A Device for the Gray's Inn Revels', in Vickers, B., (ed.), *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*. Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 52-60.

Bann, S. (2003). 'The Return to Curiosity: Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Museum Display', in McClellan, A., (ed.), *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*. Oxford, Blackwell, pp. 117-130.

Bargrave, J., in Robertson, J. C., (ed.). (1867 [1662]). *Pope Alexander the Seventh and the College of Cardinals. With a Catalogue of Dr. Bargrave's Museum*. The Camden Society.

Beaudry, M. C. (2006). *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing*. New Haven, Yale University Press.

Berger, H. (2000). *Fictions of the Pose: Rembrandt against the Italian Renaissance*. Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press.

Biesboer, P., and Togneri, C., (ed.). (2001). *Netherlandish Inventories 1: Collections of Paintings in Haarlem, 1572-1745*. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Trust.

Boström, H. (2004 [1985]). 'Philipp Hainhofer and Gustavus Adolphus's Kunstschrank', in Preziosi, D., and Farago, C., (eds.), *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*. Aldershot, Ashgate, pp. 537-559.

Brown, C. (1999). *Scenes of Everyday Life: Dutch Genre Paintings from the Mauritshuis*. Oxford, University of Oxford Press.

Browne, T. (1657). *Nature's Cabinet Unlock'd*. London, Edward Farnham.

Dilevko, J., and Gottlieb, L. (2004). *The Evolution of Library and Museum Partnerships: Historical Antecedents, Contemporary Manifestations, and Future Directions*. Westport, CT, Libraries Unlimited.

Endt, M. 'Reopening the Cabinet of Curiosities: Nature and the Marvellous in Surrealism and Contemporary Art'. (PhD thesis, School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, Faculty of Humanities, The University of Manchester, 30 September 2008), via British Library Electronic Theses Online Service, http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=1&uin=uk.bl.ethos.493443, accessed 26 March 2014.

Fabiański, M. (1990). 'Iconography of the Architecture of Ideal *Musaea* in the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', in *Journal of the History of Collections* 2 No. 2, pp. 95-134.

Findlen, P. (2004 [1989]). 'The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Geneaology', in Preziosi, D., and Farago, C., (eds.), *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*. Aldershot, Ashgate, pp. 159-191.

Foucault, M. (2002 [1970]). *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Abingdon and New York, Routledge.

Grinke, P. (2006). *From Wunderkammer to Museum*. Revised edition. London, Quaritch.

Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1992*). Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London and New York, Routledge.

Hunter, M. C. W. (1995). *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy: Intellectual Change in Late Seventeenth-Century* Britain. Woodbridge, The Boydell Press.

King, L., and Marstine, J. (2005). 'The University Museum and Gallery: A Site for Institutional Critique and a Focus of the Curriculum', in Marstine, J., (ed.), *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*. Malden, MA, and Oxford, Blackwell, pp. 266-291.

Laszlo, P., trans. Mader, M. (2001*). Salt: Grain of Life*. New York, Columbia University Press.

MacGregor, A. (2007). *Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press.

Mauriès, P. (2011). *Cabinets of Curiosity*. London, Thames & Hudson.

Meadow, M. (2002). 'Hans Jacob Fugger and the Origins of the Wunderkammer', in Smith, P. H., and Findlen, P., (eds.), *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe*. London and New York, Routledge, pp. 182-200.

Meadow, M. (2005). 'Quiccheberg and the Copious Object: Wenzel Jamnitzer's Silver Writing Box', in Melville, S., (ed.), *The Lure of the Object*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, pp. 39-58.

Meadow, M. (2013). *The First Treatise on Museums: Samuel Quiccheberg's Inscriptiones*, 1565. Los Angeles, The Getty Research Institute.

Ovid, trans. Innes, M. (1955). *Metamorphoses*. London, Penguin.

Pearce, S., and Arnold, K., (eds.). (2000). *The Collector's Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting*. Vol. 2, 'Early Voices', Aldershot, Ashgate.

Putnam, J. (2009*). Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*. Revised Edition. London, Thames and Hudson.

Leonardis, A. (2013). Unpublished translation of Quiccheberg, Samuel*, Inscriptiones Vel Titvli Theatri Amplissimi Complectentis rerum vniuersitatis singulas materias et imagines eximias, ut idem recte quoq[ue] dici possit: Promptuarium artificiosarum miraculasarumq[ue] ac omnis rari thesauri et pretiosae suppellectilis [...]* (Munich: Monachii, 1565) [VD16 Q 63, Bavarian State Library, Munich].

Maurice, K. (1980). 'Jost Bürgi, or On Innovation', in Maurice, Klaus, and Mayr, Otto, (eds.), trans. by Bartlett Wells, H. *The Clockwork Universe: German Clocks and Automata 1550-1650*. New York, Smithsonian Institution, pp. 87-102.

Sawday, J. (2007). 'Nature Wrought: Artifice, Illusion, and Magical Mechanics', *in Engines of the Imagination: Renaissance Culture and the Rise of the Machine*. Abingdon, Routledge, pp. 166-206.

Scheurleer, Th. H. L. (1985). 'Early Dutch Cabinets of Curiosities', in Impey, O., and MacGregor, A., (eds.). *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, pp. 115-127.

Schneider, N. (2009). *Still Life: Still Life Painting in the Early Modern Period*. Köln, Taschen.

Soanes, C., and Stephenson, A. (2005). *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Second Edition. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Spitzer, M. (2004). *Metaphor and Musical Thought*. London, University of Chicago Press.

Tradescant, J. (1656*). Musæum Tradescantianum*. London, John Grismond.

Turpin, A. (2006). 'The New World Collections of Cosimo I de' Medici and their role in the creation of a *Kunst –* and *Wunderkammer* in the Palazzo Vecchio', in Evans, R., and Marr, A., (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*. Aldershot, Ashgate, pp. 63-85.

Webpages

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Kunstkammer Wien, http://www.khm.at/en/visit/collections/kunstkammer-wien/, accessed 4 November 2013

Things are Changing: Museums and the Material Turn

Mario Schulze
University of Zurich
mario.schulze@uzh.ch

Abstract

This article offers one of the many possible answers to the question of what changes museums. It is argued that changing knowledge about museum things has, and has had, enormous influence on the approaches museums adapt to display their collections. A new relationship between things and people has developed since the 1970s. This change in epistemology that became known as material turn was mirrored in changing approaches to exhibition design in museums. To trace these interrelated changes, the article focuses on two German museums of history (Historical Museum Frankfurt and Werkbund-Archive/museum of things in Berlin) and follows their shifts in exhibition design during the last 50 years. In reacting to the latest developments in knowledge about museum objects, they firstly replaced their glass cases with text-book-exhibitions, and then they installed stage-like combinations of objects (scenographies), simply to reinstall glass showcases at the end of the century.

Keywords: museum object, history of epistemology, exhibition design, German museums

Changing Epistemologies, Changing Museums

Who changes museums? Curators, museum practitioners in general, but also, of course, politicians and participating communities. What changes museums? Fashion, trends, money, policies and maybe most important changing knowledge; knowledge about history, technology, nature; knowledge of the subject focused by the museum, of the collection, of the visitors but also of museums and their didactics and aesthetics. What is often forgotten is that museums also, and maybe most importantly, change because of our changing knowledge of things. Museums have changed because our understanding of things collected in museums has changed drastically throughout the last 50 years. Therefore this paper draws connections between changing epistemologies and changing museums (1).

The starting point of the following analysis is a particular understanding of modernity, which considers it as fundamentally transformative. Modernity has not just changed society, technology and economy but also those things we often view as permanent or even eternal: like the structure of the self, of the body and of experience. Here, it is argued that modernity has also changed the material world and the ways of relating to it as well as paying attention to it (2). The museum is closely connected to the changes of our understanding of the material world driven by modernity. Indeed, it is very much formed by these epistemologies. That is not surprising because museums are among the most important public institutions charged with the task of handling, ordering and keeping things. They are even often called houses of objects or houses of things (Thiemeyer 2011). The questions: what are objects, what can they do and what to do with them are central museological questions – distinguishing the museum from theme parks, *Madame Tussauds* or trade shows. Raising these questions evokes mantra-like assurances that the object is the beginning and the end of good practice in a museum. For this reason, new ways of thinking about things have had immediate influences on museums. However, museums are not only adopting knowledge. They contribute to new understandings of objects and things. Museums are places where knowledge, identity and permanence of things are constantly created.

This paper does *not* aim to answer the question: what is the right understanding of a museum object? It does *not* seek to present an ahistorical theory of things and objects in museums. Many scholars have tried to define museum objects, differentiate between real world things and museum objects and developed theories about museum objects. German museologists and cultural theorists like Gottfried Korff (2007), Gudrun König (2003) or Eva Sturm (Sturm 1991), in particular, have tried to explore what happens to things when they enter museums, and how museum objects should be handled in exhibitions. More recently Sandra Dudley (2012) argued for a new way of relating to and thinking of museum objects. In contrast, this paper adopts a historical point of view underlining the contingency of museum objects throughout the last 50 years. It shows how new ways of comprehending things have produced new display strategies at museums. It points out that museums change because of new theories of museum objects and of things in general.

Some research on the connection of changed ways of understanding material things and the development of museums has been undertaken during the last 10 to 15 years. Namely Michelle Henning (2006: 5-36) explains how museums took on a new public form in the modern period in paying particular attention to new relationships between people and things emerging during that time. She argues that the rise of the public museum in the 18th century was based on the destruction or revaluation of older relationships to things. Actual material and economic changes produced a different approach to consumption, which set the conditions for the public museum. She indicates that while in the age of the *Wunderkammern* knowledge and ostentation were bound together in objects of curiosity, in the 18th century objects of curiosity were seen as opposed to knowledge. In reaction to this, new public museums were obliged to make sense of the objects they collected. They had to classify them and give them a place in the hierarchy of things and cultures. They worked hard to transform the collections of curiosities inherited from the *Wunderkammern* into scientifically ordered collections. Thenceforward to legitimise objects for a museum collection and display meant to explain why they are of either historical or aesthetic interest.

Henning demonstrates how the museum object as well as the museum changed at the onset of modernity. However, there is currently no analysis that describes the intertwinement between epistemology and museums during the last 50 years, although both museums and epistemologies have changed fundamentally during that time. This paper seeks to give some tentative insights into the more recent history of museums. It focuses on changes in exhibition design during a time which became known as material turn. The material turn refers to new research perspectives on things and material culture slowly gaining prominence in the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, Material Culture Studies and Science and Technology Studies were at forefront of what is now a broad movement within humanities and social sciences. Although coming from different disciplines and focusing different research questions all these perspectives share a central idea, which can be phrased as the following: Not just "we" do things with things, but things do things with "us". The central claim of the material turn is that we need to question our understanding of things as the unquestionable and constant fundament of reality. We should rather consider them in terms of their abilities to guide and influence human action. Things might even be able to talk (Daston, 2008) and to act (Latour, 1993). While this understanding of things as speakers and actors is mainly a development of the 1990s and 2000s, leading to masses of various approaches trying to give things more importance (Brown, 2001; Baird, 2004; Turkle, 2011; Sudjic, 2010; Coole, Frost, 2010), the material turn has a history dating back into the 1960s and 1970s. This time span of the material turn sets the time span of the following analysis, starting in the 1960s and ending in 1999, when many ideas of the 2000s were already manifest.

In order to reveal connections between the material turn and museums this paper focuses on display designs and modes of presentation. Through techniques of display, museums attempt to position and organise a visitor experience. These attempts are connected with ideas about experience, learning in a museum, citizenship and so on. This paper argues that displays also derive from certain assumptions about the role of museum objects and about the abilities that are attributed to the collected things. Furthermore, exhibition displays are best suited tackling the question of changing epistemologies and their influences on museums because displays change more often than practices of collecting; and exhibitions are more likely to try something new because of their ephemeral character. A very short history of the correlations between designs, which have been en vogue, and the knowledge of things and objects helps to pose the central question of this article: How did the museum object change and what exhibition design derives from a certain epistemology of the museum object?

To suggest some possible answers to this question, two case studies or rather some glimpses of these case studies are presented here. The Historical Museum Frankfurt and the Werkbund-Archive/Museum of Things have been selected for various reasons. At first, these two museums were considered to be the most innovative among German museums of history and have been comprehensively discussed during the time that is focused here. In addition, they house a broad inventory of objects including artworks, commodities, artefacts, and everyday life objects. This is important because, although it is true that different object categories demand different presentation modes, museums collecting all kinds of objects have developed certain modes of display almost independent of specific object categories. That implies that modes of presentation are not just related to object categories but also to a more general understanding of the museum object. Furthermore, these two museums were chosen because they were not only trying to invent new ways of displaying their collection but also reflecting upon their attempts. They tried to closely connect their work with theories regarding museums, which is why they fit for a study on the interrelations between knowledge about museum objects and display.

Exhibition Designs in German Museums 1960s to 1990s

Figure 1. 1968. Permanent Exhibition of the Historical Museum Frankfurt. © *historisches museum frankfurt/ photo: Fred Kochmann*

The following story of exhibition designs starts with the maybe most important museum for the debate on exhibitions of history in the Federal Republic of Germany: the Historical Museum Frankfurt. Founded 1878, it is a city museum like many others, housing arts and craft, ethnographical objects, paintings, sculptures, and graphics. In 1968, the first permanent exhibition after the Second World War was opened. This was an exhibition entirely devoted to contemplative object-examination, exhibiting series of the same kind of objects ordered by category and art form: Small and big vases made of porcelain and sinter, made in Meißen, Höchst and Fürstenberg, vases with flowers or mythological scenes on it. The text on the labels next to the objects explained the production of vases. The main aim of this exhibition was to show differences in the quality, origin, age, etcetera, for those visitors with an acquired taste. The knowledge the exhibition wanted to convey is an elaborate knowledge about the object. To reach that aim by presenting the object by a classificatory arrangement presupposes that the object can be interpreted without ambiguity, as long as the visitor brings the necessary previous knowledge. This rather common understanding of the museum object since the 19th century came under pressure in the 1970s, which can be impressively seen in the history of the Historical Museum Frankfurt.

In 1972, the museum moved to a brutalist building and created a new permanent exhibition. With this exhibition the museum was responding to the appeal by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in the 1960s to fight for more public relevance. It took a whole new approach and tried to reform the museum from the bottom. In comparison to the Historical Museum Frankfurt, other museums in West Germany suddenly looked like

reminiscences from the past. It provided free entrance, developed new visitor statistics, and opened the first children's museum of the Federal Republic, a café and a shop. Nonetheless, it did not become famous for that but for the political debate accompanying its opening. The so-called 'Friends of Frankfurt' marked the Historical Museum Frankfurt as a 'Marxist second-rate school' (3) practicing 'vulgar Marxist propaganda' (Hoffmann et al., 1974; Kittel, 2011: 135). The historical situation of this exhibition was rooted in the political movements of the 1960s. Embracing New Left politics, the curators were willing to turn the museum into a more public institution with a political responsibility. That meant firstly developing exhibitions arguing politically and secondly making the museum attractive for all not just for educated elites. Working class people, in particular, were the newly targeted group. However, a problem arose: the curators, namely Detlef Hoffmann and Peter Schirmbeck, were convinced that the imagined workers were not interested in the displayed objects and did not know how to approach these objects in a museum. The status of museum objects was seen differently than before. Objects were seen as not saying anything to the visitors, they were considered mute (Hoffmann, 1976). This was one of the main reasons of the decision to try something different than the old-fashioned display of the collections with glass cases.

Figure 2. 1972. Permanent Exhibition of the Historical Museum Frankfurt. *© historisches museum frankfurt/ photo: Fred Kochman*n

The Historical Museum Frankfurt created a walkable textbook on the labour movement instead. Borrowing design ideas from trade shows and exhibition architecture of the 1920s the text was written on room filling

metal boards and illustrated with photos and diagrams. The 20th century section was almost cleared of objects. Remaining objects were there simply to illustrate the 'text of history'. It seems that the historical narration of the exhibition and the objects of the collections were considered as not compatible. The object as an authentic testimony to the past or an outstanding example of good craftsmanship had become questionable. The text had to replace the objects because the epistemological status of the objects had changed. With this exhibition the Historical Museum Frankfurt ignited an avalanche of debates about the role of objects in a modern museum. Many museum makers criticised the museum for its degrading of objects. Arno Schönberger, Director General of the German National Museum in Nuremberg, even demanded a *Hippocratic Oath* on the original object (qtd. by Kittel, 2011: 166). These debates led to new attempts to create exhibitions with a message but using museum objects.

In 1980, the Historical Museum Frankfurt reacted to critics with a new permanent exhibition integrating an increased number of objects but keeping its political approach. When exhibiting the women's movement in the 20th century it used an old museal design: It created pictures. However, unlike rooms and dioramas in folkloristic museums or natural history museums, the installations and scenes in the museum were not displaying lost or distant worlds in a naturalistic manner but combining objects in order to convey a feminist message.
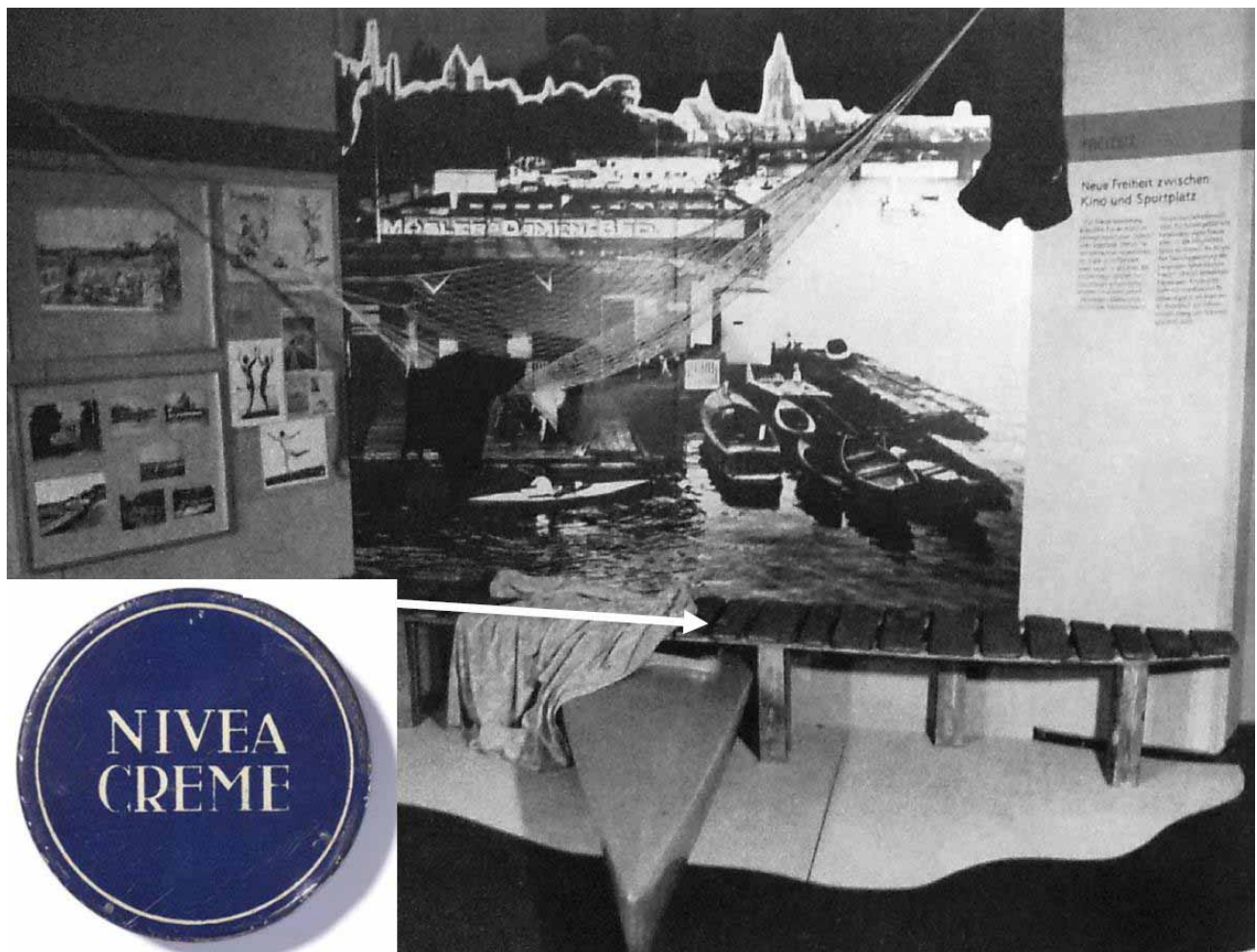

Figure 3. 1980. Permanent Exhibition of the Historical Museum Frankfurt. *© historisches museum frankfurt/ photo in HMF, 1981: 74*

Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, curator of the exhibition, explains this installation with bathrobe, hammock, paddleboat and blue coloured floor in front of a photograph of the ladies' bath Mosler:

> Not the single original exhibit, but the surprise of a pool setting in a museum conveys immediately the crucial message: the fact that girls and women have been swimming and paddling a lot in the twenties, is historically significant for female emancipation and body history (Schmidt-Linsenhoff, 1982: 335) (4).

Let us take a closer look at one object in this staging in order to filter the epistemology underlying this staging. A *Nivea* tin makes sense within this installation because it illustrates a new approach to the body – to care for the body is to care for oneself. The skin cream taking its name from the Latin *Nix, Nivis*, meaning snow white,

symbolises the clean, sanitised and washed body. The *Nivea* tin has countless other levels of meaning: the design of the can is derived from the advertising language of the *New Objectivity* (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) in the roaring twenties; the ingredient *Eucerin* was the first water-oil emulsifier and stands therefore more than any other substance for the chemical revolution in the household; et cetera. Arranging the tin with bathrobe and paddleboat draws attention to the connotation with health, care and subjectivity that in turn represents the modern woman that in the 1920s became visible in the public while doing sport, not equal to men but at least alongside men. Those might have been the thoughts of the curators. What does this new exhibition design, which became known as staging of museum objects, tell us about the museum object during that time?

A museum object has become a medium of meaning here. It is primarily interesting to the museum because of its symbolic value. At about the time of the exhibition the French-Polish philosopher and historian Krzysztof Pomian argued that any object in a museum collection has this semiotic quality. To express this semiotic understanding of museum objects, he used the term 'semiophores' (Pomian, 1978). Semiophores, or mediums of meaning, can convey the curatorial message without text as long as they are staged and arranged among other objects. The described staging of objects and the *Nivea* tin show that during the 1970s, and parallel to the linguistic turn in humanities, museum objects became readable because they were semiotically interpreted. Therefore it was not necessary to ban them from the exhibition and replace them by text like in the early 1970s. They were not the reason for apolitical exhibitions anymore but able to convey political messages if shown in right context, if staged. The text of the 1970s went into the objects that have in a sense become text themselves.

In the 1980s and -90s the museum-object gained further powers which impacted on exhibition design strategies. To follow the epistemologies of this time some glimpses of another case study are presented. The Werkbund-Archive, founded 1973 in West-Berlin without connection to the *Werkbund* itself, had purely archival functions for only a short time and collected objects of consume almost right from the start. Like the Historical Museum in Frankfurt, it was fighting for a more political museum. West-Berlin, back then a mythologised biotope of all sorts of subcultures and the 'alternative' in the Federal Republic, was providing the right background for this goal. The Werkbund-Archive which has been named 'Museum of Everyday Cultures of the 20th Century' since 1982, did not just want to display everyday culture, but to change everyday life and 'to set out for a new reality' (Siepmann, 1987: 23). Like many other museums during that time, the exhibitions were supposed to criticise the institutional practice of museums and to be publicly and politically relevant. Searching for an exhibition design adequate to these goals the Werkbund-Archive adapts scenographies resembling theatre performances by Brecht and Artaud. With ironic, shocking arrangements of museum objects, music and lights it tried to sensualise abstract topics in a given space. It connected knowledge with imaginative speculation quoting the age of curiosity and being out to discover the unusual, unknown and virtual. The exhibition titles give an idea of this rather poetic and unusual approach: 'When the red sun goes down in the sea at Capri – In the shopping mountains of the 50s'; 'Scenes of the 60s – Op + pop, ex + hop, sexy mick, tricky dick, mini, maxi, Mao Tse-tung'. 'Pack Ice and Pressed Glass' was the first exhibition of the museum in the prestigious Martin-Gropius-Building right next to the Berlin Wall. A description of one room in detail will give a feeling for the kind of exhibition design developed during that time.

Figure 4 1987. Exhibition 'Pack Ice and Pressed Glass' Conception and Realisation: Eckhard Siepmann and Angelika Thiekötter © Werkbund-Archive/ Museum of Everyday Cultures of the 20th Century, Berlin

Bathed in bluish twilight, Wagner's overture to Tristan and Isolde in the background, the first room of the exhibition with the title 'dreaming' explained a complex historical situation in which mechanisation drove the production of commodities during the 19th century. The pivotal installation consisted of some huge ladders hanging in the centre of the room crossing each other, some of them not touching the floor. There was no text devoted to these ladders. What could be meant with this installation is found in the catalogue, not supposed to be at hand in the exhibition. The catalogue discusses the rise of the successful commodity producers to the bourgeoisie and the social pressure to display their status according to their position on the social ladder.

What can be said about the underlying relationship between object and visitor as presumed by the curators of the Werkbund-Archive here? The museum object seems to oscillate. On the one hand it remains a medium of meaning, a two-faced, referencing to something else in its closeness. The Ladders stand for the social Ladder. On the other hand the Werkbund-Archive goes beyond the unambiguous signifier/signified-relation and looks for a limitless cacophony. Flying, crossed ladders and their shadows as texture, as entanglement, as ever-unfulfilled promise to get higher, as transcending that fails. These objects are not just staged within a setting of objects and media in order to make it possible to decipher them, but also to sense and experience them. Museum objects were increasingly thought of as being able to trigger emotions and experiences which is why many curators of that time were trying to find a way between controlling all possible connotations of an object and just letting the object 'perform'. Beginning their work on exhibitions in the early 1980s with an understanding of a museum object quite similar to the 'semiophores' of Pomian and the Historical Museum Frankfurt, the Werkbund-Archive slowly discovered a new understanding of museum objects. During the 1990s, in particular, its curators increasingly distanced themselves from semiotic approaches and paid more attention to the materiality of museum collections.

The starting point of this switch to materiality have once again been critics of the extravagant scenographies immediately pointing to the problem that whole enterprise seems to be a bit out of touch and with its heads in the clouds. The next director of the Werkbund-Archive, Renate Flagmeier, put it in these words: '[..] with revival attempts by staging we have made conflicting experiences: narrative installations devalue objects to be background actors in a story being alien to them.' (Flagmeier, 1995: 8) The questions of Flagmeier and others were: Who is supposed to understand these meaningful scenographies? Is the museum object patronised by the curators? Can exhibitions narrow objects down to a single story they are supposed to tell?

Along with Renate Flagmeier the Werkbund-Archive developed again different exhibition designs, which would not have been possible without crediting museum objects with new abilities. The 'Impermanent Exhibition of the Permanent Collections of the Werkbund-Archive' wanted to be a reflection on the museum in general but also continue the chosen path of political discourse.
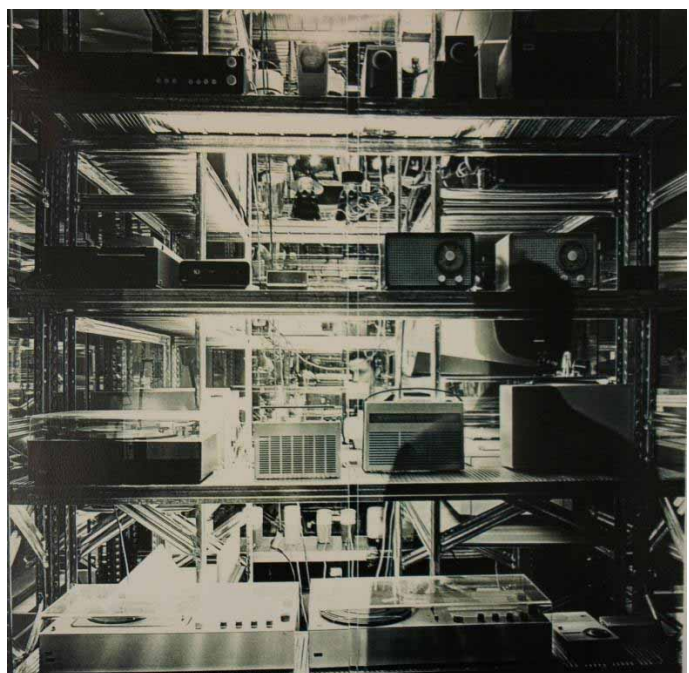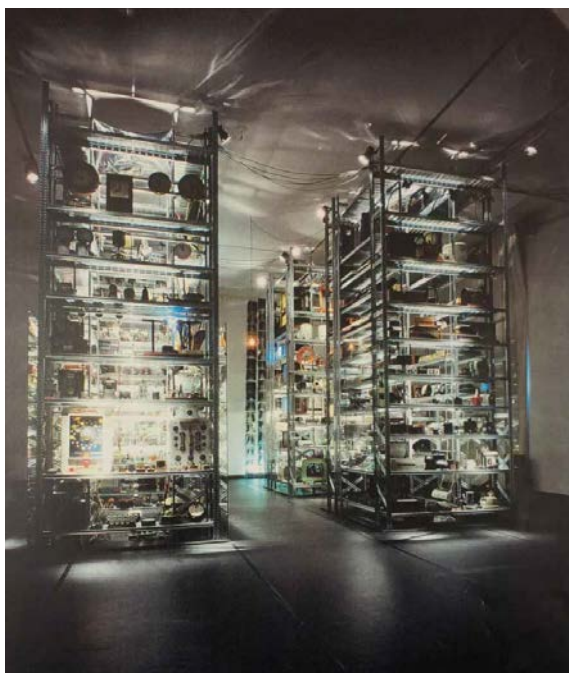

Figure 5 and 6. 1995. 'Impermanent Exhibition of the Permanent Collections of the Werkbund-Archive'. Conception: Renate Flagmeier; Design: Detlev Saalfeld, *© Werkbund-Archive/Museum of Everyday Cultures of the 20th Century, Berlin/ photo: Armin Herrmann.*

In this Installation named 'Culture of Devices', a term borrowed from the philosopher Vilém Flusser, mechanical and electronic devices were presented in 16 high racks. The devices were ordered austere by functional groups. That means televisions on one rack, radios, mixers, vacuums, and telephones on the others. This constellation was supposed to convey the overall image of a machinery, a total apparatus.

> The installation is supposed to give a feeling for the phenomenon of the culture of devices structuring our everyday life. It reminds us of a central aspect of this phenomenon: to operate and to be operated (Flagmeier, 1995: 7).

There is again almost no text in the exhibition, but also no stage-like object arrangements. Nonetheless, there is an abstract message to be conveyed. How is this possible? Who is actually reasoning here if not text and curated installation? The answer of the curators quoting explicitly and implicitly the newest theories on material culture is that the things themselves have begun to talk, just as the working title of the exhibition implies: "The Language of Things". Their presence alone is enough to remind the visitor that he is dependent on the things surrounding him. The exhibition design deriving from these new understanding of the relationship between things and people becomes even more obvious in the latter exhibitions of the Werkbund-Archive that changed its name to 'museum of things' in 1999.

Figure 7. 1999. Exhibition 'Commodity Beauty - A Time Travel'. Conception: Renate Flagmeier and Angelika Thiekötter; Design: Detlev Saalfeld. © *Werkbund-Archive/museum of things, Berlin/ photo: Armin Herrmann.*

The exhibition 'Commodity Beauty - A Time Travel' displayed all sorts of different objects like mannequins, vases, tableware in full-glass-cases and focused on commodities, on their forms and fetishes. Single light spots illuminated the objects from the design collection of the museum, especially objects with *Werkbund*-Affiliation. Again this exhibition tried to be political and to convey a theoretical argument about commodity. Though, instead of using wallpapers of texts or an extravagant staging, it reinstalled glass showcases and adapted classical museal designs. These old designs were supposed to free up the possibilities of encounters with the collected objects. Instead of using the objects as illustrators of stories communicated by other media, the museum of things was letting the objects doing much of the communication. The clean, object-centred

exhibition, which the Werkbund-Archive developed during the 1990s, relies substantially on the ideas of the material turn that things alone are supposed to be the actors and mediators of the topic displayed.

Conclusion

The story which has been told here begins and ends with an exhibition design mainly based on glass cases. Different stages take place in between: the clearing of the exhibition halls and displays with wallpapers of texts; the installation of stage-like settings, of assemblages citing modern art and finally the reinstallation of shelves and the return of drawers and glass cases. Between the glass cases of the 1960s and the 1990s a change has taken place. The object within the glass case has become something different because our epistemologies have changed. The object became talkable and able to act. In 1960, the museum object was a leftover from the past displaying the past and the human kind 'back then'. A text informed the visitor about origin and material. In 2000, the museum object is a thing that touches the visitors, telling them a story about the world, ideally about their world, their lives. It does this solely through its presence, its materiality, just as the newest theories in humanities imply. While many museums of the 1950s put faith in 'object lessons' giving the knowing visitors the opportunity to contemplate in front of the speechless object, museums of the 1990s and today prioritise the topic of exhibitions and the visitors' experience and education (Henning 2006: 2-3). Nonetheless objects are not abandoned from the exhibitions. This is because nowadays museums and curators regard objects as the most important mediators of the topics and contents of their exhibitions.

Such a history about exhibitions is not just a museological self-reflexion, but rather a contribution in historicising the material turn, a contribution to the history of the museum object and of epistemology. This history shows that the relationship between objects, visitors and curators has changed. The expectations of what objects in the museum context are supposed to do, and what they actually can do, changed quite radically. These changes could be summarised in four important steps:

1. Expecting from museum objects to be authentic portrayals of yesterdays or of an object category.
2. Mistrusting them and replacing them by texts telling the story to be told in the museum.
3. Allowing museum objects to convey something by a certain sign or symbol they bear - if staged in a museum space.
4. Expecting them to be mediators and agents of the topic displayed.

This history is not over yet, of course. Recently, Sandra Dudley argued that 'the experiential possibilities of objects are important in themselves' (Dudley, 2012: 19) and hence suggested that museums should allow 'directly, physically, emotionally' engagements with the objects. Applied to exhibition design, this theory could be understood as request to do away with the glass showcases again.

Although this chronological story implies that these historical steps resemble scientific paradigms overtaking each other like kings and queens, in a monarchist state, these different approaches to a museum object should be rather seen as fluid typology opening up a new understanding of the connection between epistemologies and museums. In every museum these approaches mix and build new alliances just like different types of exhibition design do as well. That museum objects and exhibition design have been connected throughout history should remind us on the simple fact that what things are and what they can say is always dependent on places, people and theories, on networks and collectives. Things have become speakers and actors, because there have been museums and curators adopting thoughts from the humanities and constantly making the objects talk their message. That raises among others the question: Who are the people and places entrusted with selecting the talkable things? To make the question more political: Who has the right to curate? And that is a question often forgotten when talking about the language of things, because when the thing itself is able to talk why bothering with the question: who selects them?

Notes

(1) For this way to put it I thank the organisers of the conference 'Museum metamorphosis' in Leicester 2013. The section in which I had the opportunity to speak was called 'changing museums, changing epistemologies'.

(2) Compare for an overview of current approaches to historicizing epistemologies: Rheinberger, 2010.

(3) This quote loses some pejorative power because of the translation. In German it says 'marxistische Klippschule'.

(4) All German quotes have been translated by the author.

References

Baird, D. 2004. *Thing Knowledge. A Philosophy of Scientific Instruments*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Brown, B. 2001. Thing Theory. In *Critical Inquiry* 28 (1): 1–22.

Coole, D. H.; Frost, S. (eds.) 2010*. New Materialisms. Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Durham, London: Duke University Press.

Daston, L. (ed.) 2008. *Things That Talk. Object Lessons from Art and Science*. New York: Zone Books.

Dudley, S. (ed.) 2012. *Museum Objects. Experiencing the Properties of Things*. London, New York: Routledge.

Flagmeier, R. 1995. Die Unbeständige. In Werkbund-Archiv/ Museum der Alltagskultur des 20. Jahrhunderts Berlin (ed.). *Ausstellungsmagazin 'ohne Titel. Sichern unter…'*. Berlin: 4-9.

Henning, M. 2006. *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Historisches Museum Frankfurt 1981. *Frauenalltag und Frauenbewegung 1890-1980. Katalog*. Frankfurt/M., Basel: Roter Stern, Stroemfeld.

Hoffmann, D.; Junker, A.; Schirmbeck, P. (eds.) 1974. *Geschichte als öffentliches Ärgernis. Oder, Ein Museum für die demokratische Gesellschaft*. Fernwald: Anabas.

Hoffmann, D. 1976. "Laßt Objekte sprechen!". Bemerkungen zu einem verhängnisvollen Irrtum. In E. Spickernagel, B. Walbe (eds.): *Das Museum. Lernort contra Musentempel*. Gießen: Anabas: 101–120.

Kittel, M. 2011. *Marsch durch die Institutionen? Politik und Kultur in Frankfurt nach 1968*. München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag.

König, G. M. 2003. Auf dem Rücken der Dinge. Materielle Kultur und Kulturwissenschaft. In K. Maase, B. J. Warneken (eds.): *Unterwelten der Kultur. Themen und Theorien der volkskundlichen Kulturwissenschaft*. Köln: Böhlau: 95–118.

Korff, G. 2007*. Museumsdinge. deponieren - exponieren*. Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau.

Latour, B. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Harvard University Press.

Schmidt-Linsenhoff, V. 1982. Historische Dokumentation - zehn Jahre danach. In Historisches Museum Frankfurt (ed.). *Die Zukunft beginnt in der Vergangenheit. Museumsgeschichte und Geschichtsmuseum*. Gießen: Anabas: 330-347.

Thiemeyer, Th. 2011. Die Sprache der Dinge. Museumsobjekte zwischen Zeichen und Erscheinung.In Beiträge des Symposiums *Geschichtsbilder im Museum* im Deutschen Historischen Museum Berlin. Available online at http://www.museenfuergeschichte.de/downloads/news/Thomas_Thiemeyer-Die_Sprache_der_Dinge.pdf Last access: March 23, 2014.

Turkle, S. 2011. *Evocative Objects. Things We Think With*. Cambridge/Mass., London: MIT Press.

Sturm, E. 1991. *Konservierte Welt. Museum und Musealisierung*. Berlin: Reimer.

Pomian, K. 1978. Entre l'invisible et le visible: la collection. In K. Pomian*. Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux. Paris, Venise XVIe – XVIIIe sciècle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1987: 15-59 (published before in Enciclopedia Einaudi, t.III, Turin, 1978: 330-364).

Rheinberger, H.-J. 2010. *On Historicizing Epistemology. An Essay*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Siepmann, E. 1987. *Alchimie des Alltags. Das Werkbund-Archiv, Museum der Alltagskultur des 20. Jahrhunderts. Gebrauchsanweisung für einen neuen Museumstypus*. Gießen: Anabas.

Sudjic, D. 2009. *The Language of Things*. London: Penguin.

Musealising change or changing the museum: the case of the musical instrument museum from the visitors' perspective

Judith Dehail

PhD Candidate, Information and Communication Sciences, Université Paris 7, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Centre Marc Bloch Berlin.
dehail@cmb.hu-berlin.de

Abstract

Although we concentrate increasingly on the number of visitors that European museums welcome each year, museum audiences are seldom given the floor. It is also rare that a museum's concepts are based on a discussion with its visitors. The musical instrument museum is a case in point for looking into the ways in which the museum institution might however be challenged if it considers the visitors' expectations. The museum for musical instruments indeed entails a paradox as it musealises objects that are meant to produce music. And music is based on a practice that is multiple and changing. This process of musealisation reveals itself as particularly problematic for the museum visitors. The following paper aims at showing how, by shaping their expectations, the relationship of music-lovers to music outside the museum jeopardises the traditional model of the museum and might subject it to change.

Keywords: musical instrument museum, music and museum, visitor studies, hierarchy of the senses, hierarchy of knowledge

In the past few years, it has become quite common to hear that museums have now set the visitors at the centre of their preoccupations and of their dynamics of change. This statement is however questionable as studies (Le Marec, 2004, 2007) have shown. Visitor studies in museums tend to be limited to measuring the attendance of an institution and elaborating new categories in which to fit visitors, according to their age, gender, social category, etc. Romanello has shown that when studies do give the floor to audiences, the data drawn from the interviews is rarely used in order to fuel the process of rethinking the concept of a museum (Romanello, 2013).

The musical instrument museum is a case in point for looking into the ways in which the museum institution might be challenged if it considers visitors expectations. Musical instruments museums are a paradox as they musealise objects that are meant to produce music. And music is based on a practice that is multiple and changing. Confronted with its incapacity to exhibit music itself, the museum exhibits musical instruments. The museum therefore transforms in this case the means, the musical instrument, into an end, by rematerialising the work of art. This process of musealisation reveals itself as particularly problematic for the museum visitors.

This paper aims at showing how, by shaping their expectations, the relationship of music-lovers to music outside the museum jeopardises the traditional model of the museum and might subject it to change. It will therefore look into the hierarchies on which this model is based, at how visitors question these hierarchies and finally, how the museum attempts to answer this paradox.

Method and definitions

This study is based on qualitative research using in-depth interviews with visitors at the end of their visit as well as with museum professionals conducted in two different museums: a musical instrument museum in France, the *Musée de la Musique* in Paris and one in Germany, the GRASSI *Museum für Musikinstrument*e at the University of Leipzig. Both these museums use a traditional model for exhibiting musical instruments organised in a chronological order, having recourse to different spaces to represent different periods in order to offer to the eyes of the visitors an extensive tour into the history of music.

The research on which this paper builds also stems from the observation that the situation with visitor studies in those museums reflects the one that is generally described above: when surveys are carried out or information is collected about the museum visitors, it is essentially quantitative, with very little attention paid to the visitor beyond the traditional socio-professional categories. Using a qualitative method both for the collection and for the analysis of our data allows us to overcome these categories and to give a determining place to the visitors' observations in our study. Instead of these categories, we consider the complex web of musical practices that seem to predetermine the museum visit and to create expectations in the visitors. The protocol used to initiate

the interviews in both museums indeed takes into account the practices that music-lovers have outside the museum and the way these practices will interact with their museum visit. 'Music-lovers' is understood in the sense proposed by French sociologists Antoine Hennion, Sophie Maisonneuve and Emilie Gomart (Hennion, Maisonneuve and Gomart, 2000), comprising not only those who play an instrument, or who have acquired a formal music education, but all practices linked to music such as listening or instrument building whether they are professional or amateur practices - occurring in the private, or public sphere. Finally, although both museums we chose as our case studies are based on a traditional model, they differ radically by their size and organisation. The analysis based on the data drawn from our case studies allows us therefore to provide some answers to broader questions regarding musical instrument museums, as well as feed a more general reflection on the attendance of museums.

The choice of the musical instrument museum as a case in point for our study is also explained by the specificity of its status. The musical instrument museum is one example among a large variety of museums, whose subject matter is music. All through time and around the world, musealising music has been a preoccupation taking the shape of composers' houses (1), museums dedicated to singer-song-writers (2), popular music museums (3), departments in art museums (4) or in ethnography museums (5) among other musealisation forms. This diversity illustrates on one hand the complexity of the undertaking of exhibiting music, and on the other its significance.

Before getting to the core of this paper, it is important that we also clarify the way we understand the term 'expectation' for the museum visitors' case. When examining the question of the relationship between visitors (*publics*) and the museum institution, Joëlle Le Marec brings to light the way the marketing approach – increasingly used in museums – fails to grasp its complexity (Le Marec, 1997, 2004, 2007). She explains how the marketing approach tends to reduce the relationship to a mere commercial exchange although visitors relate to the museum in a much more complex way, actually directly opposing the marketing model and based rather on the symbolic operativity (6) of the institution. The countless interviews she has conducted with museum visitors in various environments and over an extensive period of time reveal how visitors fundamentally trust the museum and in its ability to accomplish the social missions to which – they assume – it is dedicated. In doing so, she denounces the dangerous amalgam that is made between definitions of notions such as expectation and satisfaction of visitors that actually, Le Marec argues, radically vary 'whether one is museum visitor or product consumer' (Le Marec, 2004: 11). Drawing upon Le Marec's thesis, this paper is based on a broader understanding of the visitors' expectations as benevolent anticipations, built on the trust and around the symbolic dimension that is constitutive of the museum institution.

Museum objects are witnesses only. The theoretical postulate of the transformation of the 'use value' into a 'symbolic value'

A museum collection is generally defined by the fact that the objects composing it have lost their original function. Often, they have been taken out of the places where they had been kept until then, whether it be a church, a palace, a house, or a public space. Yves Jeanneret explains: 'To the multiple roles that these objects were fulfilling in all these places, a more imperious function substitutes or superimposes itself that justifies this extraction: the museum objects are elected to stand as witness to beauty, identity and civilisation' (Jeanneret, 2011: 121). In other words, museum objects are expected to lose their 'use value' to acquire a 'symbolic value'. The collection bed is never to be slept in again, the pot will never be used for cooking again, the shoe will no longer be worn, and the musical instrument will not be played. Jean Davallon indeed explains that the emergence of the exhibition is conditioned by the forming of a new relationship to the art object and to the natural object. In the same way, the emergence of heritage (*patrimoine*) is closely linked to a new status being attributed to these objects (Davallon, 1992: 106).

The object has thereby a plurality of values, is always susceptible to being redefined and to circulate within the art culture system (Clifford, 1988: 222-226). Musical instruments that become part of a collection are freed from their past as object and embody a new symbolical significance within the exhibition. They will stand for a musical historical period, a music style, a famous musician, a technique of fabrication etc. Still according to this theoretical approach, the visual items can also be presented as works of art for their aesthetical value or for their legendary reputation, and therefore become ends in themselves. When applied to our object of study, musical instruments, these theories are, to some extent, conclusive. It is the case for example of Stradivarius' violins at the *Musée de la Musique* in Paris. Their specific apparatus, constructed around an isolated showcase

standing in the middle of the room, sublimates the object giving it an epiphanic character. The intention is to create an aesthetical emotion capable of hiding the prosaic visual character of the original object. It seems to us however that this theoretical approach, privileging a strict distinction between the definitions of the object before and after it enters the museum, leads to some aporias.

Musealising musical instruments or the emergence of a paradox

The point of view of museum visitors might pressure us to reconsider the theoretical transformation of the value of musical instruments in the museum described above. One of the most commonly shared reactions among the interviewed visitors is the frustration provoked by the prohibition to touch the instruments exhibited. We have distinguished three ways with which visitors express this frustration and confront it. The first reaction type can be characterised as empathetic: visitors adopt the position of the museum. They voice the fact that they would wish to touch the musical instruments, see them in a better light, try them out, or hear the sound they produce, but they also express their understanding for the position in which the museum stands. They have expectations or wishes, but they abandon them very quickly, because they 'know that when you go to a museum you can't' (7). In other words they perceive that these expectations would not be compatible with the museum's constraints as a public institution. The following example (8) illustrates the empathetic capacity of the visitors for the museum that allows them to relinquish their expectations:

> You always wish to have the haptics [to be able to touch the objects] but I understand that on the other side, it doesn't work to have 500 year-old instruments and to allow anyone who wants to play on the instruments to do it, this is naturally understandable. [...] I like to look behind the façade, this is why I would have sometimes hoped, for example with the neo Bernstein grand piano, that the cover would be open, that you would be able to see the electronic sound pick up system. I had already seen one in Berlin, but I think that it would make it optically easier to understand for people if it was open. But then you would need to put these Plexiglas panes of course, which is financially not really… I can imagine why you don't do this with all of them.

It is interesting to note that these reactions are very far from the demands or reactions typical of the unhappy customers who would be less likely to adopt the position of the institution to calm their frustration. This example shows, once again, that the 'expectations' with which visitors enter the museum should not be reduced to a mere mercantile relationship. Visitors' expectations are then shaped not only by their relationship to music outside the museum but also by the symbolic dimension of the museum.

In the second type of reaction, a tension appears clearly between use value of the object and conservation rules. The visitors realise that playing the instruments of the exhibition is not allowed but they find it difficult to resign themselves to not touching them, getting close to them in order to see them better or trying them out. The rationally conceivable conservation constraints of the instruments in the museum do not outbalance the desire to experience the object in a different way than by exclusively looking at it.

The third category of reaction features extreme positions of visitors. In this last category, visitors have clear claims about the use value of the museum object, namely the musical instrument. These claims are user expectations concerning either the museum or music. In this category as in the preceding one, the visitors clearly do not perceive the conversion of the use value into a symbolic value that the museum strives to create for the instruments. Here, however, they go one step further in claiming back the use value of the instrument. In other words, they find a way to short-circuit the normal visiting path and get to actually play on some of the exhibited musical instruments. 'I was interested in seeing the pianos', explains one professional pianist (9),

> but I wasn't sure if I wanted to come, because unless I got a tour and I can play the instruments, it's very frustrating to look at them when you can't touch them… It doesn't mean anything to me to look at them, it matters to me to understand the development of the instrument by putting my hands on it and feeling it and hearing the sound, and this, even if it's only for a few seconds, can radically change my approach to the composer and his time.

After the interview, this visitor was finally allowed to play on some of the pianos of the exhibition. This adaptation of the museum policy is nonetheless univocal and is not the case for the majority of visitors, as the visitors who form this last category are intensely involved either in a museum practice or in a musical practice. These three differing positions reveal that visitors clearly perceive different values for the musical instruments.

However, there is a global refusal to see the use value of the instrument annihilated, and different strategies are set up to cope with this frustration, including getting to touch the instrument. This would suggest that the process attempted by the museum to transform the use value of the instrument into a symbolic value does not entirely work.

Why not hear the museum? Toward a dehierarchisation of the senses

The fact that visitors experience a frustration when facing musical instruments behind glass cases and feel a need to touch them also implies that the distance to the work of art or the object (an implicit rule of the museum visit) does not work either. In his book *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Martin Jay underlines the fact that the Western philosophical tradition is based on the idea that the acquisition of knowledge must take place before everything else, if not exclusively, through a visual relationship to the object (Jay, 1994) – and museums have largely contributed to this supremacy of the sense of vision. Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1966) evidenced the role of classifying and collecting in the shift from pre-modern and multi-sensory knowledge to modern and visual knowledge. Describing the way specimens from natural history collections, archives and herbariums were increasingly laid out alongside each other forming tables that could literally be read off by a viewer, he showed how collections were one of the places where modern visual systems of knowledge were created. Donald Preziosi develops Foucault's thesis, defining the modern museum as 'the most extraordinary optical instrument of all; the veritable summa of opticality, of visuality' (Preziosi, 1996: 106) (10).

In the musical instrument museum, however, this supremacy of the visual perception is clearly challenged by the visitors. The distance to the object that museums usually enforce seems to be perceived as contributing to a frustrating and groundless fetishisation of the object, and to conflict with the visitors' lively relationship to music. Besides the will to reinstate touch as legitimate, this contesting of the hierarchy of the senses established by the museum also stems from the nature of music itself. The Parisian museum in which we conducted interviews systematically proposes an audio guide for visitors who are about to walk into the permanent exhibition. With this audio guide, visitors are given further context as well as musical examples from a selection of exhibited musical instruments that are identified with a reference. This is thought by the museum to give an additional dimension to the visual visiting route. The principle is quite easy: when facing an instrument they want to know more about, visitors press the corresponding number and can then hear details about how it was made, when and where it was played, or more importantly, hear its sound. The sum of this audio information ends up forming a sort of parallel itinerary that sometimes, as the interviews reveal, takes over the visual one. One visitor explains, for example, how she listened many times to the track of the flute on the audio guide – as she walked in front of other musical instruments, in parts of the museum where there weren't any flutes exhibited – because she used to play the flute when she was young, and felt nostalgic upon hearing its sound. Here, the sense of hearing clearly prevails and vision is relegated to the background.

The hierarchy of the senses that characterises the museum visit is therefore jeopardised on the one hand by the fact that the music practices of the visitors strongly involve the body and on the other hand by a different hierarchy of the senses that music calls for.

'If Mozart lived nowadays'(11): rethinking musical knowledge

The analysis of visitor interviews reveals yet another hierarchy on which museums are based and against which visitors act, namely the hierarchy of knowledge. In the permanent exhibitions considered for this research, the museums in Paris and Leipzig make a strong dichotomy between a category of people considered as professional musicians and one of people thought to be non-professional or amateur musicians. The music history presented in the museum does not take processes into account such as musical composition, and there is for example no draft of sheet music to be seen. Learning is also not taken into consideration, and no information is given about musical education throughout the centuries. The musical works represented are exclusively works of Western classical music composers identified as illustrious and they are shown as fully developed artworks. The historical exhibition of the museum for musical instruments in Leipzig typically ends with the 'new Renaissance', a period which marks the beginning of a renewed interest for early music in the twentieth century. In the Parisian museum, although there is a tendency to collect instruments of the twenty-first century, the part of the exhibition dedicated to popular music is still very much underdeveloped. Also, it is interesting to note that the musical instrument museum in Leipzig does not show any object from its non-Western musical instruments

collection in the historical exhibition. As for the collection of non-Western musical instruments at the Parisian museum, it is thrown out of time, at the end of the visiting route, in a part of the exhibition entitled 'World Music'. The history of music that is shown in the museum is thus almost exclusively a history of composition and performance of Western classical music.

In an essay entitled 'Toward a New Organology: Material Culture and the Study of Musical Instruments', Allen Roda argues that 'classifying musical instruments is an exercise of power through control over discourse' (Roda, 2007: 18). Drawing upon James Clifford's thesis, he also points out that displaying musical instruments as emblematic of a group of people not only freezes them in time, but the instrument is also frozen in time and place through its association with a particular group of people.

> By constantly reminding the public that the accordion is a European instrument, museums are actively erasing the way in which the instrument has been transformed by other groups of people throughout the world and subsequently placing value judgments on those transformations as being somehow "less authentic" than the instrument's cultural origins (Roda, 2007: 19).

In other words, by authenticating a specific context – a time and a space – for each musical instrument, the museum establishes hierarchies between the musical practices that are actually linked to these instruments.

The interpretation of musical instruments (and thereby of music itself) that is constructed and proposed by museums is however susceptible of conflicting with the visitors' interpretation. Besides remarks about the way the museum has chosen to show music history, some visitors interestingly find ways to actually act against the hierarchy of knowledge that the museum strives to establish. In the example (12) shown here, the visitor explains how, with the help of the audio guide, she precisely enjoyed pulling instruments out of the time and the musical period in which the museum had fixed them:

> I really enjoyed listening to rock music up there. And then coming down with that music still in my ears, with Johnny B. Goode for example, in front of the octobasse. I said to myself "Oh what a pity that these musicians were not able to know another era, with other instruments, it could have led to something fantastic". I even say to myself that if Mozart lived nowadays, maybe he'd have a ball. […] I think "Oh wow, if he had had the instruments we have today, say an electric guitar… what would he have done with it?

In other words, she uses the means that the museum has set up in order to support its traditional model but she adapts them to her own perception of music. This perception is based on her musical practices and doesn't include, for example, any hierarchy between popular and classical music.

The analysis of the interviews conducted in the two museums reveals the conflicting nature of the relationship between music and museum. More specifically, the hierarchies on which the museum is based are challenged by competing relationships not only to musical knowledges, but also to the body.

Adaptations call for change. Considering a new model for musical instrument museums

Conscious of the specificity of music's lively and immaterial character and to some extent also of the frustrations of the visitors, museum professionals have imagined ways in which to enrich their museum on two levels. Additions to the permanent exhibition have been proposed in adjunct spaces, such as temporary exhibitions, as well as inside such as an audio guide. We will look here into two of these innovations in more detail: the sound laboratory in the GRASSI *Museum für Musikinstrumente* in Leipzig and the concerts proposed on a daily basis by the *Musée de la Musique* in Paris as part of its exhibition.

The museum in Leipzig has created a dedicated space alongside the main exhibition, in which visitors can try out musical instruments. Visitors are invited to play on objects such as a piano made out of Plexiglas, allowing the player to observe the mechanism in action, an organ model built especially to explain how this instrument produces its sounds, a clavichord and various percussion instruments, among other instruments. The room is brightly coloured and well-lit, and is also equipped with texts phrased and presented in such a way as to suit young children. The sound laboratory is situated one floor above the permanent exhibition, and one must walk through the temporary exhibition in order to access it. One main reason why this space was clearly separated from the rest of the museum was to avoid any confusion, which could, according to the designer, lead the visitors to feel encouraged to touch the original instruments. As a matter of fact, the sound laboratory is described by most of the museum employees as a buffer space, of which one of the primary roles is to offer a

room where the visitors can finally experiment with instruments after only being allowed to look at the exhibition. A curator at the Leipzig museum (13) explains how this space is useful for her to cope with the visitors' frustration when she guides groups around the museum: 'it helps me a lot downstairs when I can say "at the end you can go upstairs, and there you can try *everything* out, you can try out the cembalo which you are not allowed to do here, the clavichord, the organ…" and then they are very quiet and I don't hear any complaints anymore'. The observations in the sound laboratory and the interviews with visitors reveal a very rich range of reactions and emotions, from absolute wonder, for example when visitors interact with musical instruments for the first time, to total rejection of the concept, when visitors explain that 'this is not for them'. It is however interesting to note that they often clearly differentiate between their experience in the sound laboratory and in the permanent exhibition to such an extent that some people come exclusively to spend time in this room, ignoring the rest of the museum. Also, the interviews show that having the freedom to try out musical instruments in the sound laboratory, although it brings up reactions and emotions, does not cancel out, for many visitors, the frustration caused by the hierarchy of the senses operating in the permanent exhibition. On the contrary, it seems that the contrasting character of the two spaces could result in the exhibition appearing blander, as this example (14) suggests: [During the interview, after talking about the sound laboratory] 'But downstairs [it is good] that the museum is there, that one can have a first contact [with the instruments] but it would be better if someone was there and would play a couple keys on some of the instruments, wouldn't it? They are all standing there like dead souls in the corner'.

The 'educational concerts' (*concerts pédagogiques*) that take place in the exhibition of the Parisian museum consist in a different musician coming in every day and playing a specific amount of time. During the summer holidays she/he plays half an hour twice, and for the rest of the year the musician plays for three hours continuously in the afternoon. The player is advised to occasionally stop playing and give information to the visiting public about the instrument or the music played as well as answering questions posed by the audience. The musicians do not play on instruments of the collection (neither originals nor facsimiles) but bring their own and sit with them on a stage installed among the harpsichords, in the second part of the exhibition, where instruments of the eighteenth century are presented. Visitors are informed at the entrance of the museum as well as on the website of who the musician of the day is. Many visitors also simply stumble upon the concert as they walk around the museum. The idea is that visitors gain an opportunity to be in contact with a variety of musicians, instruments as well as repertoires. The interviews conducted with some of the musicians as well as visitors reveal however a conflict between the reception modes specific to the concert and to the museum. Many musicians explain how they are often confronted with the fact that visitors are bothered by them playing in the museum to the extent that they go and complain to the museum guards. As a matter of fact, some visitors express a frustration caused by the fact that they were not able to listen to their audio guide because of the concert. Also, some musicians admit that playing in these conditions is difficult. In the same way, some visitors explain that they felt bad for the musician, such as a woman interviewed in the Paris museum (15), who thought the musician was being exhibited, rather than listened to:

> Personally I found [the concert in the museum] fabulous, but for him it must be terrible! Because there he is really on exhibit and not necessarily being listened to as one might be in a concert for example. There, one is an acknowledged instrumentalist. Here, it must be very difficult for him […]

Indeed, the temporalities of music and of the museum tend to be rather conflicting. Music happens in time, and therefore listening to a live concert requires listeners to remain in one place for a definite amount of time. This temporality seems to conflict with the unfolding of the museum exhibition through various spaces. Even in the summer period, when each concert lasts thirty minutes, it is rare that visitors fully attend it. 'We stayed for two pieces only… because we were scared not to be able to see everything [in the museum]' explains one visitor (16). One of the interviewed musicians (17) also explains how he is often confronted with the disinterest of visitors. 'People are not here to listen to you, they hurry. […] I often spend an hour or an hour and a half without anybody stopping [to listen]'.

The examples presented above show two additions brought to the museum in order to adapt it to the case of music. They are witness to the creativity with which museum professionals implement change in the museum. They also trigger emotional reactions in the visitors and they contribute to complexifying the visitors' relationship to music in various ways. However, as the interviews reveal, they also seem to strengthen the competing aspect of the models of music and of the museum. In his book *Le Goût des Autres. De l'exposition coloniale aux arts premiers*, Benoît de L'Estoile, argues that the partial renovations of the permanent exhibition

of the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris over the years actually precipitated its definitive closure and thereby the creation of the *Musée du Quai Branly* (de L'Estoile, 2007). The renovations would have only emphasised the fact that the rest of the exhibition was obsolete and that the general concept was incapable of presenting a convincing vision of culture. In the same way, one could argue that introducing new parts to the musical instrument museum instead of rethinking altogether the traditional model on which its permanent exhibition is based tends to underline the static aspect of the latter. A proposition would then be to go towards a new model, based on a conceptualisation of music as a process, rather than as fully completed artworks. This would allow to counter the up to now still dominant meta-narrative of music history that often crystallises around the canonical composers and to give a greater role to a whole nebula of musical practices, considered so far as minor. This model would therefore enable to rethink the distinctions between amateur and professional musicians, between popular and classical music as well as the hierarchy of the senses at work in the traditional museum model, and that has shown its paradoxical nature in the case of the musical instrument museum.

Conclusion

The case of the musical instrument museum helps bring to light the hierarchies upon which the traditional model of the museum relies and more specifically the hierarchy of the senses and of knowledge. They are questioned by the relationship that visitors continuously build with music outside the museum, not only because of how this relationship involves the body but also because it relies on strongly affirmed stands regarding musical knowledges. The attempts made so far by the observed museums to adapt to the specificity of their content, although valuable in themselves, tend to underline the conflicting nature of this relationship and thereby the need for a change of model. The musical instrument museum therefore proves a paradigmatic example of the extent to which the museum institution can be challenged if it considers visitors expectations. Examining the moment when museum rules and hierarchies are challenged, and when things do not happen as planned in an exhibition, it becomes clear, however, that visitors act neither as a mass nor as typologies of individuals in search of a specific product, but as music-lovers with an ever-building reflexivity and a benevolent faith in the institution and in its capacity to evolve.

Notes

(1) See for example the Mendelssohn House in Leipzig, Germany: http://www.mendelssohn-stiftung.de/r-house.html [Accessed: 2nd January 2014].

(2) Such as the Espace Georges Brassens in Sète, France: http://www.espace-brassens.fr [Accessed: 2nd January 2014].

(3) See for example Britain's museum of popular music in London, England: http://www.britishmusicexperience.com [Accessed: 3rd January 2014].

(4) Such as the musical instruments department of the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, USA: http://www.metmuseum.org/en/about-the-museum/museum-departments/curatorial-departments/musical-instruments [Accessed: 2nd January 2014].

(5) See for example the musical instruments collection of the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, France: http://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/collections/explorer-les-collections/parcours-thematiques/instruments-de-musique.html [Accessed: 2nd January 2014].

(6) Joëlle Le Marec borrows the concept of symbolic operativity of the museum from Jean Davallon. Thinking about the link between museum and media, Davallon (1999) argues that the definition generally used for medias, and that characterises them exclusively as communication and information technologies, is too limiting in that it leaves out an essential part of their functioning, their symbolic operativity. He therefore considers the museum rather as a social arrangement that helps create a social relationship between social actors and museum objects (musealia) during the museum visit.

(7) Interview with museum visitor in Paris, August 8th 2013.

(8) Interview with museum visitor in Leipzig, July 19th 2011.

(9) Interview with museum visitor in Leipzig, June 15th 2011.

(10) For a more detailed analysis, see Candlin, F. (2010), Art, Museums and Touch, Manchester University Press.

(11) Interview with museum visitor in Paris, August 6th, 2013.

(12) Ibid.

(13) Interview in Leipzig, August 2011.

(14) Interview with museum visitor in Leipzig, August 3rd, 2011.

(15) Interview with museum visitor in Paris, August 9th, 2013.

(16) Interview with museum visitor in Paris, August 8th, 2013.

(17) Interview in Paris, August 2013.

References

Candlin, F. (2010), *Art, Museums and Touch*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Clifford J. (1993), *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature. and Art*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

Davallon J. (1999), *L'exposition à l'oeuvre. Stratégies de communication et mediation symbolique*. Paris, L'Harmattan.

De L'Etoile B. (2007*), Le Goût des Autres. De l'exposition coloniale aux Arts premiers*. Paris, Flammarion.

Foucault M. (1966), *Les Mots et les choses*. Paris, Gallimard.

Hennion A., Maisonneuve S., Gomart E. (2000*), Figures de l'amateur, formes, objets, pratiques de l'amour de la musique aujourd'hui*. Paris, La Documentation Française.

Jay M., (1993), *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. London, University of California Press.

Jeanneret Y. (2011), *Where is Mona Lisa ? et autres lieux de la culture*. Paris, Le Cavalier Bleu.

Le Marec J. and Deshayes S. (1997), 'Evaluation, marketing et muséologie.' *Publics et Musées* 11: 165-191.

Le Marec J. (2004), 'La relation entre l'institution muséale et les publics: confrontation de modèles'. Proceedings of the conference 'Changer: les musées dans nos sociétés en mutation'. [Online] Available from: http://pacmusee.qc.ca/docs/sizes/4c4ef7e339e2a/source/ColloqueChanger-Theme1-Le_Marec_Resume_Conference_Biographie.pdf [Accessed: 7th January 2014].

Le Marec J. (2007), *Publics et musées: La confiance éprouvée*. Paris, L'Harmattan.

Preziosi D. (1996), 'Brain of the earth's body: Museums and the framing of modernity'. *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Art work*, Cambridge/New York, Cambridge University Press.

Roda A. (2007), 'Towards a New Organology: Material Culture and the Study of Musical Instruments'. [Online] Available from: http://allenroda.com/toward_a_new_organology/ [Accessed: 7th January 2014].

Romanello G. (2013), 'What We Know About Our Audiences: Utopian or Cynical Behaviour?'. *Museological Review* 17: 62-75. [Online] Available from: http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/documents/museologicalreview/mr-17/9_Romanello_FINAL2Jan2013.pdf [Accessed: 7th January 2014].

Acknowledgments

Curatorial Compass: Organising Meaning in Institutional and Online Displays

Michael Stephanie Berrie
MA (Distinction) Art History & Visual Culture, Richmond the American International University in London
berrie.michaels@gmail.com

Abstract

In the fast paced era of the 'Information Age' the conceptions of information gathering brought by visitors to museums and online platforms has begun to alter. As the world of art transcends the museum and gallery setting into the cyber-world of the Internet, the online and physical realms of art no longer stand alone as entities to be examined in seclusion, but rather as symbionts co-existing in an epoch of information. Through the application of Hermeneutic theory and Phenomenology this paper analyses the common ways physical institutions such as the British Museum and online art databases such as Artsy utilise organisation and navigation to create meaningful and informative visitor experiences.

Keywords: Museum displays, Online art databases, Hermeneutic theory, Phenomenology

Meaningful Approaches

Navigation is the root of the museum experience. For some, arriving at the doors of a museum or gallery can feel like a delightful homecoming while for others it may feel more like stepping over the threshold into a dark and uncharted territory. Commensurate with that is the experience of those exploring art and objects on the Internet, scrolling and clicking their way to countless destinations. In both settings, the organisation and subsequent navigation of displays is integral to meaning-making. This paper discusses each of these platforms' approaches in order to better understand the ways their visitor experiences relate. I argue that through the application of hermeneutic theory and phenomenology commonalities between the two are unquestionably evident. By understanding these significant similarities progress can be made towards a symbiotic relationship between the two, enabling both to better adapt to the needs of their audiences.

Museum Exhibitions

In the age of the post-museum objects are understood to be polysemic, or of possessing multiple meanings that are perpetually changing based upon the context they are pondered in (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). The art of creating understanding and the ways in which messages are communicated are both complex and varied. Meaning-making is informed by varying scales of ideas and information being processed contextually over time. This information is then recalled through a range of experiences including navigation, both the more abstract act of navigating information and ideas as well as the physical act of navigating an experiential realm. Meaning-making in museums then is a product of interaction and interpretation by the visitor and is better understood through the application of hermeneutic theory and context-based learning practices.

Hermeneutic theory can be defined as developing understanding through the *process* of interpreting– or deriving meaning– where 'interpretation aims to uncover the meaning of a work through a dialogic relationship between the detail and the whole' (Ibid., 2000: 117). To relate this notion to the practice of museum exhibitions the individual works on display inform the exhibition on the whole, just as the larger themes and contexts of the exhibition imprint on the interpretation of the singular object. The viewer must consider both and rearrange their understanding accordingly. This so-called dialogic interaction between the viewer, the piece and the larger exhibition requires a shifting focus between the viewer's preconceived perceptions, their reactions to the piece and the meaning suggested by the larger context of the exhibition, which speaks to the viewer both consciously and subliminally.

As Hooper-Greenhill (2000: 117) explains, 'things have meaning because of the frame within which they are placed,' and this understanding is a product of pattern making: arranging new information or experiences into a composition from which relations can be uncovered and analyzed. The situating of an object in a larger context is a key museological practice and can radically shape the understanding of a particular idea. For example:

a brick might be used to build a wall, smash a window, warm a bed, or prevent a car from rolling away. In each case it is the same brick, but its meaning derives from its context of use. The 'brick' as a 'fact', a material fact, gets its meaning by the way in which it fits into a pattern (Ibid., 2000: 11).

Other theorists such as Susan M. Pearce (1994) highlight this in their own work, stating that because objects exist in 'locational relationships' to other objects and to a broader landscape of meaning, it is necessary to establish a knowledgeable context to interpret the art or artefact within. Pearce (1994) claims:

> Objects embody unique information about the nature of men and society: the elucidation of approaches through which this can be unlocked is our task, the unique contribution museum collections can make to our understanding of ourselves.

As such, establishing context within displays must be carefully and methodically considered knowing that with each viewer comes a new opportunity for the object to be interpreted in a way it has never been interpreted before (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 115).

Understanding is not derived merely from a sum of informative parts but rather an ongoing dialogue between large and small details, just as the museum experience is not distilled to the individual exploration of objects. Instead, it is the culminated exchange of information between the viewer, object, exhibition, gallery and museum as a whole. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (1993:11), a leading institution in the practice of interpretation, states of their practices, 'display [is] the foundation of interpretation'. However, the entirety of the institution serves as an influence on the meaning-making taking place within its walls.

An audience's experience within a museum is first informed by the viewers' approach and entry into it, as the location and architecture conveys messages about the objects inside (Moser, 2010: 24). Once within the museum, how the space is organised and arranged influences the way visitors move within it and presents the institutionally designated context. It is a prime concern of museological practice to utilise a space in the way that best contributes to the understanding of the exhibition or collection's message. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (1993: 6) furthers this idea by stating:

> Although seldom considered as elements of a museum's educational program, the order of galleries and the arrangement of objects are fundamental to interpretation… Most museum-goers learn more from contextual or thematic arrangements of art within a chronological or taxonomic groupings. One of our prime objectives is to create installations that give visitors opportunities to compare and categorise works of art and construct frameworks for understanding.

Organising the physical space effectively is integral to encouraging broader access to the institution's proposed understanding of the object. Furthermore it highlights how organisation and, subsequently, navigation promotes the hermeneutic circle of dialogic understanding between the viewer and the object – underscoring the conventions of context-based education.

In support of this theoretical basis, scholars such as Stephanie Moser (2010: 27) have proposed that displays and their components serve as a narrative 'that visitors subconsciously "read" when they move through an exhibition'. Moser (2010: 27) goes on to state that the positioning of works in more 'striking or accessible' locations can influence the interpretation of the object as being more significant in comparison to others that have been relegated to less visually appealing placements. Mentally organizing concepts and artefacts hierarchically is an engrained behaviour shaped through past experiences, though not always consciously. While it may be implied through the organisation of the display there is an unarticulated knowledge that informs the viewer that the object's location, lighting or other highlighting feature means that it is of more significance. This phenomenon is known as tacit knowledge and:

> can be understood as all that is known by individuals, minus all that can be said. Tacit knowledge remains at an emotional, reactive level, and as it remains non-verbal, unarticulated, cannot be analyzed and assessed (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 116).

As it is not necessarily obtained intentionally or known explicitly, often the holder of said knowledge is unaware of drawing upon it (Ibid., 2000: 116).

Much of the human experience is felt and processed subconsciously, and often we are only able to express it well after an experience has passed (Wood & Latham, 2009). While the physical body is the root of the lived-experience, it becomes invisible to the psyche during transactions of information between viewer and object,

serving as an antenna for understanding – receiving, translating and outputting projections quietly in the background. Dr. Cheung On Tam (2008: 8) of the Hong Kong Institute of Education explains that the, 'apparent "absence" of the body seems to allow the object to become present'. Phenomenology is the primary methodology for understanding this activity and explores human awareness derived from lived-experience and the resulting perceptions of the physical world (Marković, 2012). These perceptions take the form of meaning on a material, cultural or personal level and, in the context of the museum, can manifest in what John Dewey historically called the *aesthetic experience*; a term used to explain the psychological event when a person focuses completely on one object in a unique, emotional response (Ibid., 2012).

Like other phenomenological experiences, the *aesthetic experience* is immediate and visceral, requiring time following it to be fully comprehensible or understandable (Wood & Latham, 2009). It is suggested that:

> Experienced meaning is not simply a surface phenomenon, but it permeates through the body and psyche of participants. But, participants are able to articulate only that portion of meaning that they can access through reflection...If a participant stays with their reflective gaze, deeper aspects of the experience will begin to seep into awareness and become observable (Ibid., 2009).

As such, the phenomenological exploration of meaning-making in the museum underpins that consciousness (making sense of our perceptions by way of our body) and intentionality (the awareness of the transaction of information or meaning between the object and the viewer) contributes to the practices of understanding objects. In particular, hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to provide insight into the search for meaning and interpretation (Tam, 2008: 2).

Gateways to Understanding at the British Museum

To better understand these ideas, an examination of the practices in place at the British Museum can be highly beneficial. With over 5 million visitors annually (British Museum: 2013) the British Museum boasts an expansive browsing audience which it aims to serve in the best ways possible. The museum's research showed that visitors tend to read more labels than panels within the galleries, so 'gateway objects' have been distributed throughout the galleries to provide key background information or thematic introductions (Buck, 2011:46). The displays are designed to encourage visitors to read more and aid in contextualizing objects within the larger collections (Ibid., 2011: 46). The 'gateway objects' utilise position, lighting, images and text to engage visitors and enable them to continue this dialogue with surrounding objects. This is an important practice within such large institutions as reading all of the labels within such a behemoth space would be a Sisyphean task for even the most dedicated museum visitor. Thematic interpretive structures are highly useful for visitors browsing without an existing framework of information as it enables them to focus their attention and take the 'crucial first step' towards the aesthetic experience (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1993: 6). Olivia Buck (2011: 46), a former interpretation officer at the British Museum, claims, 'the results are heartening,' and explains that data reflects extended viewing times in the galleries featuring the gateway objects:

> the dwell time in the Japan gallery is around 11 minutes, and visitors on average stop at 12 gateway objects (27% of the objects in the gallery), which is significantly higher than most other galleries.

This yields positive implications for expanding learning opportunities for browsing audiences, and supports the process of interpreting an object within a specified frame of context and creating opportunities for engaging dialogically with art and object. These gateways recall visitors' tacit knowledge through the visual showcasing of key objects while fostering the hermeneutic exchange of information. Such practices can create opportunities for visitors to reach deeper and deeper to uncover new personal discoveries.

Online Platforms

When thinking about the cyber-world of the Internet and technology, it is a common practice to make sense of the abstract by manipulating the language we use to describe the physical and material. For example, landmarks on the Internet are known as web*sites*, giving them the sense of place and destination despite possibly existing in countless places at once. Frequently, terms are adapted from the physical world that have a deeply engrained meaning within society in order to best communicate the objectives or uses of digital entities.

Of particular interest is Janet H. Murray's term *digital artefact* as it highlights the relationship between the physical and the virtual. Whereas an 'artefact' can be seen as a material entity deliberately created by humans, a

'digital artefact' encompasses, as Murray (2012: 411) says, anything made of bits and processors – a website, a network, the Internet and so on – virtual entities resulting from the intentionality of human innovation. One product of cyber ingenuity is virtual museums, which María-José Moreno (2007) of the University of Puerto Rico defines as, 'an interactive virtual space that provides information and exhibits cultural objects in digital format'.

While these virtual museums are traversed through clicks, cursors and hyperlinks they are nonetheless navigated like their brick-and-mortar counterparts – making their organisation and spatialisation a pivotal aspect of meaning-making. Murray (2012: 40) states, in her book *Inventing the Medium*, 'Every digital project involves spatializing in some form, including maps, information spaces, locations in the real world, virtual places' (Ibid., 2012: 159). Designers must award particular priorities to creating and providing agency – an aesthetic pleasure characteristic of digital environments, which results from the sense of making something happen. Agency is accomplished through the successful combination of two of the four affordances of the digital medium: the participatory affordance and the procedural affordance. The former deals with 'allowing an interactor to manipulate, contribute to, and have an effect on digital content and computer processing' while the latter, which Murray (2012: 432) identifies as the most important of the four affordances, refers to the actual processing power of the platform and the complex executable instructions that define it. Together, these affordances influence the interactor by clearly outlining boundaries, informing them of their current location, and allowing them to maintain control of what they do next, how they feel about it and what they learn (Ibid., 2012: 159). For this to happen, mapping is important as interactors 'feel most comfortable in an environment that is neither confining nor infinite, an environment explorable, but not hazardous' (Tognazzini, 2014) and thus should know how they got to where they are and how to get back in order to best make sense of their 'journey'.

Human-computer interaction expert Bruce Tognazzini (2014) explains that boundaries are vital to the interactor's experience as, 'no autonomy can exist in the absence of control, and control cannot be exerted in the absence of sufficient information'. Effectively designed interfaces instill the users with a sense of control while allowing them to, 'quickly see the breadth of their options, grasp how to achieve their goals, [so they] can settle down to do their work' (Tognazzini 2014). This ultimately means that the designer must effectively script both the interactor's and computer's behavior (Murray, 2012: 432). This 'scripting' however does not mean that the online experience is a singular one, especially in the cyber art world. Moreno (2007) states that the virtual museum allows works of art to be placed in 'innumerable contexts' allowing them to 'acquire new social functions and practices depending on the users' location and interest'. One may uncover a work of art following research on a seemingly unrelated subject, linking the two concepts in the mind of the interactor and creating opportunities for new interpretations and perceptions.

A hermeneutic framework for informed perceptions is particularly well demonstrated in a phenomenological reading of human intentionality – the concept of understanding the relationship between humans and our world. Though this encompasses several forms of intentionality, the one most pertinent to this discussion is the mediated form where technology is placed between the human and the world, arbitrating the dialogic relationship between the two. The human-technology 'hermeneutic relation' has been explored by phenomenological theorists such as Peter-Paul Verbeek (2008: 389) as a form of intentionality, where, 'technologies provide representations of reality which need interpreting in order to constitute a "perception"'. This highlights the specific relations of humans to the world through the interceding of technology.

In the digital realm, intentionality is at the core of our lived-experience as interactors. The utilisation of technology as a mediator for hermeneutic relations with the world around us requires designers to be cognizant of the aspects of the phenomenological experiences most pertinent to meaning-making. It is no surprise then that Murray (2012: 427) utilises the term 'lifeworld' in her work, which she defines as:

> the messy world of culture and embodied experience that we inhabit in our daily lives, where meaning is ambiguous and shifting depending on the frame of reference, and where we understand one another through repeat acts of negotiation and empathy, mediated by symbolic representations like language and digital artifacts.

Here, Murray (2012:47) uses the term to contrast the order sought after in categories of classification systems, but recognises it as being introduced by philosopher Husserl in the field of phenomenology. The 'lifeworld' encapsulates the significance of context on our informed understanding of the world through objects, both material and digital.

Just as in the institutional setting, our tacit knowledge achieved through our lived-experience in the 'lifeworld' informs the way we interact and engage with digital artifacts as if meandering galleries and corridors filled with objects and information. In the digital expanse of online art museums interactors traipse through interfaces rather than galleries, making meaning out of a context they can create themselves. Murray (2012: 426) says of the design aspects of this that in order for an interface to be truly 'intuitive' it draws upon the tacit knowledge of interactors and prompts their behaviour with cues taken from established conventions, thus encouraging them to engage appropriately with the unfamiliar environment 'without explicit direction'. To the interactor, the interface must be both 'intuitive' and become transparent through participatory affordance. While navigating the digital landscape the body also becomes invisible – this time accreting with the interface, in a way, and becoming part of a wired-in form existing both outside the digital artifact and within it.

Murray (2012: 289) states that interaction design should evoke the 'experience of a reliable, polite helper, always under the explicit direction of the human interactor'. With both the implication of knowledge and the familiarity of a companion, the interactor's use of the Internet will be steeped with their personal level of knowledge regarding using browsers, clicking links and even participating in a digital dialogue. The interactor often taps into their tacit understanding through the familiar handling of a mouse or keyboard and in the 'Digital Age' this sensory experience is often more familiar than that which is offered within a museum. The interactor will be physically experiencing each drag of the mouse while emotionally feeling a sense of control and authority in their communication with the machine; in some way each click and clack of restless keys will be informing their experience on an unarticulated level. When the interactor engages with a virtual museum, they are opting to mediate their understanding of art through a web-accessing device. As the interactor utilises their agency, they experience art and object through a new form of experiential learning, trusting technology to guide them through their educational journey.

Of course, criticism of mechanically reproduced art has been prevalent since the birth of photography, and writers such as Walter Benjamin (2008) expressed concern about the removal the object from its context, the lack of 'aura' present in the original works, and the effect this may have on the aesthetic experience of the viewer. Others (Brennan as quoted by Gordon, 2013) still have claimed that, 'too much free and easy exposure cheapens the impact' of museum collections. However, one simply cannot ignore that the virtual museum provides unique opportunities to engage with collections without the restrictions of geography, time, education or socio-economic standing which opens the doors to knowledge and discovery for a wider audience. Through virtual navigation, interactors engage with digital artifacts and reproductions of art through a variety of contextualisations and scenarios not available in most physical institutions. This allows them to create unique and diverse frameworks to view objects in; and new contexts leads to new functions for art and objects in the lives of interactors.

This has not gone unnoticed by institutions like the British Museum (2013) which hosts 27.3 million virtual visitors each year, and holds over 2 million online records which is 'the largest figure of any comparable museum or gallery'. Without the aid of a physical space, the museum has segmented its extensive online collection into fourteen unique themes in order to support contextualised interpretation. With selections such as trade, leaders and rulers, entertainment and money online visitors can uncover objects from the museum's collection within a thematic framework. This undoubtedly aids the casual browser much in the same way as the museum's gallery spaces, and the model for navigation is largely the same. When an individual piece is observed, the options to continue an interrelated journey through the collections are restricted to only a few navigation options such as related themes or additional historiographic information. Just like in the gallery space, the objects the interactor is guided to directly relate to a specific context generated by the institution. Though the pathways branching off from each selection are minimal, this is offset by the additional options for online tours, video supplements and the 5,000 object strong 'highlights' collection. Still, this platform is perhaps more appropriate for the rigid explorer seeking a more institutionally mediated experience as its dependence on search functionality in some ways limits the opportunities for discovery. Moreno (2007) argues that the true 'virtual museum':

> liberates the work of art from its academic or institutional context and its author and makes it accessible to the viewer, who in a certain sense re-creates and re-contextualizes it.

In order to support this more fluid vision for the virtual museum a new approach to the online platform is needed.

Relative Exploration and Artsy

One product born of this belief is Artsy: an online database of historical and contemporary art with the ambitious aim to 'make all the world's art accessible to anyone with an Internet connection' (Artsy, n.d. [a]). Artsy's 'Art Genome Project,' maps a selection of over 500 'genes', or characteristics ranging art historical, geographic, thematic and stylistic basis 'that connect the world's artists and artworks' in unique and changing ways:

> For instance, Artsy might connect Andy Warhol to Damien Hirst via the Pop Culture gene, or Ai Weiwei with Botticelli via the Metaphor/Allegory gene. These connections create endless opportunities for discovery and learning (Artsy, n.d. [a]).

Matthew Israel (2012), Director of the Art Genome Project, states that this act of 'mapping serendipity' – further emphasizing the role of spatialisation in the digital realm – 'provides an educational experience quite different from other art-historical resources'. Because of its distinctive search capabilities of genes assigned to its works of art from over 400 galleries and 100 museums, 'related search is an active, exploratory, and self-motivated experience that opens up seemingly infinite pathways' (Israel, 2012). With a range of themes, traits, artists and other related topics to explore the opportunities for uncovering new works of interest are notably high. On any one individual piece there are multiple similar works provided and on average close to a dozen suggested genes to explore.

For example, when one views the piece *The Great Wave* by Katsushika Hokusai interactors are immediately presented with thumbnails and base information for eighteen works which are deemed most similar and then nine additional search categories to consider. While the British Museum's (n.d.) online interface only offers the continued search options of 'Highlights from the Collection' and works from Japan when viewing this piece Artsy (n.d. [b]) offers the interactor Edo Art, Woodcut/Linocut, Waterscape, Flatness, Water, Colour Similarity, Mount Fuji, Pacific Ocean, Wave, and Ocean to investigate further – each with their own selection of works with uniquely curated related images and themes to navigate. This is what permits interactors these 'seemingly infinite' possibilities for exploring art in new and innovative ways. Aided by high-resolution images that typically must be requested if not purchased from many institutions, Artsy creates a space for both intimate exploration and broad understanding.

By providing choices to make about what pieces to view next, Artsy opens a dialogue between the interactor and the objects, and aids in creating a context that works for their particular goals for understanding. Israel (2012) states, 'Comparison--seeing similarities *and* differences--is arguably the essential tool of art education'. The Art Genome Project identifies the shared characteristics of works and artists and provides interactors with agency via interactivity as they make choices that generate unique results. As interactors explore works through the 'related art search' they create their own path to navigate from piece to piece. This provides the opportunities for comparison that Israel discusses in his description and recognises the exchange between the large and small details as being key to art education. This approach utilises easily manipulated context in order to keep the hermeneutic circle open and promotes the act of developing perceptions through experiential learning and technological mediation.

Conclusion

In this fast paced era of technology and information, the legitimacy of institutions and online learning resources is being frequently scrutinised. Unquestionably, both serve an important role in educating the public about art, objects and their histories. Through evaluating each platform through a lens of context-based learning, hermeneutic theory and phenomenology it has become increasingly clear that the similarities between meaning-making practices in both are, perhaps surprisingly, high. Conclusively, it can be stated that navigation and interacting with objects are at the core of the meaning-making experience in both platforms. Through mapping and spatialisation practices objects are given context and a thematic or educational framework to be viewed within. This contributes to a dialogic exchange between the object and the person, and enables the process of interpreting to take place.

In the case of the physical museum this is an institutionally mediated interpretation, with galleries designed to provide a specific thematic or historiographic context for the works. This is highly beneficial for visitors, particularly those identified as a browsing audience, as it aids the development of a relationship between the

object and viewer. This approach is restricted by the physical space and tangible objects making it challenging to fully exemplify the polysemic nature of objects but it provides an important and meaningful environment for interpretation to take place. In the virtual world of non-institution based platforms such as Artsy the interactor is afforded the ability to create their own contexts by exploring 'genes' that link works and artists in a variety of unique ways. Though for some the number of options may be overwhelming, the general result is the manifestation of new approaches to understanding and inquiry.

The multichannel presence of institutions today introduces new opportunities and challenges for object and image based study. As the world of art and artefact transcends physical collections into the cyber-world of the Internet, the conceptions of information gathering brought to the institution by visitors has also begun to alter. Many museums are working constantly to meet the needs of audiences who are growing accustomed to frequently updated, downloadable information that they can access night or day via smart phone, tablet, or computer while sitting at home in their pyjamas or enjoying a cappuccino at a local coffee shop. Although this may seem daunting, physical and virtual platforms alike can benefit from increased engagement with their audiences by ensuring that the reaches of their interpretative and educational outlets are appropriately inclusive. Further research into the commonalities between online and institutional displays can undoubtedly create grand opportunities to expand the discourses on object and image-based learning.

In the 'Age of Information', the cyber-world of online art databases and their brick-and-mortar counterparts are not enemies, but symbionts, working to promote the education of art, objects and their histories. Together, they create meaningful spaces for interpretation and understanding while providing visitors with the agency to form their own opinions and take up active roles in their education. Through both experiences cultural capital is gained and intellectual curiosity is promoted. By no longer observing the platforms in seclusion, researchers can better serve the diverse audiences interested in art, objects, their histories, and the ongoing dialogue about the future of cultural institutions in the 'Digital Age.'

References

Artsy. (n.d.) [a] *About | Artsy*. Accessed on 11.03.13: http://artsy.net/about

Artsy. (n.d.) [b] *Katsushika Hokusai The Great Wave or "Under the Wave, off Kangawa"*

Accessed on 01.04.14: https://artsy.net/artwork/katsushika-hokusai-the-great-wave-or-under-the-wave-off-kanagawa-kanagawa-oki-nami-ura

Benjamin, Walter (2008) *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. London: Penguin

British Museum "A Year of Success for the British Museum: Annual Review 2012/2013." (2013) *British Museum* Accessed on 01.04.14: http://britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/press_releases/2013/a_year_of_success.aspx

British Museum "Hokusai's The Great Wave". (n.d.) *British Museum*. Accessed on 03.05.14: http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/asia/k/hokusai,_the_great_wave.aspx

Buck, O. (2011) Beyond the Basics. *Journal for Interpretation Research*, 15 (1), pp. 45-49.

Gordon, Leslie A. (2013) 'It's Google, but Is It Art? Museums Wonder Whether They Should Open Their Galleries to Digitizing', *ABA Journal*. Accessed on 30.04.14: http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/its_google_but_is_it_art/

Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000) *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. London: Routledge

Idhe, D. and Verbeek, P. (2008) Cyborg intentionality: Rethinking the phenomenology of human-technology relations. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 7 (3), pp. 387--395

Interpretation at The Minneapolis Institute of Arts. (n.d.) [pdf] Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts. p. 6,11. Accessed on 03.13: Museum-Ed http://www.museum-ed.org/wp-content/.../mia_interpretation_museum-ed.pdf

Israel, M. (2012) Mapping Serendipity. Accessed on 28.06.13: http://theartgenomeproject.tumblr.com/post/27070014241/mapping-serendipity

Marković, S. (2012) Components of aesthetic experience: aesthetic fascination, aesthetic appraisal, and aesthetic emotion. *i-Perception*, 3 (1), p. 1.

Moreno, M. (2007) Art Museums and the Internet: The Emergence of the Virtual Museum. *Crossings: eJournal of Art and Technology*, 5 (1), Available at: http://crossings.tcd.ie/issues/5.1/Moreno/

Moser, S. (2010) The devil is in the detail: museum displays and the creation of knowledge. *Museum Anthropology,* 33 (1), pp. 22-32

Murray, J. (2012) *Inventing the Medium*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

Pearce, S. (1994) *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. 1st ed. London: Routledge

Tam, C. (2008) Understanding the Inarticulateness of Museum Visitors' Experience of Paintings: A Phenomenological Study of Adult Non-Art Specialists. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 8 (2), pp. 1-11

Tognazzini, Bruce. (2014) First Principles of Interaction Design (Revised & Expanded). Accessed on 01.05.14: http://asktog.com/atc/principles-of-interaction-design/

Wood, E. and Latham, K. (2009) Object Knowledge: Researching Objects in the Museum Experience. Reconstruction, 9 (1), Accessed on 06.13: http://reconstruction.eserver.org/091/wood&latham.shtml

Architectural Interventions and Symbolic Transformations: the case of Brazilian cultural complex

Juliana Prestes Ribeiro de Faria
PhD student, Post-Graduate program in Architecture, Technology, and Cities; Department of Civil Engineering, Architecture, and Urbanism; University of Campinas – São Paulo, Brazil
juliana.prestes.faria@hotmail.com

Regina A. Tirello
PhD Professor at the Department of Civil Engineering, Architecture, and Urbanism; University of Campinas – São Paulo, Brazil
rtirello@gmail.com

Abstract

In an attempt to tend to the aspirations of contemporary societies, museums have undergone both physical and symbolic transformations. However, it is necessary to question whether or not this level of change is impacting on the role of the institutions themselves, that of conserving and exhibiting the material testimonies of mankind for societal pleasure, given that the interiors of the historical monuments that host these institutions are not exhibited in conjunction with the art itself. The striking architecture from past centuries, conceived to be a symbol and to silently convey ideals and principles, has more recently become an empty casing without history or meaning. This is the case of the old buildings that once hosted the administrative departments of the state of Minas Gerais in the city of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, which have recently been transformed into a sizeable cultural complex.

Introduction

Both national and international cultural institutions have, in recent decades, undergone conceptual changes regarding the means through which they generate their material and non-material heritage, especially with regards to museums. In the material realm, the notion of internal space and the physical insertion of the museums in contemporary cities have taken on a dimension that goes beyond the materiality that once limited them, with an increasing tendency towards the search for an interconnection with other structures, aimed at producing cultural conglomerates. This is a phenomenon that was seen in nineteenth-century Europe, but which became more popular at the end of the twentieth century with worldwide dissemination. Today, added to this concept are a wide variety of media and technological resources that end up relegating historical architecture to the role of a mere functional support, despite its intrinsic eloquence.

In the words of Mila Niklolic (2012), museological institutions engage in multiple functions capable of satisfying the desires of a more discerning public, which the author translates into the concept of a "Museum Cluster". Following this concept, the museographic structures are integrated within their cities by the appropriation of pre-existing eminent buildings. The decision to utilise these buildings as museum spaces is not solely based on the selection of their locations or the buildings themselves, but rather based on using groups of buildings that are potentially capable of promoting a greater influence, with increased impact, on the city and its citizens. This gives greater magnitude to urban forms, which extend their domains to the city blocks, streets, squares, neighbourhoods, parks, mountains, and islands of museums due to the construction of new cultural and urban spaces.

In Brazil, this phenomenon can clearly be seen in the current form of *Praça de Liberdade* (Liberty Square), an area of immense symbolic, historic, and architectural value in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. This space once represented, in the people's minds, a locus of political memory, but has more recently been transformed from a single, solitary space into a multi-use cultural centre. The stated plan to place Minas Gerais within the international tourist route produced a bold project which stemmed from its need to 'recover and preserve its cultural heritage' (Iepha, 2003), and created a sizeable cultural complex, which offers twelve galleries for visitation, eight of which are already up and running.

This study will offer reflections on the characteristics of the spatial and symbolic appropriation of the grandiose historic buildings of Liberty Square in Belo Horizonte which, having been relieved of their original civic and administrative duties, were restored and adapted to host numerous museums and hands-on cultural activity centres, creating the *Liberty Square Cultural Circuit*.

This touristic superstructure has added great value to the historic architecture of the city, regardless of its original nature and functions, displacing the historical values that these tangible goods effectively prompt and express in the memory of Belo Horizonte, through its characteristic physical structure and urban implementation. Architecture, as defined by the Vitruvian principles of *utilitas*, *firmitas*, *venustas* (firmness, commodity, delight), appears to be no longer capable of attending to the many variables of communication that the current "memory managers" understand as adequate and practical enough to perpetuate the regional/national Brazilian culture.

Museum, Cluster and Museum Cluster

The museum and the museum cluster appear almost simultaneously, though the latter was not perceived as such by not having urbanistic representativeness or critical mass (Nikolic, 2012). The cluster, on the other hand, is based on Porter's (1998) recent theory, which defines it as the geographic concentrations of interconnected institutions in a particular sector. Thus, the postmodern city, globalisation and its economy will be the core of this spatial behaviour.

Choay (2011) states that this phenomenon will cause changes in the understanding of culture and identity and consequently in the organisation of territories. Spatially, globalisation is represented by a set of networks through which material and immaterial flows are transmitted, and gives a new identity to the various societies – globally to the planet (Choay, 2011).

In a globalised world, societies no longer own their cultural particularities, which are replaced by a unique identity. To belong to a global society, people need to know more about a society's entire material culture, resulting in an increase in the range of visitors and, even more, in the number of cultural attractions in cities. This justifies the formation of cultural clusters, mainly under the banner of the revitalisation of degraded historical areas and economic development. Evans (2005) argues that culture-led regeneration is the feature of old and new cities, as they seek to revive and transform themselves into cities of culture.

Mommaas (2004) evaluated strategies of cultural clustering in the Netherlands and found that these are based on the ideologies of 'enterprise culture'. Frantz (2005), on the other hand, analysing the formation process in Vienna revealed:

> Under the pressures of increased economic competitiveness, political decision-makers are looking to cultural flagship architecture to combine competing images of economic regeneration and socio-cultural cohesion within a shared urban symbol of civic pride.

Irina van Aalst (2002), Ines Boogaarts (2002), Hans Mommaas (2004), Mariangela Lavanga (2005) and Allen J. Scott (2010) have all undertaken research that focuses on cultural clustering of distinguished global complexes. However, in the words of Forgan (2005):

> We should be alert to the fact that while in the nineteenth century only capital cities or major provincial towns established prestigious museum building, this is happening today in a host of other places. In part this is driven by competition and by urban regeneration schemes, both in the United States and in Europe, although it should be noted that using museum as agents of urban development is nothing new, and sensitivity to the politics of urban growth may be suggestive of rather different civic attitudes to the value of museums.

Therefore, it is clear that the tendency is to form cultural clusters, but it is important to understand that, whilst each case will have its intrinsic specificity constitution, they will have similarities in relation to their social, political and economic objectives, and, in the last case, on the aspects of cultural development.

The Beginning of the Phenomenon in Europe

The nineteenth century is considered by some to be the golden era of museums (Alexander, 2008). Inspired by growing nationalism, European capital cities brought an important element into their urban centres, the

museum. Bazin (1967) states that French Revolution promoted museums, considering that these institutions had an educational calling to instruct the nation and to educate its citizens through the dissemination of knowledge concerning its country's history (Alexander, 2008). In other words, this historical fact marks the point at which museums become official institutions in the public interest.

Royal collections and those that belonged to noble families and religious institutions are grouped into palaces to gradually transform the latest into public museums, as in the case of Hermitage Museum, opened in 1764, and the Louvre in 1793 (Bazin, 1967). The former is one of the largest art and culture galleries in the world, and has extensive collections of diverse range of peoples and cultures in a collection of historic buildings from the former Russian capital of St. Petersburg. Its origin go back more than two and a half centuries when Empress Catherine II (also known as Catherine the Great), an art lover, began compiling the Museum's current art collection with the acquisition of hundreds of Flemish and German paintings (Piotrovsky, 2003).

Currently, the Hermitage Museum includes a group of five buildings that are located between the Neva River and Palace Square. These were originally built for non-museum uses, with the exception of the New Hermitage building, which was erected in the nineteenth century specifically to host the imperial art collections (Soldatenko, 2003). Nevertheless, the conduct of this institution was consistently respectful and conservative as regards the art exhibition gallery, given that it was always viewed as not interfering with the collections hosted in this space but, rather, complementing them. It is clear that the concern over the integrity of the interior architecture, as well as of the traditional uses of the building, is hindered by the lack of environmental conditions that are appropriate for the storage and exhibition of the works of art (Lukin, 2003).

After the opening of palatial complexes, the construction of representative new buildings begins, as seen at the Hohenzollerns Museum in Berlin and the Deutsches Museum in Munich. These were founded between the first half of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the next century and are the first group of planned museums (Nikolic, 2012). Hohenzollerns, which is German for 'Museum Island', is set on a peninsula moulded by the meeting of the Spree and Kupfergraben rivers in Berlin. It is a complex consisting of five institutions, the Altes Museum (1830), the Neues Museum (1855), the AlteNationalgalerie (1876), the Bode Museum (1904), and the Pergamon Museum (1930). The first building was planned by the architect Karl F. Schinkel to host an extensive art collection donated by an art lover. However, a few years later, Friedrich August Stüler, under the King's orders, realised a plan for the commercial development of this region, which would become a 'sanctuary for the arts and sciences' (Alexander, 2008).

The first element of the construction was the Neues Museum. The next step did not take place until 1866, with the commissioning of the AlteNationalgalerie (or the Old National Gallery, finished in 1876). Another two decades passed before the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (today known as the Bode Museum or the Old Museum) would be buitlt. However, the architectural project planned by Stüler would only be concluded in 1930 with the construction of the Pergamon Museum.

These two previous examples, Hohenzollerns and the Hermitage Museum, originated in the beginning of the clustering process, were used to symbolically highlight the traditional centres of power. However, whilst the Hohenzollerns was designed for museum purposes, the Hermitage Museum had its origins in a main building but grew inordinately around a square, attaching buildings to the existing structure, rather than adding new buildings. Both have gone through periods of extensive destruction, loss of their art collections, social and political neglect and lack of resources but, despite this, have adopted an attitude of respect towards the historic building that houses art.

Europeans Effects on the American Continent

The first boom of museums took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. This occurred simultaneously with the industrial revolution, the urban growth and the consequent development of major urbanistic projects, which, together with the taking place of international exhibitions, created a propitious environment for the emergence of new clusters in Europe (South Kensington, London, Museumplein, Amsterdam) and other continents (Nikolic, 2012).

The effects of the European phenomenon also occurred in the United States, and were the basis for the development of the Washington Mall (Smithsonian Castle 1855), Museum Mile with the ordering of Central Park in 1870, and the Grant Park (Plan of Chicago 1909). The latter manifests the ideas of the cultural planning that became known as City Beautiful. However, this continued due to the Great Depression of the 1930s, which

coincided with the plans for Washington, the centre of which is the national mall. The centre of power of the most politically powerful country is surrounded by major national museums, as an expression of absolute prestige (Nikolic, 2012).

In New York, the Museum Mile, on the other hand, despite being founded in the same period (with the construction of Central Park and the emergence of the first public cultural institutions, the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Natural History and Central Park Zoo), currently communicates richness, luxury and art as it progresses along Fifth Avenue in Manhattan and among numerous historic mansions and imposing modern buildings. In the later part of the 19th and early 20th centuries the MoMA, the Guggenheim museum, Whitney, Frick and Neue Galleries, and the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, were founded and, together with those cited above, created a common cultural program, forming this cluster (Nikolic, 2012).

The first half of the twentieth century is marked by world wars and a major economic crisis; however, despite these chaotic world events, new museums clusters around the world can be identified from this time. In South America, the phenomenon arose in the 1940s, and was associated with the manifestos of modern Brazilian architecture. Designed by Oscar Niemeyer, the Pampulha Architectural Complex in Belo Horizonte can be considered the first group of buildings aimed at a collective and social purpose (Nikolic, 2012). The work includes five buildings: a casino (Museu de Arte da Pampulha), an elite club, a dance hall (Centro de Referência da Arquitetura, Urbanismo e Design), a church, and a hotel, around an artificial lake. Over time, this complex did not manage to achieve the necessary density to become a cluster of museums but became a space for culture and entertainment (Castriota, 1998).

Another urban project that enabled the development of a museum cluster in Brazil was the Cultural Corridor of Rio de Janeiro. In the 1980s a project in Rio with preservationist character began to conserve the remnants of urban complexes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which had passed through successive modernist interventions, caused largely by the verticalisation process as well as by increased automobile traffic (Pinheiro & Del Rio, 1993). A group of planners proposed the creation of a project that reconciled historic preservation, cultural development and economic sustainability through the implementation of design guidelines for new construction as well as restoration of old buildings and revitalisation of public spaces congruent to the central area of Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, the plazas, sidewalks and streets received new paving, street furniture and street lighting appropriate to the historic architecture (Del Rio, 1991).

Thus, in the 1990s there were already cultural centres at regenerated buildings and the presentation of new cultural practices in public open spaces, all being restored and managed by federal, state and local agencies (Del Rio, 1991). Some cultural spaces have been the result of private partnerships, like Bank of Brazil Cultural Centre, Brazil France House, the cultural space of the post office, the Imperial Palace, and the Naval Oceanographic Museum, The Municipal Theatre, The National Library, The National Museum of Fine Arts, the recent Justice Cultural Centre, as well as, the traditional and elegant renovated Odeon and Pathé cinemas, along with the Tiradentes Square emerge the Art Center Hélio Oiticica (Pinheiro & Del Rio, 1993).

In recent decades, Brazil has produced cultural complexes that aimed to promote the recovery of abandoned industrial areas, such as the Sea Dragon Centre for Art and Culture in the city of Fortaleza. This space underwent a series of transformations after port activities that were once carried out in this area had been transferred. The government of the state of Ceará drafted a project aimed at democratizing access to culture, providing spaces for cultural exhibitions by the local population, and catalysing the development and renewal of the area, with the set-up of new uses within its immediate surroundings. This cluster has manifested as a contemporary and monumental-scale architectural building, distributed over a massive square created by the demolition of nineteenth-century townhouses that once occupied this space (Gondim, 2007).

The Complex of Liberty Square

The architectural and landscape complex of Liberty Square consists of gardens, boulevards, lakes, fountains, sculptures, busts and monuments, in addition to a metal frame gazebo. The construction of Liberty Square began together with that of the new capital (Belo Horizonte) and was inaugurated together with the city. Hosting the main government offices of the state of Minas Gerais, this square creates the juncture between four major avenues. The avenue that leads the entrance gates of Liberty Square is lined with imperial palm trees (Castriota, 1998).

At the beginning of last century, when the square still retained its original layout, its use was limited to the coming and going of the government workers employed in the state department offices, as well as the couples who did tours on the weekends. In the 1920's, Liberty Square underwent changes, inspired by French architecture, to receive the King and Queen of Belgium, which produced the square's present-day format (Castro, 2006). In the 1950's and 1960's, verticality and modernism brought the Niemeyer Building, the Public Library, and the Mape Building. During the military regimes, the square served as the gathering ground for civil protests, a use which was repeated many times throughout the history of Minas Gerais. This space was also used for fairs of different kinds – arts and crafts, antiquities, typical regional food, and even flowers and plants (Castriota, 1998).

Throughout history, the meaning attributed by the general public to Liberty Square gradually began to change. From the political centre, and the space to fight for democracy and liberty, this square was gradually transformed into a social space, used for the social life and leisure of the local population. Nevertheless, the value attributed by society to this public space and its current consolidation is currently passing through another wave of changes (Lopes, 2006).

These changes are referent to emergence of the Liberty Square Cultural Circuit in an area of great symbolic, historic, and architectural value for Belo Horizonte. Its institutional presentation reveals that this is the largest cultural complex in Brazil and the only one of its kind in the world to be the product of public-private partnerships. The objective of this initiative is to expand the public's access to the old government buildings of the state of Minas Gerais, which were vacated due to their transference to the new State Government Offices in the Administrative Centre located in the Serra Verde district of Belo Horizonte (De Oliveira, 2007).

The intention was also to promote the recovery and maintenance of the historical heritage of Minas Gerais through the execution of firm partnerships, given that it is the role of private companies to invest in, and administrate these cultural spaces (De Oliveira, 2007). The projected plan also has the intention of placing Minas Gerais on the international tourist route, through the events of the Confederations Cup and the upcoming World Cup in 2014, both of which will host soccer games played in the *Mineirão* stadium in Belo Horizonte.

Tourism as an alternative to increase economic development generates a demand for major cultural projects in areas that concentrate historical monuments (Van Aalst & Boogaarts, 2002). Therefore, investments originated from private companies looking for visibility for their brands are captured and justified as the only alternative to promote the restoration of extensive heritages, degraded by the lack of public funds. The eminent risk of destruction and the inevitable frustration of local societies in their daily activities that end up being excluded are not even considered. The Cultural Circuit turns out to be just another product of the cultural industry as noted by Frantz (2005) at the case of Museumsquartier Vienna.

From 2010, the year in which the Cultural Circuit was inaugurated, to date, eight galleries have already been opened with another five in the implementation process. The first to open its doors to visitors was the Tim UFMG Gallery of Knowledge, which occupies the old main building of the Dean's Office of the State University of Minas Gerais, constructed in 1961 in a modernist style. The adaptations completed to implement this cultural venue include the envelopment of its façades, with the façade's front wall structured in a large projection panel that exhibits interactive contents. The displays are distributed throughout the five floors of the building and present the main discoveries of humankind, using museological scenarios, planetariums, observatories, and 180° cinema (Iepha, 2012).

The universe of metals, minerals and their components are exhibited in the EBX Mines and Metals Museum, which was installed in the old building of the State Department of Education. This building, which has an eclectic style with a predominance of French neoclassical elements, underwent remodelling aimed at improving accessibility, such as the installation of an outside lift and the construction of a steel staircase, which provides access to all floors. Paulo Mendes da Rocha created the architectural project, while the museography was created by Marcello Dantas, the latter making use of virtual environments to document the history of mining and steel working in Minas Gerais.

The main actors involved in the development of cultural complexes are: curators, stakeholders, architects and politicians. These actors, each with their own personal interests, have particular characteristics, especially the architects, mainly those who have a specialism in designing museum space. These specialised architects are described by Evans (2003) as "Star Architects" and known as the one whose signature brand is sought globally.

This worldwide trend extends to national and regional designers such as Oscar Niemeyer who, in the 1990s, designed an art gallery in Niteroi that simulates a flying saucer with curved walls and no clear divide between floor and walls – 'a curator's nightmare' (Evans, 2003, p. 429). Also included in this group should be the architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha, who is responsible for a wealth of projects relating to cultural institutions in historical buildings, which are known for their interventionist style, as noted in their proposal to the EBX Mines and Metals Museum.

José de Magalhães, an architect from the Belo Horizonte´s Construction Commission, was responsible for drafting the blueprints for the state's Department of Education and Treasury Department. Throughout its history, the latter building, which today hosts the Minas Gerais – Vale do Rio Doce Memorial, has undergone a series of modifications and additions that were removed in the most recent restoration which recovered the original features of the building (Figure 1). However, contemporary elements were incorporated, such as the suspended garden, which is located in the empty central portion of the building, and a panoramic elevator and metallic walkways, which connect the two sides of the building. Distributed throughout the three floors of the museum are the thirty-one exhibition rooms, which have the museographic theme of the history of Minas Gerais and its traditions in art and music (De Oliveira, 2007).

Figure 1 Minas Gerais - Vale do Rio Doce Memorial © Iepha

As it is an 'experience museum', its environments have been adapted to offer interactive experiences, which attempt to provide the visitor with the chance to live the experience presented in each exhibit, which is markedly different from the way in which traditional museums exhibit their collections (Iepha, 2006). The large concentration of museums of experience in this cultural complex can be understood as a result of what Choay (2011) considers an electro-telematics revolution. This is caused by the emergence of electronics instruments and telecommunication networks added together to a set of activities and contemporary social behaviours. Societies have been increasing their contact with virtual worlds, and reducing the duration and use of real living

memories in favour of the immediacy of virtual experiences, and this change can be also noticed in museological practices, as suggested by Jeudy (2005).

The largest and most well-equipped building within the Circuit is the Banco do Brasil Cultural Centre, a six-floor building in the old state Department of Social Defence. With branches in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasilia, the institution will fill these spaces with wide-ranging exhibitions and other projects, to be defined by public announcements. The restoration work began in 2009 and is still ongoing, mostly due to its complexity and to the extent of the architectural planning, which in sum contains a theatre with capacity for over two hundred people, one thousand two hundred square meters of exhibition area, a cafeteria, multimedia rooms, and an ample administrative area.

It is obvious that the completion of this complex demanded demolitions of parts of the building, such as concrete slabs, pillars, and beams so that the metallic structure of the theatre box seats and its Italian-style stage could be constructed. The same occurred with the execution of the exhibition room, which contains more than one thousand square meters, and of all the bathrooms within the building, which were adapted to the new number of users. The internal patio, which used to be open to allow sunlight to enter the building's rooms, now has a retractable cover made of glass and metal (Iepha, 2012).

This 1930's building, in neoclassical style, was built to host the Department of Public Safety and Assistance. Therefore, other public services have occupied this space throughout its existence; nevertheless the main characteristics were maintained, including its façade as well as its interior design in coloured mortar, its concrete structure, marble floors, and the presence of stained glass in the staircase hall.

In addition to the cultural equipment presented here, other institutions were also incorporated, which are located close to Liberty Square and carry out similar functions. These include the Luiz de Bessa State Public Library, planned by Oscar Niemeyer in 1954, and the Minas Public Museum, with its sacred art collection and art works from dozens of collections from institutions and private donors. Next to this museum is the Public Archive of Minas Gerais, the oldest of the institutions in Minas Gerais, conceived to store, conserve and make available documents from the colonial, imperial and republican periods of the state. Both buildings were constructed in an eclectic style, given that the museum is hosted in this building, which had originally served as the Treasury Secretary's residence since 1897. To make the connection between the two spaces, the Cultural Circuit proposed the construction of a café, which is being developed beneath a large lawn, in an attempt to promote internal circulation (Iepha, 2003).

Undoubtedly, the highlight of the Cultural Circuit is the Governor's Palace (Figure 2). Constructed in 1897 in an eclectic-style as the residence of the governors of Minas Gerais, this building brings together the sophistication of the Frederico Steckel paintings on the ceilings, walls, and cornices, with the nobility of the furniture, rugs, crystals, porcelain, and silverware, mostly from France (Castro, 2006). The structure of the roof and the iron staircase were imported from Belgium, the roof tiles from Marseille, and the pine wood floors from Latvia, which demanded contracting a workforce who were specialists in this type of construction (Iepha, 2003).

However, throughout its more than 100 years of existence, the Governor's Palace has undergone a series of adaptations and changes in an attempt to satisfy the taste and needs of the governors and their respective first ladies. Thus, in the 1980's, the building was forced to undergo extensive restoration, as its structure demanded solidification, with a number of interventions occurring later.

In recent years, the building has been restricted to the administrative functions of the state government and has only been used to receive official receptions. However, the walls tell numerous stories, which is one of the main attractions of the palace. Former Governor Olegário Maciel suffered a massive heart attack while bathing in a bathtub and died. Tancredo Neves gave his acceptance speech on the palace's balcony after having won the first direct election to the state governor's seat. These stories are told by the guides who accompany visitors through the rooms and bedrooms of the Governor's Palace; however, this will be altered later this year, as the Cultural Circuit has determined that this is a museographic space and, for this reason, changes are necessary. In addition to the collection that is already in exhibition, picture frames and interactive mirrors that tell the story of personalities from Minas Gerais and that generate representations in real size that can be seen using 3D glasses will be incorporated into the museum. Informational and technological resources will be installed to satisfy the ideals of the project, which is intended to attract a younger public and better serve the tourist in general (Iepha, 2012).

Figure 2 - Governor's Palace. © Iepha.

Another gallery that has already been inaugurated is the Popular Art Centre, which occupies the old Sao Tarcísio hospital. The adaptation and restoration works began with the demolition of all of the structures that had not been contemplated in the original layout drafted by Luiz Signorelli. After having freed up the space around the house, two underground floors were excavated and an annex was constructed, consisting of a 3-storey building that connects to the existing building by means of a structure containing staircases and an elevator. It was also necessary to demolish the entire inner structure of the building so that this could be adapted to the needs of the exhibition areas and to store the art collection. This building offers rooms for workshops, auditoriums, and a shop that sells pieces of art from the Jequitinhonha Valley and Minas Gerais in general (Iepha, 2010).

The addition of this building to the cultural circuit is intriguing, considering its historical and aesthetic insignificance to the heritage of Minas Gerais. It is noteworthy that the old hospital is not even listed as heritage by the state or municipality. This is understood as a holdover of the Noah's ark, which tends to house in the patrimonial ark all types of construction (Choay, 2001). Still in relation to this building and with almost the others from the complex, the presence of a cafe and a shop that sell souvenirs are of note. It is the cultural mercantilisation to make consumers that can buy flowers in the boutique of Bagatelle's garden in Paris or watercolour paper in National Library, in other words, the image of the monument is associated with the sale of consumer products and as an advertising medium.

In addition to these eight cultural galleries, which are to be opened in 2014, four other cultural galleries are in the process of being implemented. Buildings chosen to house other cultural institutions are: *Rainha da Sucata*; *Palácio dos Despachos*, which is located beside the Governor's Palace; Dantas Mini-Palace and the Norbona Solarium; Old Department of Transport and Public Works and the main building of the Social Security Institute of the Public Workers of the State of Minas Gerais.

The Automobile Museum is also the fruit of the partnership between the state of Minas Gerais and Fiat, which will host a permanent collection of 150 rare automobiles from the Veteran Car Club of Brazil. This gallery demands that this type of exhibition contains high-scale dimensions and, for this reason, will be installed in the old parking lot once used by the vehicles of the Governor's Military Liaisons, located behind the Governor's Palace.

Modernisation or Transformation?

Since the implementation of the Cultural Circuit, the historic buildings that make up Liberty Square have been undergoing a transformation process. Externally, there are cases of the old Dean's Office of the State University of Minas Gerais, which had its entire façade covered so as to create the Tim UFMG Gallery of Knowledge; of the State Department of Education building, in which a lift was installed outside of the body of the main building and

a steel staircase was constructed to serve the Mines and Metals Museum; and finally the Popular Art Centre, which changed its frontage by introducing an annex building.

It can be argued that the most impactful of these interventions were the changes made to the old Dean's Office, as they permanently modified the perspective of the Liberty Square architectural complex. On the other hand, the insertion of new elements to the façades of the buildings also caused harmful effects to the old complex, altering their architectural volumetry and generating an inevitable loss of the intrinsic grandeur of these buildings.

The inner space of these nineteenth and twentieth century monuments and the composition of their decorative elements have defined representative historic environments, which reinforce the unity of the complex in each architectural example. In this manner, any change that should challenge this ensemble may well create a split in perception, which is the case of the Minas Gerais Memorial. This building was once characterised by its abundance of decorative linings, polychrome walls, and ornaments. However, as it was planned to be a 'experience museum', the environments also underwent a metamorphosis, transforming into show rooms of a wide range of spectacular scenarios. The materialisation of this museum was executed by covering the existing walls with dry-wall and, consequently, reducing the visibility of the linings, which provoked obstructions in the aesthetic reading and hindered the historic comprehension of the gallery.

The building that once hosted the State Department of Social Defence underwent a different type of change, justified by the typology of the building itself. The demolitions of a large portion of the building's structure to install the Bank of Brazil Cultural Centre caused the loss of the original spatiality. For many, this damage is recklessly disregarded, as it does not deal with elements of artistic importance. However, this building loses its order, harmony, and technical reference, which demonstrated the time period's innovative use of large reinforced concrete spans. This same structural condition offered the possibility to create the current ideal for exhibition galleries, the white cube, a modern temple that separates the work of art from society so as to allow for the possibility of an aesthetic perception of the artistic work.

The case study presented in this paper sought to demonstrate the fine line that exists between conservative and destructive interventions, which take place because of the need to change these museological institutions in an attempt to cater to the current societal demands. These institutions are required to undergo a constant modernisation processes, making them current and adapted to new requirements, which is different from transformation, which implies a radical change from one state to another (Evans, 2005). It is believed that this extensive and expressive architectural landmark, as well as the works of art exhibited within them, can and must coexist, and the more intrinsic this symbiosis is, the more holistic this sensorial experience will be for the visitor (Forgan, 2005).

The cultural complexes can be viewed as novel icons in the majority of big cities worldwide, Brazil containing a few of these examples. The Liberty Square Cultural Circuit in Belo Horizonte falls within this select group mainly due to the creation of a new centrality which is connected to the existing historic and cultural heritage, as well as the use of a symbolic dimension to form itself. The exploration of this symbol is based on the perceptions of these buildings, which have been intensely modified by interventions over time.

Acknowledgements

References

Alexander, Edward P. & Alexander, Mary. 2008. *Museums in Motion: An introduction to the history and functions of museums*. Plymouth: Altamira.

Bazin, G. 1967. *The Museum Age*. Brussels: Desoer.

Choay, Françoise. 2001. *A alegoria do patrimônio cultural*. São Paulo: Estação Liberdade: Editora UNESP.

_____ 2011. *O patrimônio em questão: antologia para um combate*. Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço.

Del Rio, Vicente. 1991. *Desenho urbano e revitalização na área portuária do Rio de Janeiro: a contribuição do estudo da percepção ambiental*. Tese de doutorado. FAU-USP. São Paulo.

Evans, G. 2003. 'Hard-branding the Cultural City: From Prado to Prada'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 27(2). 417-40.

Evans, G. 2005. 'Measure for Measure: Evaluating the Evidence of Culture´s Contribution to Regeneration'. *Urban Studies*. 42. May 2005. 1-25.

Van Aalst, I. & Boogaarts, I. 2002. 'From museum to mass entertainment: The evolution of the role of museums in cities'. *European Urban and Regional Studies*. 9(3). 195-209.

Gondim, Linda Maria. 2007. *O Dragão do Mar e a Fortaleza Pós-Moderna: cultura, patrimônio e imagem da cidade*. São Paulo: Annablume.

Forgan, Sophie. 2005. 'Building the Museum: Knowledge, Conflict, and Power of Place'. *Isis*. 96(4). December 2005. 572-585.

Frantz, Monika. 2005. 'From Cultural Regeneration to Discursive Governance: Constructing the Flagship of the 'Museumsquartier Vienna' as a Plural Symbol of Change'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 29(1). March 2005. 50–66.

Jeudy, H. P. 2005. *Espelho das cidades*. Rio de Janeiro: Casa da Palavra.

Lavanga, Mariangela. 2005. 'Cultural Clusters and Sustainable Urban Development'. Proceedings of the International Conference for Integrating Urban Knowledge & Practice. May 29 – June 3.

Lukin, Valerii. 2003. 'Transforming Historic Architecture into Viable Museums: The Conservation Perspective'. *Museum International*. Paris: UNESCO. 217(55).

Mommaas, H. 2004. 'Cultural Clusters and the Post-industrial City: Towards the Remapping of Urban Cultural Policy'. *Urban Studies*. March 2004. 41(3). 507-532.

Piotrovsky, Mikhail. 2003. 'The Hermitage in the context of the city'. *Museum International*. Paris: UNESCO. 217(55).

Pinheiro, Augusto Ivan. & Del Rio, Vicente. 1993. 'Cultural Corridor: A preservation district in downtown Rio de Janeiro, Brazil'. *TDSR*. IV(11). 51-64.

Porter, Michael. E. 1998. 'Clusters and the new economics of competition'. *Harvard Business Review*. 76(6) November - December. 77-90.

Nikolic, Mila. 2012. 'Culture and Ideology in the city structure. From cultural Acropolis to City of Knowledge'. Proceedings of the International Conference Architecture and Ideology, September 28th-29th, 2012, Belgrade: Faculty of Architecture University of Belgrade. 772-781.

Nikolic, Mila. 2012. 'City of museums: Museum Cluster as a manifesto of the paradigm shift'. Proceedings of the 6th conference of the international Forum on Urbanismo TOURbanISM-toURBANISM, January 25th-27th, Barcelona: Escola Tecnica Superior d´Arquitectura de Barcelona – UPC, IFOU. 1-10.

Iepha-MG/Instituto Estadual do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico de Minas Gerais. 2006. *Parecer Técnico sobre o Projeto Executivo de Restauração do edifício da Secretaria de Estado da Fazenda/Praça da Liberdade*. Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais 7th. August.

Iepha-MG/Instituto Estadual do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico de Minas Gerais. 2010. *Parecer Técnico sobre o Projeto Executivo de Restauração do Antigo Hospital São Tarciso*. Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. November.

Iepha-MG/Instituto Estadual do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico de Minas Gerais. 2003. *Parecer Técnico – Criação do novo Centro Administrativo Estadual de Belo Horizonte e alteração de uso dos prédios públicos da Praça da Liberdade transformando-a em Centro Cultural*. Instituto dos Arquitetos do Brasil-Departamento de Minas Gerais - IAB-MG. Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, October.

Iepha-MG/Instituto Estadual do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico de Minas Gerais. 2003. *Projeto Corredor Cultural Praça da Liberdade*. Comissão Especial. Belo Horizonte/MG. Diretoria de Conservação e Restauração, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, August.

Iepha-MG/Instituto Estadual do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico de Minas Gerais. 2012. *Parecer Técnico sobre os novos projetos que integrarão o Circuito Cultural Praça da Liberdade*. Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, January.

Scott, A. J. 2010. 'Cultural economy and the creative field of the city'. *Geografiska Annaler*: Series B, Human Geography 92(2). 115-130.

Soldatenko, Anatoly. 2003. 'Hermitage merchandising and international marketing'*. Museum International*. Paris: UNESCO. 217(55(1)).

De Oliveira, Benedito Tadeu. 2007. 'Patrimônio e desenvolvimento em Belo Horizonte. Palácios da Praça da Liberdade em risco'. *Arquitextos*, São Paulo, ano 07. 80(7). Portal Vitrivius <http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/arquitextos/07.080/282>. [Accessed 15th May 2014]

Castro, Maria Angela Reis. 2006. *Guia de Bens Tombados de Belo Horizonte*. Belo Horizonte: Prefeitura Municipal de Belo Horizonte.

Lopes, Miryam Bahia. 2006. 'Liberdade, testemunho e valor. A Praça da Liberdade em Belo Horizonte'. *Minha Cidade* 173. São Paulo: Portal Vitruvius. <www.vitruvius.com.br/minhacidade/mc173/mc173.asp>. [Accessed 15th May 2014]