



Universität der Künste Berlin
Institut für Kunst im Kontext

Landesmuseum Joanneum
Museumsakademie

Reflecting by Doing

Conceiving and creating an exhibition on the history and the collections of The Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo

A workshop arranged by
Museumsakademie Joanneum, Graz, and
Institute for Art in Context, University of the Arts, Berlin, Germany

March 27-30, 2008
at the Goethe-Institute and the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo

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Concept

Instead of discussing theoretical issues, this workshop aims at learning and reflecting by doing: goal of the workshop is to set up a small however substantial exhibition on the collections of the Historical Museum of B & H within two days. In order to achieve this goal, 30 objects will be chosen from the different collections of the Museum; these objects have to match two conditions: to portrait a specific aspect of the museum's holdings and, by this, of the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, furthermore, to associate with one specific letter of the Bosnian alphabet. The result will be the core of an 'encyclopedia' on the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina as far it is represented by the collections of the Historical Museum - an exhibition that can be extended as well as refined in the future.

The Historical Museum of Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina was founded in 1945 as the Museum of National Liberation, in 1949 re-named Museum of National Revolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in 1993 given its current name and mission by law. Housed in an interesting modernist building, erected 1963 especially for its purposes, the museum holds vast collections on the Medieval, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and pre-World War II periods.

The workshop is open for curators only and will be conducted by Prof. Dr. Michael Fehr, Berlin, and Dr. Bettina Habsburg-Lothringen, Graz, supported by Asja Mandic, Sarajevo.

in collaboration with
Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo
Zmaja od Bosne 5, 71 000 Sarajevo
<http://historijski.muzej.ba/>

supported by
Goethe-Institut Bosnien und Herzegowina
Department for Art History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo



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Program

Thursday, 27.03.2008

5 - 8 pm **Introduction & Welcome**

Michael Fehr & Bettina Habsburg-Lothringen: How to set up an exhibition on a museum in two days

Muhiba Kaljanac, Director, Historical Museum of B & H: Introduction into the History and Collections of the Historical Museum of Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Goethe-Institut
Bosnien und Herzegowina
Bentbaša 1a
71000 Sarajevo
www.goethe.de/ins/ba/sar/deindex.htm

8 pm **Dinner**

Friday, 28.03.2008

9 am - 6 pm **Mining the Historical Museum of Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Making decisions about what to exhibit. Research on the background of respective objects. Preparing for the exhibition. Setting up a webpage.

Saturday, 29.03.2008

9 am - 6 pm **Setting up the exhibition including its documentation**

8 pm **Opening of the exhibition for the public**

Sunday, 30.03.2008

10-12 am **Meeting of the participants with the museum-staff in the exhibition**

Reflecting on what has (not) been achieved. Planning on future collaboration.

Michael Fehr: Rising from the Rubble

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Talking about rubble, talking about "Rising from the Rubble" for Germans like me is somehow very familiar but causes ambivalent feelings and thoughts as well. It is familiar, since having been born some years after the Second World War, "Rising from the Rubble" was the experience marking my life. And at least as long as I was a child this was not a bad experience, since the ruins of destroyed buildings served as excellent and most exciting playgrounds, though, as you can imagine, we were forbidden to go into them. But "Rising from the Rubble" at that time also meant that, for example, my parents - my father being an impoverished German refugee from Czechoslovakia, and my mother, in spite of her Jewish background, having survived the Third Reich by luck - wanted to start a new life, and, as a symbol for this, were proud finding an apartment in a new house, one of these fast-and-simple constructions built right after the war, practical but extremely ugly. A house which today is a ruin of this "Rising from the Rubble", whereas many of the ruins caused by the war, having been reconstructed within the last decades, nowadays function as dwellings many people are eager to live in. More, "Rising from the Rubble" at least in my ears has the sound of what, in the early Fifties, in Germany was called "Wiederaufbau", literally translated, "Re-Building", a program which started as a general reconstruction of the damages resulting from the war, but in fact turned out to be a gigantic destruction-movement of the historical substance of our country - comprising much more changes and losses than the war had ever caused. Finally, "Rising from the Rubble" is connected with the recent development within the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, especially Eastern Germany, the former German Democratic Republic. Here "Rising from the Rubble" is understood by many people as a rollback, a 40 years jump back in time, an attempt to deny or at least ignore what happened within the last four decades, trying to start a new life at a historical date, in 1949. And what is getting clear now is that the economic disaster in Eastern Germany meets a Western Germany within which many people do feel comfortable in believing to have been on the right side, and do not notice that they produced a society which has lost flexibility, the capability to change it self, and the courage for innovations, and thus, I fear, will fall to ruins as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen, even if you expect me now to come down to a more metaphoric interpretation of rubble, and to the role of art, I would like to take this unusual chance to speak a little more about rubble, and try to develop some criteria for the role of art in Western societies by putting up the question how rubble is understood and handled.

First, I would like to mention that in German there are two words for what you name rubble, two words which draw a distinction between its different forms. One, in German: "Schutt", defines rubble as more or less unusable material resulting from a destruction-process, natural as well as man-made, that is a grain-like substance having the characteristic of material which can be poured. (Maybe this understanding meets what you associate with the word rubble.) The other one, in German: "Trümmer", defines a sort of rubble consisting of more or less big chunks resulting from the destruction of anything created by men, chunks which allow the reconstruction of what was destroyed at least in a virtual sense, rubble which is the material that the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was probably thinking of when he described the function of what he called "plastische Kraft", that is the "sculptural power", meaning the human capability "to grow out of itself in a peculiar way, to redefine what is past and strange and to incorporate it; to heal wounds, to replace what is lost, and to reshape forms which have been smashed."

Second, I would like to remind you of the "Rubbish Theory", published by the British author Michael Thompson in 1979 (Oxford). In his theory, Thompson develops some distinctions and thoughts which, I believe, are most valuable for our discussion, and this is why I want to recall some of its essentials. Thompson points out, that everything we deal with can be divided into three categories: the Transient, the Durable and Rubbish. Things which belong to the category Transient are things with an estimated lifetime within which they continuously lose value down to the point where it hits zero. Actually everything we deal with once belongs to this category when it enters the market and is sold or bought. I believe, you know what I am talking about, if not, just look at your car. Things which belong to the category Durable, however, have an unlimited lifetime within which they gain value. Things kept in museums are durable in this sense for sure, but anything of value which is out of the market usually belongs to it as well. Now, the interesting point of Thompson's Rubbish Theory is to explain that these two categories, at least within Western societies, are open categories, meaning that each community sets

its own convention on what is seen as transient or durable, so that each member of this community can define and recognize which category a given object is relating to. All other items, that is all items which can not be related to one of these two categories, Thompson calls Rubbish. That is, Rubbish is defined as things which have no social definition at all. Based on a lot of examples from different social fields, Thompson from this derives his "law": That things can change from the Transient to the Rubbish category and from the Rubbish category to the Durable, but that there is no way from the Transient to the Durable other than the one leading through the Rubbish.

Taking up these distinctions and definitions, now the path can be developed that things normally travel on within Western societies. Let me just sketch this path in an general manner - in life, of course, objects will have quite an individual and specific career. When it enters society, that is usually the market, a given object will have a certain value, and an expected lifetime, and belongs by definition to the category Transient. In this state it will remain for the duration of its expected lifetime or as long as it can be used, but will lose value in a continuous way. Sometimes, if it is repaired or resold, it can regain some value, but in general it will lose its value down to the point where this tends to zero, no matter if the object is still in use. If its value is zero, the object will pass over to the Rubbish-category. This transition from the Transient to Rubbish in most cases will be a gradual change of status, a change one might not see or feel directly, because it usually occurs within a long period of time: The object slowly moves to the margins of social life, maybe is given away, or is inherited, or will be stored somewhere until it might get into a dump. In any case, especially if the object is not destroyed, it will live in this obsolete status for some time, maybe a long time, how long actually nobody can tell. But some day someone will draw it to the light, look at it, blow the dust off it and will put up the question if it could be of any use. If this question is answered negatively, the object will remain within the rubbish, or be dumped. But if this question is answered positively, the moment has come where the object can pass over into the category of the Durable.

It is very important to notice, that considering objects from Rubbish at first hand means, that their value can be estimated only by ignoring current social standards, that is only by individuals who feel free to decide by themselves whatever value or use can be ascribed to the object they picked up.

Now, if the object is considered to be somehow valuable or usable, the individuals who made up this assessment usually will start to search for these objects, and similar ones, and will collect them. This movement will draw the attention of other individuals onto these objects, and in consequence more individuals will look for them, followed by professional collectors and traders. As a result of this interest the market for these objects gets tight, and their price takes off. The next step of this development will be that scientists get interested in these objects and do research on them. This again will confirm the collector's interest, and especially when it becomes known, maybe as a conclusion of research-work, that the number of objects is limited, we will have a run for the objects, and their value grows more and more. Now utilization-interests take command, and museums get interested as well, and will start to collect them, and their new rating will be published in exhibitions, catalogues, and other form of listings. At this point, in fact exactly at the point where the objects have been priced at such a level that it gets more or less impossible to trade them, they will be taken out of the market, and are put into museums where they not only keep but gain value - but do not affect the economic process anymore. Only if this has occurred the new assessment of the objects is accomplished, and that means that they now belong definitely to the category Durable, and will stay there usually for an unlimited period of time.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you accept this sketch of the basics of Rubbish Theory, I assume, you will not be astonished, if I now postulate that the relation between the Transient, the Durable and Rubbish does not only apply to the handling of material things, but to the handling of knowledge, theories, opinions, and ideas as well. And I assume that you also will agree that anybody who has just an idea of the function of Rubbish Theory will try to utilize it to make money, either by diving into the rubbish, looking for objects which could be transferred into the category Durable as many and fast as possible, or, though it is theoretically excluded, by jumping over the Rubbish category, and trying to produce things which can pass directly from the Transient to the Durable. The first move led, as you know, to the development of a big and well established business-branch, reaching from flea-market, second-hand trade, and dealing antiques to recycling trash and leftovers from production processes. But most of the things, and goods, which are moved by this branch just return to the Transient where they again start the career I tried to sketch. The second move, however, that is, the attempt to skip the Rubbish category, and reach the Durable directly with transient products, is naturally, as you may have guessed already, at least in general the business of the art-scene. But here or there, in fact, only a few objects pass the border to the

durable category, and the most interesting question rising now is what qualifies things to get transferred into the Durable. To recognize and define these qualities actually is the heart of the phenomenon we are talking about, and it is very clear, I believe, that in order to understand the process of reassessment of things, and ideas, one has to investigate who, and by which means, is setting up the criteria from which the estimation of qualities of objects is derived.

Since Thompson's Rubbish Theory does not answer this question, I have to confront you with my own theorems on this topic. The first may sound a little paradoxical but nevertheless will find, I believe, your approval: Those who believe in standards, and are normatively oriented to a system of values, create, despite their selfunderstanding, rubbish and rubble, whereas those who do not believe in a fixed system of standards, and deal with rubbish and rubble, create values. My second theorem will support this idea and clarify it, since it states: Those who create values have an aesthetic competence: the competence to distinguish between function, form, standards, and value; and that it is artists, scientists, and sometimes critics, who have this competence - if they do good work. But my third theorem says, that the business resulting from the knowledge of these theorems is more or less ruined, even though many, maybe most of the people do not want to admit this.

Let me elaborate on these theorems somewhat more: The general understanding of the function of art within modern Western societies can be described in short as the attempt to create and establish new values by reflecting current standards and values which usually is performed by deconstructing, and reconstructing their form, and function. In other words: The general understanding of artists' work is that their business is situated within the Rubbish category, and is basically transferring objects from Rubbish to the Durable. This understanding of the role of art evolved to the same degree as its traditional function vanished, and artists would lose their economic foothold within the vicinity of the leading social groups, or the dominating systems. This was a long process with many frictions, and dissimutanities regarding the development within different European countries, a process which started maybe with the beginning of the 16th century, and which was understood as a discovery and as an emancipation of the subject. In effect it led to the point where the artists were free to do what they wanted to do but had, in fact, to pay for this freedom by losing a fixed social function as well. At this point, I would like to date it with the official presentation of the first technical form of image-processing, that is the invention of photography, in 1839, the artists had no other chance but to work within the Rubbish category being themselves within a social Rubbish category, which, in German, we call Lumpenproletariat (raggle), or, more euphemistic, Bohemian. The signature of this state of the art was to establish new concepts of looking at the world, against the increasing fixture of a one-eye-perspective organization of experience established by image-processing machines. It is most interesting to notice that all these new concepts developed by artists were immediately understood in the sense they were intended - but refused by the public as Rubbish styles: the names they were given, for example, Impressionism, Fauvism, Expressionism and Cubism make this very clear.

A new step in this development was reached when these Rubbish styles proved to be more successful than the art of the Salon, and entered the museums. Since this conquest demonstrated to everybody for the first time, and in large scale, that products from Rubbish could be transferred into the Durable, and that current values could be made Rubbish as well. This experience, however, was the platform for avant-garde artists who would now concentrate on questioning the values and the function of art, and tackle its institutional aspect, the museum. On the other hand this experience led to the insight that nobody could tell, at least regarding recent art, what would prove valuable in the future, and as a consequence whatever looked like art was bought and collected. This new demand met an increasing production of works of art which partially was the result of an artistic strategy against the bourgeois understanding of art, and the museum, and partially resulted from an utilization of this strategy: More and more people became interested and felt capable to become an artist, since producing art not only promised a fast dollar, but the techniques to produce art appeared to be easily appropriable. In effect, the art scene started to boom, slowed down only by external circumstances, like the depression, or the World War.

After the Second World War the boom rose again, but the mechanism, as I tried to point out, now caused a new phenomenon, a sort of self-induced overkill of the art scene. The reason for this, at least in Germany, was that the public art supporting system, namely the museums run by communities, and the state, which actually comprises about 90% of all museums concerned with art, could not match any longer the art boom by their means, and lost influence, in addition challenged by a growing number of private collectors who could buy whatever they were interested in.

And this is the situation now: Along with the economic depression we suffer from especially in Germany, and which effects in the first place what we call "Öffentliche Hand", that is the whole of the public services, and public funds, the museums, and other institutions dealing with art get poorer and poorer, relatively, and absolutely, and in comparison with the private sector. However, the consequence of this development is that the conventions on values and standards regarding art itself turn fragile: not only the *canons* built up by the museums get relativized, but even more, the museums as the institutions of art start to crumble. In short: I believe what we experience in the Germany context today is the definite collapse of the whole system built around art affairs which developed within the last two centuries.

To draw a conclusion in short: What we experience these days is not a shift within the system, a move making some Durable Rubbish, a shift which, by the way, museums perform daily by putting valuable things into their magazines, but a real crash of the system of producing and distributing art in. I do not believe in a resumption of the development caused by the invention of photography - swallowing traditional functions, and roles from artists on one hand, but triggering them to set up and achieve new aims as well. I rather think that artists, at least in Western societies, will lose their function in general, since handling rubble and rubbish in the sense I tried to point out in my preliminaries, that is, recalling Nietzsche, the human capability "to grow out of itself in a peculiar way, to redefine what is past and strange and to incorporate it; to heal wounds, to replace what is lost, and to reshape forms which have been smashed", since this capability will be taken over by the New Media and be done by machines. At least most of it. And this is why I believe that we need a fundamental new paradigm for artistic efforts. For this new paradigm I would like to propose these three axioms:

1. To give up egocentric subjectivity, establish forms of collective work in freedom.
2. To define the basics of our existence, work out, and present their value.
3. To leave rubbish and rubble, and develop charisma.

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Donald Preziosi: Brain of the Earth's Body

Deutscher Kunsthistorikertag "Universalia sunt in re", Bonn, 16 March 2005

Art history is not at an end, but rather at its beginning. In fact, it is our field's perpetual attempt to begin; to justify a discourse of history which tries to erase the artifice of its historiographic methodology, which is what has made it as profoundly interesting and important today as it was two centuries ago. I want to talk today about some of the implications of the mythic ambitions of art history and museology.

1.

The title of my paper, "Brain of the Earth's Body," refers to the historical processes by which Europe constructed itself, both materially and virtually, in relationship to the rest of the world – to the new worlds and peoples it encountered and increasingly dominated beginning five centuries ago. Central to that self-construction was the institution of the museum. The title also refers to ways in which this project of self-transformation, commonly referred to as *modernity*, was articulated, supported, and produced both by the institution of the museum, and by a network of interpretative professions, at the center of which were the history, theory, and practice of art.

It is customary to believe that the museum institution as we know it today is an increasingly rational and scientifically systematic version of earlier forms of collecting and display, which are thought of by contrast as being unsystematic, idiosyncratic, or picturesque; or as Romantic prologues to more objectively ordered, historical authentic instruments of public education.

It has also been customary for some time to believe that artworks – whether defined strictly as a certain kind of artifact, or more generally, as artifacts as such – are historically and philosophical significant phenomena, and that art itself has a history, the careful analysis of which would produce authentic and significant knowledge about the (presumably parallel or complementary) histories of individuals and peoples. It has also been customary to believe that the insights gained by this form of historical analysis would provide significant lessons for our own times, since the shape of the present is also commonly seen as the product and effect of the past.

Our modern institutions of art history and museology are founded upon such assumptions. Changes in artistic form are believed to correspond to changes in mentalities, beliefs, or intentions; or to changes in social, political, or cultural conditions. The major portion of the debates in the fields of art history, theory, and criticism over the two centuries has concerned the ways in which relationships between form and signification should be articulated. A much lesser portion of these debates, however, have concerned the validity of this fundamental hypothesis in the first place, since it will be obvious that to question this assumption is to cast doubt upon the entire mission or *raison d'être* of art history and museology.

This paper is concerned with some of the implications of questioning these foundational assumptions of our field. It is concerned, then, not with the 'end' of art history or its seeming transformation into some 'post-art historical' condition, but rather with its beginnings since, by its very nature, our field always seems to be at a crossroads (*Querstrasse*) of contradictory theoretical perspectives, and what has often been portrayed in recent years as a 'new' art history has commonly consisted of a return to alternative theoretical possibilities of art historical practice which have been invisible or dormant in the literature of the discipline.

2.

One of the theses of this paper is that the primary function of what we call 'art' in modern times has been to make visible certain very specific ideas about the Self – that is, to make visible a certain kind of subjectivity which would have pragmatic social value in the evolving nation-states of Europe and America. In other words, in modernity, art is a *practice of the Self*: a practice superimposed upon, and to a great extent superseding and usurping, the practice of religion. Historically, the language of aesthetics is a language of ethics.

Related to this is a parallel historical thesis regarding the contingency or transitoriness of notions of art. The modern idea of art as a kind of thing represents an apparent transformation from earlier modes of making and using any materials (*ars, tekhnē*). This transformation was an ideological shift which aligned together artifacts and psychology, making possible a civic and secular version of the older religious practice of permanent self-examination, of a discipline of the soul. This entailed obscuring the functions of art as a mode of explaining and producing what it seemed to merely measure and analyze.

Essential to the rise of the modern nation-state is this close ideological alignment of ethics and aesthetics, and the institution of the museum as we know it today evolved to serve as laboratory, theatre, and factory for the production both of the state and of its citizen-subjects through the 'medium' of art. Art

is thus is not simply a product of the state; rather, the nation is a product – in many ways the principal product and effect - of art. Similarly, the ideological mission of art was to produce and articulate the Self as citizen, a member of the people or the Folk.

Such historical developments depended upon a very specific kind of *repression*. For institutions such as art history and museology to establish themselves as systematic, authentically historical disciplines, what must be repressed is the essential ambivalence and undecidability of the connections between the individual or collective subject and its products or objects. This is the most fundamental art historical and museological problem, and it is simultaneously epistemological, semiological, ethical, political, historical, and religious. It relates to a long history of the practices of Christian piety and the individual's responsibility for its actions and their effects. The new modern public or civic museum in Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was the theatre and battleground within which this problem was most dramatically addressed. While the fundamental problem of the relationships between subjects and objects was of course played out on every social front (and not least in religion), it was the new institution of the civic museum which focused these issues most powerfully and acutely, and with far-reaching implications for modern notions of individual and collective identity.

Such questions are by no means new: you will have heard echoes in what I've just been saying across a wide spectrum of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought. But I believe it is important to reconsider such fundamentally unresolved problems today in any attempt to understand the current state and future potentials of art, art history and museology. One way in which the project of rethinking art history and museology may be furthered is by closer attention to the historical and social contexts and circumstances surrounding the institutional foundations of modern museology, art history, and aesthetics. At the same time it will be necessary to understand what the historical rise of art history and museology replaced or obscured in European thought and social practice, as well as to how these developments related to older modes of social and religious practice. It is important here to also consider the ways in which the modern nation state and the very idea of the Nation usurped the power and the ethical space of established religion, and replaced or superimposed upon religious loyalties a loyalty to the power and freedoms afforded by the new nation-state.

These are very fundamental problems facing our beliefs and practices as art historians, critics, and theorists, and it will be obvious that in the context of the present paper we can only look at the barest outlines of the questions that need to be asked. What I would like to present here as a small beginning is a case-study of two early 19th century institutions whose contrastive orchestrations of subject-object relationships may help illuminate what was most deeply at stake in the modern invention of art and the staging of its civic functions in the articulation of the roles expected of makers and users of art and of museums. My hope is that an appreciation of such contrasts will help clarify the larger issues at stake for us today, and help clarify the deep implications of 'universalia sunt in re.'

First, some general observations.

Modern ideas about museums, and about art history, theory, and criticism, reflect more fundamental ideas about the relationships between social subjects and the object-worlds (*umwelten*) they occupy and imagine. Even more fundamentally, ideas about these relationships are themselves effects of ideological, philosophical, religious, and cultural perspectives on the nature of the Self as a social subject.

For the past two and a half centuries, the ways in which such relationships were articulated has determined the development of institutions such as museums, and of professions such as art history and criticism. Changes in these institutions and professions have been thought to be closely connected to changing perspectives on the world of objects and the roles expected of social subjects. Although the histories of these institutions have been commonly plotted in isolation and in linear, evolutionary ways, none of these institutions or professions are understandable historically or theoretically without an understanding of modern ideas about the nature of the individual subject, or without an understanding of the historical evolution of these ideas.

The fundamental beliefs about the nature of time, history, memory, and identity that have underlain and made possible the art historical and museological practices we know today themselves depend upon very particular *dialectical relationships* imagined to exist between ourselves as social subjects and the object-worlds we build ourselves into. These include assumptions about how the world of art or artifice not only appears to represent, mirror, or echo, but sustains, embodies, and legitimizes our individual and collective identities – our subject positions, however fixed, fluid, multiple or conflicted those are imagined to be.

Although there were a variety of approaches to the relationship between subjects and objects, two strikingly different and competing perspectives coexisted in the late 18th and early 19th century, and both have left their trace both in the forms and functions of modern museums, and in the analytical practices of art history. In art history and museology today, these two contrastive ideologies coexist

uneasily. I would like to outline these perspectives by an examination of two 19th century institutions, which most clearly exemplify these differing conceptions. Both of my examples are 19th century London institutions, chosen both because of their geographical proximity and their stark contrast to each other. The first is Sir John Soane's Museum, begun in 1812 and remaining today in its final form of 1837. The museum is preserved largely intact at the time of Soane's death in 1837, when he donated it to the British nation with the legal agreement that nothing be changed.

3.

In 1812, the London architect John Soane wrote a 64-page manuscript entitled *Crude Hints towards an History of My House in L(incoln's) I(nn)Fields*. Assuming the role of an imaginary antiquarian of the future, and discovering his London house-museum in ruins, he offered various hypotheses as to the building's original function, since there were no traces remaining of "the Artist who inhabited the place." Until his death in 1837, Soane continually rebuilt and remodeled his house-museum, in the words of his imaginary antiquarian, to fabricate "a great assemblage of ancient fragments which must have been placed there for the advancement and knowledge of ancient Art." Soane's remarkable text was a "history" of his museum from the perspective of its future ruin. *Soane then spent the next 25 years reconstructing the building in the image of what its ruins in the future might suggest it had been in the past.*

This would seem to be an impossible task. The ruined state of a building would seem especially unpredictable: a product of pure chance. Destruction will have proceeded in ways that could neither be predicted nor controlled, nor yet easily described. Yet Soane would have had to "design" those (future) fragments in such a way that they would be *legible* enough to reconstruct their prior integrity, and, through that backward-projected, reconstituted fullness, the motivations and intentions of Soane himself, who was in fact himself the "Artist who inhabited the place." Think of just what kind of design problem this would be: how could a designer or builder predict the forms of a ruin? And what can be made of the Artist's intentions in such a project: in what sense can we say that they are really prior to their imagined material effects? And just what kind of "history" does all this extraordinary projection presuppose?

Of course the Romantic fascination with ruins and with the construction of fictional 'ruined monuments' in many places in Europe is very well known, and has been the subject of many excellent historical and critical analyses in recent times.¹ I would like to explore here one particular fascination with ruins which in my view differed greatly from those of its contemporaries in Britain, Germany, or France in not being oriented nostalgically toward a melancholy lost world, but toward the future. Soane's Museum was an instrument for constructing an enlightened future.

The ruined fragments of the museum's imaginary future condition had to be especially legible so as to lead any future archaeologist to correctly reconstruct both the building's original function as well as the originating Artist's intentions for it. In short, the building should appear not only to "decay" in some predictable way, but it would have to encode clues or instructions both as to how it should be reconstructed, and how its future fragments might encode the intentions or desires of the original Artist. And those clues, to be safe, must be encrypted in every conceivable fragment that might remain in and as the museum's ruins.

In Soane's enterprise there is an implicit similarity between the creativity of the Artist and that of a God, the Artist is not simply imitating the God's *effects* - Nature - he is imitating Nature's God's *modus operandi*: how God works. Soane's mimetic labor must simulate an activity which is *outside of time*, yet at the same time inescapably a *product of time*. Thus, as the existence, nature, and will of God might be taken as "legible" in and through God's presumptive effects - the divine Artificer's artifacts, which is the "Book" of Nature - so too must the existence and will of Soane the Artist become legible, in a two-step process of reconstructive reading, which itself might resemble the reconstructive reading of the collection's fragments themselves: their re-collection. Soane *gives himself to be seen* by giving his future public tangible symptoms of his creative activity - the traces and relics by which his intentions could be reconstructed clearly and unambiguously.

From the point of view of design, this was an extraordinary project. It was articulated in the very years when the modern disciplines of archaeology and art history were being professionally founded, and Soane himself very closely followed and commented upon developments of the major works of aesthetic philosophy then current in German, French, and English. He was a familiar with the writings of Quatremere de Quincy as he was with those of Winckelmann, Kant, Herder, and Hegel.

¹ Among many useful recent texts, see Wolfgang Ernst, 'Frames at Work: Museological Imagination and Historical Discourse in Neoclassical Britain,' *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. LXXV. No. 3, September 1993, 481-497. In connection with this, see also Stephen Bann, 'The Sense of the Past: Image, Text, and Object in the Formation of Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century Britain,' in H. Veenser, ed., *The New Historicism*, 1989.

This Artist of what I might call a 'hindsight-historicism' was clearly a very complex and elusive character in a number of ways. For one thing, in contrast to the founders of virtually all other great collections open to the public, whose busts, statues, and dedicatory inscriptions grace thresholds and entryways, welcoming visitors, John Soane was figured in his museum ambiguously, in fragments, and *anonymously*, as an unlabelled bust among other objects in the collection. Also, in both his London museum and in his earlier residence in the London suburb of Ealing, he erected a basement "monk's apartment" or Monk's Parlour. In his writings, John Soane often alluded to a fictional monk ("Padre Giovanni" - Father John) who wandered like a ghost among the basement ruins. That he strongly identified with this monastic specter is clear in a number of his letters and notebooks referring to the creation of the "Monk's Cell" in the London house in 1815-16 - a section of the building he increasingly haunted, redecorated, and rebuilt. In the 1835 edition of his book *Description of the Residence of John Soane, Architect*, he described the tomb of the imaginary "Padre Giovanni" amidst mediaeval and classical fragments in an adjacent courtyard next to the (fake) tomb of his wife's pet dog Fanny.

The entire collection of Soane's Museum surrounds a large, three-storied, sky-lit space known as "the Dome," on whose eastern parapet is a bust of Soane himself, finished and put in place in 1829. The hair and clothing resemble prototypes common in ancient Roman iconography, and are thus compatible in style to other busts and bas-reliefs, real, fake, and imitations, in the Dome area.

All these busts are overshadowed by a cast of the life size nude *Apollo Belvedere* in the Museo Pio Clementino in the Vatican, a gift presented to Soane in 1811. Soane's own anonymously classical bust stands directly opposite the Apollo, on a pedestal of his own design, incorporating on its back an 18th century imitation of an ancient mosaic image of Genius in a triumphal chariot.

Soane is thus figured in his museum ambiguously, and he is situated, in his writings about the building, both *anterior* to its present state (in the guise of his alter-ego, the mediaeval Father John who wanders about down in the basement) and *posterior* to its falling into ruin - where the protagonist is the imaginary antiquarian of the future. This artist-god exists only in his absence, only as a sculptural *object* in the present time of the visitor, and also twice-removed, in the masquerade both of an ancient monk, and of an antiquarian or archaeologist yet to be born. Soane's image does not confront the visitor at the entrance to the building, but rather stands in relative anonymity as one fragment amongst several in the Dome area, dramatically overshadowed by the fine figure of the Apollo Belvedere. At the time, this statue was widely considered to be not only the paragon of ancient male beauty, but a *canon* to teach the viewer how to recognize beauty in the ideal proportions of parts to whole: macrocosm and microcosm; universalia in re...

The central 'part' in that canon was that physical part of Apollo covered over by a fig leaf soon after Soane's death. There exists an extraordinary relationship between Apollo's phallic member and the head of Soane as canonical entities: just as Apollo's genital member is the modular key to his body, so Soane's head exhibits the *locus*, as from a belvedere, where what can be seen only from this spot is the system of the entire collection of seemingly random pieces: Soane as *genius loci*; the "spirit of (his) place". So, rather than standing at the entrance to his museum, like someone greeting visitors or guarding his property, he takes up his position at the one site which renders everything in this amazingly complex and seemingly cluttered museum perfectly legible. Soane's bust, in other words, is the exact place in the whole museum where everything appears ordered and clear; where the entire program of the museum is suddenly perfectly visible. Like the 'Aha!' point in a postmodern building, or the position of the eye of the viewer in a Renaissance painting of an ideal city.

But Soane's bust is significant not only spatially, but also temporally, like different times or tenses of a Verb: he is not simply the *past definite* of what he was" (John Soane, Architect, after 20 January, 1837 deceased), nor only the *present perfect* of what has been in what he is (Padre Giovanni; Father John, his mediaeval alter-ego, ruminating on ruins and mortality in the basement, where, by the way, in the Monk's Parlour there is a miniature [dark, lead] Apollo Belvedere on a table), but also as the *future anterior* of what he shall have been for what he is in the process of becoming: - that is, the future antiquarian of the museum's own ruins and fragments. This John Soane is at the same time the *alter-ego* not only of the Apollo Belvedere whom he confronts across the Dome, but also of the visitor to the museum - each of us - whom he puts in his place that we may learn to see. The modern citizen-subject, the Self, as *genius loci*.

All of this goes very far beyond a wish of a collector to be present to explain in detail how all the parts of his collection make sense together - a sense lost with the collector's death. Soane doesn't simply arrange the pieces of his collection to make the collection tell the story of the collection itself. He positions

himself as an “antique fragment” within the collection in a place where the *relationships between pieces* (caused by placing his bust where he did) serves as the “key” to unlock the museum’s overall significance. He is the framer of the museum and he (or his eye) is what the museum frames; he is both narrator and protagonist of the tale; both inside and outside the story; both theatrical stage-set and member of the play’s cast. As protagonist, he is a statuesque fiction, the delineation of (the spirit of) a place which is the future anterior of where we as visitors shall have been. His life history is constructed as a simulacrum of the principles of design and construction exemplified in the objects of the collection. On another level, Soane stages himself as the ideal citizen-subject, and / as the prototype of the professional art historian, orchestrating sense out of the apparent chaos and detritus of life. One might be tempted to say that Soane was both a ‘subject’ and an ‘object’ in this museum, except that it is precisely this duality of subject and object that is problematized here. The museum was made up of a mass of objects which were displayed so as to be legible as examples of artistic and design principles to be understood and appreciated by visitors in the present, and emulated by students of art, design, and architecture in their task of creating a humane modern environment. Soane’s life work was explicitly dedicated to rescuing the possibility of a humane modern environment from the massive disruptions being caused in his time by the early Industrial Revolution, which so completely disoriented every facet of traditional space and time in Europe and America. The exemplary nature of the displayed items of the collection resonated with the exemplary and *ostensive* nature of Soane’s displays.

Each object-fragment is a ghost of its future completion. He termed these juxtaposed fragments his “studies,” and they were intended as thought-pieces or puzzles not only to intrigue the visitor or student, but to evoke, challenge, and elicit understanding: things to reckon with, in both senses of this term in English (to “think with” and to “struggle with”). Soane’s Museum resembles a memory-machine or a modern version of a mediaeval *florilegium* - a garden of aphorisms, fragments of wisdom, generating ethical knowledge through aesthetic example (to use two terms – “ethics” and “aesthetics” - which for Soane were mirror-images of each other). Its aim was to foster the development of a humane environment based on exemplary fragments providing ancient precedents for a modern “union of architecture, painting and sculpture,” in his own words, to “remember” a lost or dis-membered unity. In projecting the entire edifice as a mass of “future fragments,” rather than “relics” of the past, he aimed to have those future fragments *of* the building serve functions identical to those served by those now residing *in* the building. The objects in the museum are thus fundamentally different from those we are accustomed to “reading” and analyzing in later museums. *They are not there to illustrate a past, but to suggest a method and a means of creating the future.*

In seeing (the bust of) Soane seeing, the museum visitor could learn to envision a new world out of the ruins and fragments of an old world. So this institution was neither an “historical” museum of art objects, nor a private collection, in the more familiar meanings of these terms: it was, instead, an instrument of social change and transformation; a *critical* rather than an historical instrument. It was a “collection” in the original Latin meaning of that term - an assemblage of things meant to be “read together,” in which the actual process of “reading,” the visitor’s active use of the museum spaces over time, was itself productive of meaning and sense. Soane’s Museum, then, was neither simply a museum or a collection or a laboratory or a theatre, but an institution for manufacturing knowledge which combined all of these functions. An epistemological technology. In this sense, it bore a closer relation to older institutions devoted to knowledge-production such as the *Wunderkammern* or *studioli* of an earlier age than the “historical” museums we are more familiar with today, composed of collections of objects arranged episodically to be “read” as a narrative or story leading up to the present.

Soane’s remarkable project thus bears a close resemblance to that of Albert Einstein in its focus on the relativity of our frames of understanding and on the processes of knowledge-production. This in fact is the subject-matter of his museum, and what is arranged in the museum’s spaces are *not* “objects” in a passive sense to be directly “read” by viewers for their inherent and unique “meanings,” or so as to discover the “intentions” of their original makers. What Soane’s Museum exhibits are *things to think with*; instruments to be used by the visitor to create meaningful narratives about the nature of individual and social enlightenment. Thought-pieces to use in imagining the future.

Soane’s Museum was not unique, and its mission was echoed in other early European museum institutions which however either no longer exist or are known today only in fragments or in radically modified forms. All of these, as I’ve discussed in detail elsewhere, were founded by Freemasons in Britain, Germany, France, Sweden, and America, and were practical applications of a Masonic

philosophy dedicated to transforming character by transforming social space.² This philosophy was shared by the founders and designers of the major new public museums of the late 18th and early 19th century, all of whom were prominent Freemasons.

It is largely because Soane's Museum has been so well preserved in its original state that we can appreciate what the world of museology and art history that we are familiar with today has obscured and almost entirely erased. By the mid 19th century, this museum world had been radically superseded and usurped by a new world of institutions: museology and art history as they became professionalized and radically commodified in the middle of the 19th century.

After Soane's death in 1837, and after 25 years of continual change and alteration, his Museum was frozen in form, never to be modified or altered again, according to the terms of his will in donating the institution to the state. We thus have a unique instance of a Masonic institution in its original form. This is in contrast to the fate of comparable institutions founded by Freemasons, such as Alexandre Lenoir's Louvre in Paris, or Friedrich Schinkel's Altes Museum in Berlin, the British Museum in London, Bernard Ashmole's Museum in Oxford, Peale's Museum in Philadelphia, or the Royal Museum in Stockholm. Except for some minor alterations made in the late 19th century, and repairs done to damage caused by bombing in World War II, Soane's Museum remains essentially as it was 168 years ago.

4.

If art is the practice of the modern Self, art history is the practice of the commodification of the Self; the Self as historical commodity. And museology (in its post-Masonic form) is the stagecraft of the commodification of the collective Self. Because time is short, I will finish my paper with a very brief look at what is perhaps the most powerful image of this new world of capital and of the commodification of the individual and collective Self, symbolized by what became not only the world's most influential building of the 19th century, but more profoundly the most enduring emblem of the new imaginary life of the nation-state and its populations.

This was the first international exposition of the artistic and industrial products of all nations, at a gigantic and technologically innovative prefabricated iron and glass pavilion which came to be known as the Crystal Palace. This "Great Exhibition" opened in London's Hyde Park on May 1st, 1851 and closed on October 15th of that year. The Crystal Palace building was disassembled, after remaining empty for a year after its exhibition closed (in 1852) and was re-erected on a new site (in Sydenham across the river in south London) where it continued in use with many expansions and modifications until this massively popular public institution was destroyed by fire on November 30th, 1936, the same day German troops landed in Spain. Although there was no connection between the two events, many observers at the time wrote of the destruction of the Crystal Palace as marking the true end of the Victorian age, and of the events in Spain as marking the beginning of a new era.

This most dramatically transparent of 19th century institutions, this glass temple of commodity fetishism, revealed in a flash that uncanny landscape of capitalism - what Walter Benjamin referred to in his *Passagenwerk* as that catastrophic nightmare which smothered Europe³. The Crystal Palace brought together in one brilliantly lit space, one taxonomic system, all the world's products, arranged by national groupings, a "fairy world of labour," as one contemporary poet called it. In this universal framework all human products could be compared and contrasted, their differences instantly legible as differences in ability, mentality, character, style, and economic, social, and cultural development. The instant commodification of peoples and their object-worlds for the roving eye of the visitor.

The chief "roving eye" was that of Queen Victoria herself, whose husband, Prince Albert, was responsible for the whole project, and who visited the Crystal Palace 60 times during the 23 weeks the Great Exhibition was open. Her arrival each day was marked by huge crowds following her progress around the exhibition, intent upon noticing what she found of interest. It provided her with a way to visit the many different parts of her Empire without leaving England, and the exhibition, in her own words, "filled (her) with devotion, more so than any religious service (she) had ever heard;" a remark which calls up echoes of the theory of commodity fetishism developed by Karl Marx - who also spent many days visiting the Crystal Palace. We have no record of the two ever meeting as they walked among the exhibits. The Queen's stopping to look more closely at an object instantly caused it to be offered to her as a gift - a prerogative of royalty in Britain, and what might be called the ultimate ideal of all 'window-shopping' in which fascination itself resulted in immediate ownership.

Victoria exemplified that ideal of consumerism for the exhibition's visitors. More dramatically than any existing museum at the time, the Crystal Palace rendered visible and simultaneously comparable all

² See D. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity*, 2003, 63-91.

³ "Capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and, through it, a reactivation of mythic forces." Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, Konvolut K1a,8.

peoples and their products, making legible the connections between style and character, or between quality of form and level of mentality or spirit. In this materialist masquerade of Christian piety, every object is legible as an *object-lesson*, where the form of a work is the figure of its truth, and a window into the spirit of a time, place, person, or people. An obverse of centuries of Christian practices of the Self, where one's good works were an index and direct reflection of the worth of one's soul.

The Crystal Palace synthesized the technologies of history, art history, museology, and commerce. Yet it was neither a museum nor a department store, nor an abstract system of classification, nor a philosophy, nor a theory of optics, or a theory of society or social evolution; nor was it a model of the world and its peoples. It was *all of these and neither*; its founding and its enduring existence profoundly marked and altered all of these institutions and professions, so that it may be fair to say that it was the imaginary paradigm of modernity itself, the virtual brain of the earth's body⁴. It did give birth to one museum institution, the South Kensington Museum, whose name was later changed to the Victoria and Albert Museum, which shared a similar archival mission to document all the world's arts and crafts.

The Crystal Palace also rendered permanently canonical a certain relationship between subjects and objects that contrasted with that established by earlier institutions such as Soane's Museum by being primarily passive rather than constructive. Objects as things to be "read" and analyzed for their value or "content," wherein could be discerned the social, cognitive, and ethical character of their makers. This ideology of consumption and commodification lying at the heart of modern art history and museology was powerfully enabled by this remarkable institution which served both to align together existing practices of history, art history, museology, religion, and commerce and to re-initialize or re-energize them in the service of the nation-state. In bringing together all artifacts in the same frame it positioned the visitor / consumer at the center of an imaginary world of artifice; as its point of resolution. Not in an active, constructive manner, but in a passive manner; as a simulacrum of the commodity "object" for which it is the (equally commodified) "subject-consumer."

The Crystal Palace, this great dazzling frozen iceberg of a theory of order, provided a medium for imagining nation, empire, ethnicity, and individual and collective identity in a manner that neutralized otherness while at the same time fetishizing differences as mere stylistic variations of an imaginary underlying sameness. It outlined the very methodology of orientalism and commodification.

I will end by leaving you with a final image: an 1851 engraving by the artist George Cruikshank entitled "All the World Going to See the Great Exhibition of 1851," which succinctly sums up my remarks, showing the Crystal Palace astride the earth (London of course at the top of the world), absorbing all peoples and their products, shown here arriving from every point on the planet by boat, train, cart, and foot. You can make out on the globe the world's races, nations, landscapes, and monuments. Everything, that is, *except* Europe itself – the brain of the earth's body, summed up solely by the Crystal Palace: the frame of the world; the imperial optical instrument for making the world and its peoples visible as commodities.

As long as we remain fascinated by wandering about this mythic place, and resist looking out of the glass walls of the Crystal Palace into the larger landscape it both reflects and distorts, art history and museology will be perpetually beginning, frozen at its crossroads.

⁴ Walter Benjamin refers to industrial exhibitions as "secret blueprints for museums;" W. Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, Konvolut G2a,7. He also observes (Konvolut G16,6): "The world exhibitions were training schools in which the masses, barred from consuming, learned empathy with exchange value. 'Look at everything; touch nothing'."

Sharon J. Macdonald: Museums, national, postnational and transcultural identities

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Many social theorists have suggested that we are currently living in a period in which the identities of the past are becoming increasingly irrelevant and in which new identities, and new identity formations, are being created. The major identity colossus forged in the nineteenth century, and subsequently spread over much of the globe - nation-state identity - has been the subject of particular debate; and theorists have attempted to identify alternative, post-national (in the sense of post-nation-statist) identity constructions. The proliferation of museums in the nineteenth century was undoubtedly closely bound up with the formation and solidification of nation-states in, and subsequently beyond, Western Europe. A crucial question for museums today concerns their role in a world in which nationstatist identities are being challenged. Are they too inextricably entangled in 'old' forms of identity to be able to express 'new' ones?

How and why museums are able to act as manifestations of identity or sites for the contestation of identities requires a 'denaturalizing' of the concept of 'identity'. That is, we need to be able to see our notions of particular identities, including 'national identity', not as universal but as historically and culturally specific. What is entailed in even 'thinking' and 'doing' 'the nation' or 'the public'? And what role have museums played in such 'thinking' and 'doing'? What is it about museums that makes them suitable - and sometimes not so suitable - for certain identity 'work'?

The article proceeds as follows. I begin with a brief outline of the identity work of the nineteenth-century museum and with a focus on the articulation of 'the nation-state' and 'the public'. My concern here is with the relationship between the museum as a cultural form with particular technologies of representation, and with the kinds of identities that this form helped not only to express but also to constitute. The second part of the article turns to arguments by social theorists that many former identities are in the process of radical transformation, of fragmentation and disembedding and considers their implications for museums. If the nation-state and the kind of 'public' with which it was associated are on the brink of obsolescence, then what future is there for museums? Are museums perhaps too intimately linked up with material- and place- rooted, homogeneous and bounded, conceptions of identity to be able to address some of the emerging identity dilemmas of the 'second modern age' or 'late modernity'? Of course, this account of identity transformation may be wrong or exaggerated, and there are social theorists who would argue thus. Rather than address this problem directly, however, what I suggest here is that museums - because of their longstanding and central roles in the articulation of identity - are significant sites in which to examine such claims. In the third part of the article I discuss one example of an attempt to articulate a postnational, trans-cultural identity complex. The final part of the article draws upon this to reconsider the potential of museums for articulating new, postnational and transcultural identities in late modernity or the second modern age.

Nation, Museum, Public

The emergence of the nation-state, the public, and the public museum in the late eighteenth century, were intimately bound together. The French Revolution of 1789, regarded as a key moment in the dawn of the nation-state era in Western Europe, was a revolution of 'the people' which saw the replacement of an aristocratic order with a new more horizontal and democratic conception of a collectivity of equals. As such, the opening up of the formerly princely collections was an eloquent symbolic assertion of the new ideals of '*égalité, fraternité et liberté*'. That which was private and aristocratic was made public and 'of the people'; the special, exclusive sphere of the elite was breached and opened up to the scrutiny of those who had previously been denied access to such treasures. This was a moment for 'culturing' the public: for bringing 'culture', in the sense of 'high culture', to the masses and, more importantly, for attempting to constitute a public. That is, it was also a symbolic attempt to generate a 'public' - a self-identifying collectivity in which members would have equal rights, a sense of loyalty to one another, and freedom from previous tyrannies and exclusions. Of course, this is not to say that the attempt fully worked. And, of course, attempts to culture the public were not made in quite the same ways or on the

same time-scales in all those countries that became nation-states. However, as Benedict Anderson (1983) has argued for the idea of the nation-state, and as Carol Duncan has argued more specifically for the case of the Louvre (the original princely collection that was opened up in 1789) (1995: 32), these became 'models' which were widely exported around Europe and later much of the rest of the globe. There they were recast within more local histories, politics and aesthetics. This global localization (or 'glocalization') produced heterogeneity of the museum form and public culture across space. Even within any museum there were also competing agendas and contradictions. For example, the newly publicly revealed works of art, such as those at the Louvre, could themselves be the means of differential 'culturing' – social distinction - which would threaten the fragile conception of *égalité*. And the notion of *fraternité* - brotherhood - indicated a gendered exclusion which feminist theorists have suggested was deeply ingrained in, and perhaps even partially constitutive of, the idea of 'the public' itself (Yuval-Davis 1997). National identities and national publics were also defined through difference from other nations and ethnic groups - the new world picture was one of discrete, spatially-mapped, bounded difference, something which could prove difficult for those who, according to this picture, were 'out of place' (such as migrants) or who found their values and cultural attributes depicted as less advanced or morally worthy than those of the 'home team'.

Identity Work

So, what was it about museums that made them appropriate agencies for culturing 'the public' and for 'thinking' nation-states? As Benedict Anderson has pointed out, thinking of oneself as a member of a national public - envisaged like a large 'team', 'family' or 'community' but made up of thousands or millions of people most of whom one would never meet - entailed a particular feat of the imagination (1983). It involved projecting sentiments of belonging and brotherhood way beyond those of direct experience, but only up to a specified 'edge' - the boundary of the national community. As individual identification with the nation-state and the numerous unknown 'brothers' could not rest on experienced *social* relations it had instead to be *cultural* - a matter of shared knowledge and practice, of representation, ritual and symbolism. Moreover, the nation-state, born of popular revolution and proclaiming equality and freedom, required that individuals would see themselves not just as passive objects of the means of social regulation but as willing and 'free' participant members. Nation-states were not to 'contain masses' but were to be made up of 'a public' of 'citizens'. This is why the harnessing of state and nation was so crucial for it brought together regulation and sentiments of belonging. It infused order with affect; it made rather contingent territorial boundaries and banal national property worth fighting, and even dying, for.

Museums, along with other public institutions, were an expressive site and agency of some of these new ways of thinking and of public culturing. Of course, not all museums operated in quite the same ways (there were differences, for example, between art galleries and industrial museums, between national and provincial institutions. And, of course, their public culturing was not always successful. It is nevertheless useful to outline some of the features that made them 'good' for identity work and which led to what is surely rather a remarkable proliferation.

The anthropologist Richard Handler (1988) has argued that the idea of 'having a culture' has become crucial to nationalist and politicised ethnic discourse: it is taken as a mark of being a *bona fide* 'people' who should also have rights of at least some degree of self-governance. Although this idea has become globally assumed, it is itself historically and culturally specific. It is based on a notion that the philosopher Charles Taylor (1989) calls 'expressive individuation': the idea not just that each national identity is different from the next, but that this distinctiveness is deep-seated and that we have a kind of 'calling' to express it.

Taylor is in fact writing of personal identity but he notes that national identity was conceptualised by analogy (1989: 376). For nations, culture is their means of such expression: it is the outward sign of distinctive 'inner depths'. Museums, already established as sites for the bringing together of significant 'culture objects', were readily appropriated as 'national' expressions of identity, and of the linked idea of 'having a history' - the collective equivalent of personal memory. This did not necessarily mean that all that was on show had necessarily to be 'of the nation', though 'national' artefacts and art works were an important strand. Just 'having a museum' was itself a performative utterance of having an identity, and this formula was 'pirated' or replicated at other levels of local governance, most notably in the civic museums which burgeoned in the nineteenth century.

The possession of artefacts from other cultures was itself important for such artefacts were, for colonialist nations, also signs of the capacity to gather and master beyond national boundaries. As such, they were claims of the capacity to know and to govern; signs too for the visitors that theirs was a nation, or a locality, that also played on the global stage. As various studies have shown, the representation of discrete cultures in exhibitions was an effective way of representing the idea that cultural difference was 'cased in', that traversing space meant encountering a succession of separate, if sometimes related, cultures (e.g. Coombes 1994; Jenkins 1994; Lidchi 1997). This was often put to more specific work in highlighting the cultural, technological or moral superiority of the 'home team' through contrast with others. The historical progression was one strategy here - articulating spatial variation with an evolutionary temporality - to implicitly and sometimes not so implicitly, locate the spatially distant in former, less advanced, times.

Museums, then, were capable of articulating two temporal narratives: one, a distinctive national trajectory and, two, the nation as final triumphant stage of successive progression. That museums could present both of these simultaneously, through specific artefacts and the sequences into which they were arranged, was part of their technological magic. Moreover, they could also accommodate a third: the immemorial. Museum buildings, especially in the nineteenth century, often hark back to classical designs, thus implying age and continuity through time. The materiality of museums as buildings, coupled with the materiality of their collections, is also important for what Handler calls the 'objectification' of culture (1988: 14). This, he explains, turns culture and identity into 'a thing: a natural object or entity made up of objects or entities' (1988: 14), and 'Westerners believe that a thing... presents itself unambiguously to human subjects who can... apprehend the thing as it really is' (ibid.). Objects or materials, in other words, seem straightforward and factual - 'real'. Presenting culture and identity in this way - which museums do so well and with all the apparatus of provenance and expert knowledge - naturalizes them, makes them seem mere matters of fact.

Objects are also readily conceptualised as *property* or as possessions. This notion too is central to Western conceptions of identity - a notion of selves as owners (which C.B. Macpherson (1962) argued emerged in the seventeenth century). In museums, not only could 'possessive individualism' be expressed on a collective scale, there could also be a 'sanctification' of property and goods - a removal of them from the world of commerce that could reassure that 'things' need not be just economic capital. Museums, in other words, could stand as monuments to the idea of distinctive identity as in part manifested by a collection of objects which, while they might have been acquired through processes of trade, were now symbolically removed from that sphere.

The visual and spatial features of museums also have implications for conceptions of identity. Here too museums offered up a range - though not an infinite set - of possibilities. Particularly important among the 'ways of seeing' suggested by the museum is what Timothy Mitchell (borrowing from Heidegger) calls the 'world as picture' or 'world as exhibition'. This 'way of seeing' crystallised in the nineteenth century (Mitchell 1988: 18-23). It entailed a detachment of the viewer - thinking of themselves as outside or above that which was represented. This was coupled with the idea that there was an "'imaginary structure" that exists before and apart from something called "external reality"' (1988: 21) and that it was possible to find external viewing positions from which the world would appear as ordered and complete. This created the idea of a privileged, objective view point from which 'structures of meaning' (ibid.) might be evident. Mitchell writes in this regard of the search at tourist sites for the correct location (generally an elevated height) from which to achieve a 'panorama', of plans and maps ('birds-eye views'), and of the viewing platforms that museums and great exhibitions so often incorporated. Many nineteenth-century museums also had central atria, surrounded by viewing galleries, and the galleries themselves tended to be designed so as to provide a long, clear, well-ordered vista. Such a 'world as exhibition' gaze, as exhibitions exemplified and offered up, Mitchell argues, was crucial to modern Western notions of objectivity and reality - notions which meant being able to think of properly informed looking as a 'separation from an external object-world ... mediated by a non-material plan or structure' (1988: 21).

Given that in museums such 'objective vision' was mostly directed to depictions of relatively compartmentalised 'worlds' or to representations of 'difference' (see especially Dias 1998), this way of seeing also helped 'objectify' national identities and cultural/racial/ gendered differences. Racial typologies, series and evolutionary trajectories, for example, could be 'seen' in the museum. This helped constitute such schemata as realities. The organizing techniques of the museum were thus regarded as

reflections of 'underlying realities' which were assumed to be inherent in the 'facts' presented by the artefacts on display (ibid.). No doubt this quest for 'objective vision' was also coupled with other ways of seeing. In a period in which visualism was becoming increasingly prioritised over other senses and increasingly bound up with modern conceptions of reality and truth (ibid.), there would, of course, have also remained alternative 'ways of seeing', such as the direct 'witnessing' of holy relics (which played into museums' authority) and the individualized aesthetic gaze (which may have helped garner individual affect, see below). Just as the variety and internal contradictions of institutions within the public sphere was a potential source of agency and dynamic, so too was the possibility of alternative ways of seeing within the museum. Its ability to incorporate diverse and even cross-cutting ways of seeing could be a strength of the museological form in identity work.

Having noted some features of museums relevant to the articulation of nation-statist identities, I should emphasise that museums were not only concerned with 'the public' and nation-state identity. Not all museums were nation-statist or even national; though I suggest that even where they were not, the model of identity articulated by national museums played into the more localised identities being constituted and displayed. Thus, metropolitan areas generally sought to establish museums on very similar lines to those of national museums, each city thus effectively claiming for itself an identity - and a type of mastery - analogous to that of the national museum. At the same time, however, metropolitan museums were not *merely* small-scale nationals - they also had their own concerns and institutional dynamics.

Likewise with other forms of museums, such as museums of local history or, in Germany, Heimat museums, there was an important relationship with national identity. As Alon Confino argues with respect to the 'mania' for creating museums of Heimat in Germany between 1890 and 1918 - crucial years for the formation of German national identity - this was neither simply an escape from issues of national identity nor just national identity writ small. Instead, 'the Heimat museum phenomenon... articulated, based on a metaphor of whole and parts, the relationship between the locality and the nation, between hundreds of divergent local histories and one single national history' (Confino 1997: 136). Because museums had come to be regarded as symbols of having an identity, to have a Heimat museum 'symbolized the worthiness of one's local past and, conversely, to be a locality with no Heimat museum was perceived almost as an admission to having no significant history' (ibid.: 140). At the same time, however, local museums could presumably articulate other kinds of identities, such as those of local community, inter-community divisions, and direct kinship or familiarity with the individuals displayed there. This was one dimension of local viewing of museums in the Scottish Hebrides where I carried out fieldwork (Macdonald 1997). Likewise, within any museum - national or local - the degree of emphasis and priority accorded 'the public', and just how 'the public' was envisaged, would have varied from case to case, depending on matters such as the particular passions and backgrounds of some trustees and individual curators, the internecine struggles between different departments within museums and their different priorities which might also include conservation, connoisseurship, and research.

This kind of complexity should be neither dismissed nor used as a justification for avoiding analysis. It exists, not instead of, but alongside, the larger-scale identity work of museums; and it is generated in part by the openness of museum artefacts and exhibitionary technologies to alternative (but not infinite) interpretations.

New Identities? New Public?

Public museums, then, were from their beginnings embroiled in the attempt to culture a public and encourage people to imagine and experience themselves as members of an ordered but nevertheless sentimentalized nation-state. They invited people to conceptualise a sense of national or racial difference from others; and to experience their own worlds as relatively and reassuringly governed ones. They helped to convey senses of both stability and progress. They helped to instantiate a 'scientific', 'objective' way of seeing - a gaze which could 'forget' its own positionedness. They helped to think identities as bounded and coherent.

All of these kind of ideas have, however, been questioned since the nineteenth-century attempt to establish them. For example, Habermas (1989) and others in the Frankfurt School (e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer 1979), argue that the expansion of the mass media and consumerism have led to the demise of the democratic 'public sphere'. The public sphere is becoming debased and de-cultured -

subsuming itself to trivia and a more superficial notion of 'staging' - and it is becoming differentiated into diverse interest groups with little sense of a larger community. A less negative perspective suggests that there is indeed a differentiation within the public sphere (though that we ever really achieved an inclusive public culture is questioned) but that this is a welcoming opening up, an ability of previously marginal or excluded voices to be heard. The journal *Public Culture*, for example, started in 1988 by Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, seeks to 'reclaim' the idea of 'public culture' in just this multicultural and indeed transnational way (Robbins 1994: xxiii). Alongside this suggested growth of cacophony in the public sphere, there has been critique of the idea of objective vision, of evolutionary and other 'grand' narratives from burgeoning new areas of theory (especially standpoint, feminist, post-colonial and queer). These have sought to unsettle the notion of the privileged vantage point from which subjectivity would be obliterated and underlying realities could be discerned. Instead, they have turned the gaze back upon the supposedly objective to explore its unstated assumptions and cultural-political positioning; and they have argued for theorising which acknowledges and seeks to reflect upon subjectivity and standpoint rather than pretends their irrelevance.

Amidst all this the nation-state looks like it might be in particular trouble in the second modern age. Threatened from within by the emergence of powerful separatist interest groups, ethnonationalisms, regionalisms and various new age movements; and from without by more transnational powers such as global corporations and supra-national organisations; both its ability to claim the affection of its members and to govern them effectively have been questioned. Whether those existing nation-states, formed at least partly through invented traditions and state institutions such as museums, can effectively act as focuses for identity if they no longer have such a significant political and economic role is also questioned. Some theorists have suggested that those nation-states formed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a kind of identity-fiction, constructed by state fiat. What we are seeing now with the emergence of ethnonationalisms, according to this argument, is a 'return of the repressed' - the expression of sub-nation-state, or 'national', identities which have been insufficiently recognised in the nation-state system (e.g. Smith 1995). Also threatening the validity of the territorialised nation-state is increased global movement and migration, as workers move between countries and continents, and as new communication technologies enable the development and maintenance of non-territorialised identities (e.g. Castells 1997).

More generally, with increased global movement and with modern telecommunications (bringing 'time-space compression' (Harvey 1989)), it has been suggested that the very nature of 'identity' is being transformed. Anthony Giddens, for example, argues that identities are becoming 'disembedded' from locality and from the traditional frameworks not just of nation and ethnicity but also of class and kinship (e.g. Giddens 1990, 1991). Increasingly, he suggests, we can reflexively make up our own identities. (However, he agrees with the point, well expressed by Arjun Appadurai, that 'while we can make our identities, we cannot do so exactly as we please' (Appadurai 1996: 170).) Thus individuals, in a process which Beck refers to as '*Individualisierung*', are increasingly called upon to make decisions about their own lives, both in relation to major matters (e.g. what kind of job to aim for) and more apparently banal ones (e.g. the style of clothing to wear). 'Who to be?' (Giddens 1991), is a question which makes sense today in a way which it would not have done for those living in previous times. Taking these points still further, it has also been suggested that the identity model set out earlier in this chapter - a model of identity as relatively coherent and bounded, and as expressive of 'inner depths' - is being displaced. Rather than thinking of identities as having clear edges and as trying to point out what is persistent or coherent about them across time or space, we will come to think of them more as endlessly in the process of creation - as defined not so much by a bounded sense of 'difference' but the endlessly deferred Derridean '*différance*' - or as 'travelling' (Clifford 1997). In her study of players of internet fantasy games, MUDS (multi-user dungeons), Sherry Turkle suggests that this is already happening with individual identities, the MUDS players conceptualising their own identities as 'decentred', 'multiple' and 'fluid' (1997). A similar phenomenon is hypothesised at the level of *cultural identity*, 'hybridity' being one of the 'watchwords' here (e.g. Werbner and Modood 1997). Again, the suggestion is that centred, singular identity constructions are being superseded by identities predicated on cultural mixing and crossover, on intercultural traffic rather than boundary demarcation. How widespread such conceptualisations are or will become is at present an open question.

Museums, precisely because they have been so implicated in identity work and because of their more particular articulations with the kind of identities that are argued to be under threat, are significant sites in which to examine some of the claims of identity transformation. If nineteenth-century style identities are indeed being displaced, we might expect that museums as institutions would become redundant or,

perhaps, that they would become museums of themselves - sites at which to look back upon a disappearing order.

Alternatively (or additionally), we might expect to see transformations within museums as they attempt to address and express 'new' identities. The latter, I suggest, is certainly one strand within contemporary museum developments. It is not, of course, the only one and any full picture would entail a mapping of the various strands and their geographical and institutional distributions. For example, while museums in some metropolitan and cosmopolitan centres may be engaging with 'new' identity possibilities, there are certainly others where museums are deployed in the articulation of bounded national identity. And avant-garde art museums may more readily engage with post-modern identity theorising than, say, heritage or industrial sites. This is not to say that the avant-garde have somehow 'got it right' - theirs may be simply one strand, perhaps a fairly minority one, within the overall complex.

Below I discuss an example of an exhibition which addresses questions of identity in ways which articulate with some of the particular identity problematics raised in a globalizing locality, replete with migrants, fluid and multiple identities. There have been many examples in recent years of innovative new exhibitions, perhaps involving groups who were previously excluded or only presented in others' terms, or attempting to reflect upon the processes of collecting and exhibiting. My argument is neither that the example I discuss - the Transcultural Galleries at Cartwright Hall, Bradford, England - is unique in the approach it takes and nor that it is simply representative of a broader movement. Rather, it is an example of how the identity potentialities of the museum can be put to new use; and, as such, it is an example of the continued life of the museum and an illustration of the (limited) flexibility of the exhibitionary form.

Representing Transcultural Identities

Bradford is a city with a substantial proportion of its population from the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and a place where racial tensions have sometimes run high and, occasionally, riot. It was here that a copy of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was first burned in Britain, an act which brought Bradford rather forcibly to global attention as a site of cultural and religious passion and fundamentalism. In a city where cultural- and identity- politics are a particularly delicate and important matter, then, the museum exhibition discussed constitutes an example of some rather interesting, and perhaps prescient, exhibitionary re-presentations of identity.

The Transcultural Galleries at Cartwright Hall were opened to the public in 1997. On display were artefacts from what was claimed to be 'the first non-colonial collection of its kind in the country' (Poovaya Smith 1998: 112), a collection which had been begun in 1986. The timing and the location of this collecting strategy and the 'experiment' in museological representation that resulted from it are significant. During the 1960s and 1970s, Bradford had developed a substantial population from South Asia - approximately 81,000 out of a total of 484,000 by the early 1990s. During the 1970s racial tensions grew, partly in relation to growing unemployment; and the early 1980s saw race riots in various British cities and a flourishing of reports on 'race-relations'. The collecting and display policies of museums, and their funding, were one of the areas to which attention was paid in an attempt to address cultural provision for, and the perception of, the non-white population in Britain.

In Bradford, a curator, Nima Poovaya Smith, was appointed in 1986 with the remit of building up, and displaying, a collection of art from the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. The collection and displays were to be based at Cartwright Hall, a purpose-built public art gallery in a Baroque style building set in a public park, which had opened in 1904. Much of Cartwright Hall's internal space and exhibitions are fairly typical of a nineteenth-century public museum as described in the first part of this chapter; and most of the art on display is European, with a strong emphasis on British work (including art with a local and regional emphasis). At this time, South Asians rarely visited the museum and one of the tasks of the new curator was to try to change this state of affairs. This concern was itself a reflection of recognition of the symbolic role of museums in expressing (even imagined) community identity. In this case, the attempt was to articulate a *plural, multicultural*, identity.

It should be noted that this was not simply a matter of dealing with two 'communities': 'English' and 'South Asian', or 'white' and 'non-white'. Within the 'white' population, Bradford has a history of immigration beginning with the Irish who came from the 1820s and the Germans, Poles, Ukrainians and

Italians who followed them. Among the 'non-white' population, the great majority is from South Asia, though there are also significant minorities from Africa and the Caribbean. But even among those from South Asia, there are significant differences in the areas and countries from which people come (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh), as well as differences of religion (Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs) and language (Hindi, Urdu, Bangladeshi, Gujarati). If we also acknowledge the differences of generation – especially between those born overseas and those born in Britain – it is clear that the situation was indeed 'kaleidoscopic' as the new curator described it. It also raised potential problems for the curator in deciding just what to collect and who, within which 'communities', to consult. One danger, identified by some who have written on multi-cultural policies (e.g. Werbner 1997: 15), is that difference could be 'fixed' or 'museumised' by the identification of discrete communities and traditions. Rather than try to represent distinct communities, however, Poovaya Smith sought to express the fluidity of cultural boundaries and identities. In doing so, she drew on her reading of post-colonial critical discourse theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak (1998: 112). At the same time, she sought to consult with South Asians in Bradford and to mount a series of temporary exhibitions on topics which it was hoped would engage local, especially though not exclusively South Asian, interest. These included exhibitions on gold and silver, Islamic calligraphy and textiles (especially *saris* – items of clothing worn by women in many areas of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and also in Bradford). Interestingly, these subjects, developed in consultation with people of South Asian descent in Bradford, used a variety of media and broached the usual distinction between fine art and craft. Most importantly, the temporary exhibitions succeeded in bringing South Asian visitors to Cartwright Hall in considerable new numbers (Poovaya Smith 1991: 126). So, what strategies did Poovaya Smith use to try to express 'transcultural identity'?

First, there were the areas of collection. These included the themes of some of the temporary exhibitions and were subject-matters which cut across territorial boundaries. Thus, gold and silver, for example, are not only the chosen media for many skilful artists across much of South Asia (rather than just certain countries), they also have symbolic and social significance across a wide area. Moreover, these materials have skill associations and cultural significances which stretch across to West Yorkshire and other sites beyond South Asia. Islamic calligraphy also provided an opportunity to explore a subject which, while of especial interest to Muslims in Bradford, also stretched across a wide geographical territory, drawing its examples not only from South Asia but also from the Middle-East. The collecting strategy is, however, even more encompassing than this, for Poovaya Smith also decided to include works by some British artists not of South Asian origin who have been influenced by South Asian styles. So, for example, jewellery by Clarissa Mitchell and Roger Barnes was included in the original exhibition on gold. This was, however, objected to by some members of the 'South Asian community' in Bradford on the grounds that these artists 'were exploiting the subcontinent for their own ends' (Poovaya Smith 1991: 126). Poovaya Smith's view, however, was that the work of these artists 'did not so much imitate Indian jewellery so much as let the influence of India itself impress itself upon their work, often in highly original ways' (1991: 126). Her decision, therefore, was to ignore this criticism: 'The voices of the community are important voices but they do not necessarily always embody a God-like infallibility or collective wisdom' (ibid.). In doing so, she privileged her 'transcultural' vision over that which, from this perspective, 'indicated a certain narrowness of vision and prejudice' (ibid.). This was not the only area of potential dissent. In the exhibition on gold, Poovaya Smith hoped to include commentary on the 'pernicious' elements of dowry which sometimes result in 'dowry deaths' where a bride's family is unable to pay the sums, generally in the form of gold jewellery, demanded by a groom's family. She consulted a group of people from 'the community' who were all very much in favour of this idea, though they did not want this to be the only dimension of the subject discussed. However, these selected 'community representatives' were all under 35 years old and had grown up in Britain. An exhibition in Leicester on a similar theme received a very different response when older members of 'the South Asian community' were consulted. There 'the community' argued that anything which might cast a negative light on South Asian cultural practices should not be displayed in a museum (see Poovaya Smith 1991: 122-5). What we see here is not just the potential problem of different perspectives within so-called 'communities', but also different perspectives on the role of museums in the representation of identity.

In attempting to cut across geographical and traditional 'community' identities, the exhibitions in the Transcultural Galleries do nevertheless employ the idea of *locality* in relation to Bradford or West Yorkshire itself. Again, however, this is done not so much to 'museumise' a clear-cut identity as to highlight the plural nature of the locality and to explore the theme from multiple perspectives. (The slippage between referring to the locality as 'Bradford' and as 'West Yorkshire' is itself indicative of the fact that locality is not precisely demarcated.) Thus, while the exhibition contains a substantial proportion

of work either from the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent or by artists who self-identify at least partly with this region, many, though by no means all of these people are also from Bradford. Moreover, the galleries also contain works by artists from West Yorkshire, such as David Hockney, who have no South Asian connections; and there are various other items, such as a Japanese suit of armour, whose only 'Bradfordness' lies in the fact that it was originally purchased by a Bradford philanthropist. The theme of locality is also explored through various commissioned works where artists were asked to reflect on either the city of Bradford or Cartwright Hall and its collections themselves. Such works include Lubna Chowdhary's miniature mysticised sculptures of Bradford buildings; Fahmida Shah's cryptic and surprising depiction of a motorbike (which was part of a temporary exhibition at Cartwright Hall) as an artistic reflection on Cartwright Hall; and Mah Rana's contemporary jewellery, with titles such as 'I never promised you a rose garden', which provide elegant ironic commentaries on South Indian marriage pendants.

The ways in which both 'South Asia' and 'locality' are evoked, then, are multiperspectival and plural. In the galleries there is no attempt to arrange artefacts in terms of separate cultures; and nor is there a historical narrative. This, however, is not to say that it is all totally disorganized. Certainly, there is not the same strong sense of order - and the kind of open vista of gallery space that proclaims its organizedness to you as you walk in - that you find in many traditional galleries, and elsewhere in Cartwright Hall itself. Instead, the exhibition presents itself to the visitor in pieces at a time; one rounds corners and sees more but never an overall view. You cannot but be aware that you are seeing it now from this angle, now from that. There is little sense here of an objectively positioned viewer. Perspective here depends on standpoint.

There is organization, however. Rather than this working by a logic of distinction and taxonomic categories, the logic is one of *connection*. This is a word which Nima Poovaya Smith repeats many times as she explains the displays. Of course, connection has always been one of the logics employed in exhibitions, and Kevin Hetherington (1997) has written interestingly of what he calls 'the will to connect' in relation to museums and their analysis. What we have here, however, is not a notion of connection as somehow 'bringing out' some underlying reality (a perspective which the historian John Pickstone (1994) refers to as 'diagnostic' or - taking his use from nineteenth-century museums - 'museological') but of connection as serendipitous, suggestive, and sometimes witty and ironic. The connections made are not supposed as in any way inevitable but it is hoped that they will spark reflection and a sense of the vigour of these kind of 'contacts' (Clifford 1997). 'Connection' is conceptualized as movement, as process, as creative agency. Moreover, the nature of the 'connections' varies in the galleries. For example, one set of exhibits are all on the theme of water: David Hockney's painting *Le Plongeur*; another painting, reflecting on the Hockney, Howard Hodgkin's *David's Pool*, and Saleem Arif's sculptural *Vessel of Vitality*. Another set of exhibits, encased together, is connected by similarities in their visual form. The marriage pendants and the artistic reflections on them are presented together. Islamic calligraphy - not only on paper and parchment but also engraved onto chairs or embroidered in textiles - is exhibited in one area of the gallery; though as with other areas this leads fairly seamlessly into its neighbours, and exhibits are juxtaposed so that they can be perceived within various sets of possible connections. The aesthetic logics themselves, then, are plural, like the nature of the identities that the Galleries try to evoke. To attempt to represent transcultural identities, then, entails not simply a reorientation of texture or a change of content, but disruption to many of the conventional forms of exhibitionary display.

Discussion

Articulating postnational, transcultural or 'hybrid' identity is a difficult matter. As some commentators have discussed, it easily runs the risk of unwittingly 'freezing' identities, precisely contrary to its ambitions. That some of these commentators have dubbed this a danger of 'museumising' the identities and cultures on display (Friedman 1995: 82; Werbner 1997: 15), signals, perhaps, that museums may face a particular dilemma in this regard. One problem that has been identified is that the notion of 'hybridity' (as with related conceptions, such as 'syncretic' or 'creole' identities) seems to presuppose pre-existing 'pure' or 'noncreolised' cultures, a view which most anthropologists would dispute (Friedman 1996; Caglar 1997). A second, related, problem is a tendency to privilege 'ethnic' or 'national' identity (e.g. 'South Asian'), even if this is conceptualised as 'hyphenated' (e.g. 'Anglo-Indian', 'German-Turkish') and to equate this with 'culture', thus again setting 'hybrid' or 'fluid' identities against an implicit 'pure' identity and conceptualising the non-homogeneous as inherently 'potentially conflictual' (Caglar 1997:

176). Moreover, escaping from geographical definitions and 'the trope of community', and the 'taken-for-granted isomorphism of culture, place and people' (Caglar 1997: 174) that these tend to conjure up, is methodologically difficult. How can hybrid and transcultural identities be represented without falling into these traps? Ayse Caglar's own suggestion, in her insightful discussion of these problems, is to focus on 'person-object relations as these exist in space and time' (1997: 180). Thus, rather than beginning with 'a community' or a geographical area, her methodological suggestion is to begin with objects and then, '[b]y plotting the networks of interconnected practices surrounding objects, and the sentiments, desires and images these practices evoke, we can avoid the need to define collectivities in advance' (ibid.). The Transcultural Galleries at Cartwright Hall seem to exemplify this starting point well. The objects exhibited, rather than any particular geographical or ethnic categories are clearly the starting point and main content of the exhibition. Moreover, by having rather little text in the exhibition (for the most part there are only short labels giving the artist's name, the title of the work and its date), it is able to circumvent for the most part geographical or ethnic descriptions. Categories such as 'Islamic calligraphy' are an exception here rather than the rule. In this respect, the exhibition medium has a clear advantage over, say, a written account in that it can privilege objects and do away with linguistic categorisation almost entirely. In doing so, however, it forgoes the second stage of Caglar's methodological process: the plotting of the social and cultural networks in which the objects are more usually employed.

Objects are largely left 'to speak for themselves'. While this may be an appropriate strategy for art works which can be seen (controversially) as a more calculated attempt to speak directly to the viewer, it means that the biographical contexts of much that is displayed – the lives, worlds and histories of which they were part, the contexts which give meaning to the objects - are given much less shrift than their formal, 'artistic' qualities. At least one commentator on the Transcultural Galleries found the labelling 'predictable' and remarked that the approach was 'not innovative' at this level (Lovelace 1997: 22). As this commentator also noted, however, this problem was one that was being well countered by the employment of a linked CD-ROM in the exhibition which includes quotes (e.g. by the artists involved), video footage of various artefacts being demonstrated in use, and - perhaps most innovatively - videos of visitor discussion groups making various thematic links between works on display (ibid.).

What we see with the Transcultural Galleries at Cartwright Hall, then, is that the museum medium is well capable of articulating postnational, transcultural identities. This, however, is an art exhibition. Perhaps to articulate such identities in a history museum or in a national museum would be more difficult: the writing of such accounts would have to be still further 'against the grain' of expectations of such museums and of their subject matter. Trying to create historical accounts that eschew national or ethnic narratives as well as causal or progressive trajectories is undoubtedly a difficult task; and one that needs to be tackled through aesthetic strategies, as we have seen here, as well as through content. Another question which we need to ask of an exhibition such as that discussed here is how far the conception of identity that it attempts to articulate is shared by those whose locality is represented in the museum - and whether they necessarily see the museum as a place for articulating identity in this way. Certainly the resistance to having the work of Indianinfluenced British artists in the collection is one instance of an identity-conception at odds with that of the curator. More generally, some commentators have questioned just how widespread are conceptions of identities as fluid, hybrid, transcultural and postnational.

Pnina Werbner, for example, claims that 'The hollow claims of the new intellectuals to be voices from the margins are exposed... by global trends towards ethnicisation: the real voices from the margins want no truck with hybridity. The reality is one of fragmentation and ghettoisation, of ethnic primordialism in the face of a weakened nation-state' (1997: 12). Undoubtedly, a museological experiment in the representation of transnational identity has many counterparts in museums established in other locations whose aim is precisely to try to articulate the kind of bounded identity model, replete with autonomous and progressive history, that the Transcultural Galleries try to disrupt. That such identity articulations exist alongside, and even in superabundance to, attempts to represent postnational and transcultural identities is not, perhaps, surprising given that, as James Clifford observes: '[i]n a global context in where collective identity is increasingly represented by having a culture (a distinctive way of life, tradition, form of art, or craft) museums make sense' (1997: 218). That they are capable of making other kinds of sense too is, however, a central theme of my argument . What we have seen is that museums are capable of being put to work in the expression of other kinds of identities than the national, homogeneous and bounded. That museums might be suitable for this kind of identity work too is not, perhaps, surprising in retrospect because, of course, they have long been 'contact zones' as James Clifford (1997: ch.7) puts it, rather than quite as publicly disciplining or penitential as some of those

working in them might have intended (see Bennett 1995). They have long made connections between continents and between times; and their objects have always had the capacity to evade the classifications and narratives into which they were written. Museums have always had – to varying extents – a good deal of serendipity, of the kind of fuzzy logic that means that there will be objects in the collections that can be readily re-presented into new, perhaps more connective, displays. If the public museum was intended in part to imagine into being particular kinds of identities, it did not always succeed. In some ways, it is perhaps this *failure* of the nineteenth-century museum project as much as its success that means that museums have life, and potential, left in them yet.

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Hayden White: The Fictions of Factual Representation

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In order to anticipate some of the objections with which historians often meet the argument that follows, I wish to grant at the outset that *historical events* differ from *fictional events* in the ways that it has been conventional to characterize their differences since Aristotle. Historians are concerned with events which can be assigned to specific time-space locations, events which are (or were) in principle observable or perceivable, whereas imaginative writers - poets, novelists, playwrights - are concerned with both these kinds of events and imagined, hypothetical, or invented ones. The nature of the kinds of events with which historians and imaginative writers are concerned is not the issue. What should interest us in the discussion of 'the literature of fact' or, as I have chosen to call it, 'the fictions of factual representation' is the extent to which the discourse of the historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other. Although historians and writers of fiction may be interested in different kinds of events, both the forms of their respective discourses and their aims in writing are often the same. In addition, in my view, the techniques or strategies that they use in the composition of their discourses can be shown to be substantially the same, however different they may appear on a purely surface, or dictional, level of their texts.

Readers of histories and novels can hardly fail to be struck by their similarities. There are many histories that could pass for novels, and many novels that could pass for histories, considered in purely formal (or, I should say, formalist) terms. Viewed simply as verbal artifacts histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another. We cannot easily distinguish between them on formal grounds unless we approach them with specific pre-conceptions about the kinds of truths that each is supposed to deal in. But the aim of the writer of a novel must be the same as that of the writer of a history. Both wish to provide a verbal image of 'reality'. The novelist may present his notion of this reality indirectly, that is to say, by figurative techniques, rather than directly, which is to say, by registering a series of propositions which are supposed to correspond point by point to some extratextual domain of occurrence or happening, as the historian claims to do. But the image of reality which the novelist thus constructs is meant to correspond in its general outline to some domain of human experience which is no less 'real' than that referred to by the historian. It is not, then, a matter of a conflict between two kinds of truth (which the Western prejudice for empiricism as the sole access to reality has foisted upon us), a conflict between the truth of correspondence, on the one side, and the truth of coherence, on the other. Every history must meet standards of coherence no less than those of correspondence if it is to pass as a plausible account of 'the way things *really* were'. For the empiricist prejudice is attended by a conviction that 'reality' is not only perceivable but is also coherent in its structure. A mere list of confirmable singular existential statements does not add up to an account of reality if there is not some coherence, logical or aesthetic, connecting them one to another. So too every fiction must pass a test of correspondence (it must be 'adequate' as an image of something beyond itself) if it is to lay claim to representing an insight into or illumination of the human experience of the world. Whether the events represented in a discourse are construed as atomic parts of a molar whole or as possible occurrences within a perceivable totality, the discourse taken in *its* totality as an image of some reality bears a relationship of correspondence to that of *which* it is an image. It is in these twin senses that all written discourse is cognitive in its aims and mimetic in its means. And this is true even of the most ludic and seemingly expressivist discourse, of poetry no less than of prose, and even of those forms of poetry which seem to wish to illuminate only 'writing' itself. In this respect, history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation.

This characterization of historiography as a form of fiction-making is not likely to be received sympathetically by either historians or literary critics, who, if they agree on little else, conventionally agree that history and fiction deal with distinct orders of experience and therefore represent distinct, if not opposed, forms of discourse. For this reason it will be well to say a few words about how this notion of the *opposition* of history to fiction arose and why it has remained unchallenged in Western thought for so long.

Prior to the French Revolution, historiography was conventionally regarded as a literary art. More specifically, it was regarded as a branch of rhetoric and its 'fictive' nature generally recognized. Although

eighteenth-century theorists distinguished rather rigidly (and not always with adequate philosophical justification) between 'fact' and 'fancy', they did not on the whole view historiography as a representation of the facts unalloyed by elements of fancy. While granting the general desirability of historical accounts that dealt in real, rather than imagined events, theorists from Bayle to Voltaire and De Mably recognized the inevitability of a recourse to fictive techniques in the *representation* of real events in the historical discourse. The eighteenth century abounds in works which distinguish between the study of history on the one side and the writing of history on the other. The writing was a literary, specifically rhetorical exercise, and the product of this exercise was to be assessed as much on literary as on scientific principles.

Here the crucial opposition was between 'truth' and 'error', rather than between fact and fancy, with it being understood that many kinds of truth, even in history, could be presented to the reader only by means of fictional techniques of representation. These techniques were conceived to consist of rhetorical devices, tropes, figures, and schemata of words and thoughts, which, as described by the Classical and Renaissance rhetoricians, were identical with the techniques of poetry in general. Truth was not equated with fact, but with a combination of fact and the conceptual matrix within which it was appropriately located in the discourse. The imagination no less than the reason had to be engaged in any adequate representation of the truth; and this meant that the techniques of fiction-making were as necessary to the composition of a historical discourse as erudition might be.

In the early nineteenth century, however, it became conventional, at least among historians, to identify truth with fact and to regard fiction as the opposite of truth, hence as a hindrance to the understanding of reality rather than as a way of apprehending it. History came to be set over against fiction, and especially the novel, as the representation of the 'actual' to the representation of the 'possible' or only 'imaginable'. And thus was born the dream of a historical discourse that would consist of nothing but factually accurate statements about a realm of events which were (or had been) observable in principle, the arrangement of which in the order of their original occurrence would permit them to figure forth their true meaning or significance. Typically, the nineteenth-century historian's aim was to expunge every hint of the fictive, or merely imaginable, from his discourse, to eschew the techniques of the poet and orator, and to forego what were regarded as the intuitive procedures of the maker of fictions in his apprehension of reality.

In order to understand this development in historical thinking, it must be recognized that historiography took shape as a distinct scholarly discipline in the West in the nineteenth century against a background of a profound hostility to all forms of myth. Both the political Right and the political Left blamed mythic thinking for the excesses and failures of the Revolution. False readings of history, misconceptions of the nature of the historical process, unrealistic expectations about the ways that historical societies could be transformed - all these had led to the outbreak of the Revolution in the first place, the strange course that Revolutionary developments followed, and the effects of Revolutionary activities over the long run. It became imperative to rise above any impulse to interpret the historical record in the light of party prejudices, utopian expectations, or sentimental attachments to traditional institutions. In order to find one's way among the conflicting claims of the parties which took shape during and after the Revolution, it was necessary to locate some standpoint of social perception that was truly 'objective', truly 'realistic'. If social processes and structures seemed 'demonic' in their capacity to resist direction, to take turns unforeseen, and to overturn the highest plans, frustrating the most heartfelt desires, then the study of history had to be demythified. But in the thought of the age, demythification of any domain of inquiry tended to be equated with the defictionalization of that domain as well.

The distinction between myth and fiction which is a commonplace in the thought of our own century was hardly grasped at all by many of the foremost ideologues of the early nineteenth century. Thus it came about that history, the realistic science par excellence, was set over against fiction as the study of the real versus the study of the merely imaginable. Although Ranke had in mind that form of the novel which we have since come to call Romantic when he castigated it as mere fancy, he manifested a prejudice shared by many of his contemporaries when he defined history as the study of the real and the novel as the representation of the imaginary. Only a few theorists, among whom J. G. Droysen was the most prominent, saw that it was impossible to write history without having recourse to the techniques of the orator and the poet. Most of the 'scientific' historians of the age did not see that for every identifiable kind of novel, historians produced an equivalent kind of historical discourse. Romantic historiography produced its genius in Michelet, Realistic historiography its paradigm in Ranke himself, Symbolist historiography produced Burckhardt (who had more in common with Flaubert and Baudelaire than with

Ranke), and Modernist historiography its prototype in Spengler. It was no accident that the Realistic novel and Rankean historicism entered their respective crises at roughly the same time.

There were, in short, as many 'styles' of historical representation as there are discernible literary styles in the nineteenth century. This was not perceived by the historians of the nineteenth century because they were captives of the illusion that one could write history without employing any fictional techniques whatsoever. They continued to honor the conception of the opposition of history to fiction throughout the entire period, even while producing forms of historical discourse so different from one another that their grounding in aesthetic preconceptions of the nature of the historical process alone could explain those differences. Historians continued to believe that different interpretations of the same set of events were functions of ideological distortions or of inadequate factual data. They continued to believe that if one only eschewed ideology and remained true to the facts, history would produce a knowledge as certain as anything offered by the physical sciences and as objective as a mathematical exercise.

Most nineteenth-century historians did not realize that, when it is a matter of trying to deal with past facts, the crucial consideration for him who would represent them faithfully are the notions he brings to his representation of the ways parts relate to the whole which they comprise. They did not realize that the facts do not speak for themselves, but that the historian speaks for them, speaks on their behalf, and fashions the fragments of the past into a whole whose integrity is - in its representation - a purely discursive one. Novelists might be dealing only with imaginary events whereas historians are dealing with real ones, but the process of fusing events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality, capable of serving as the *object* of a representation is a poetic process. Here the historians must utilize precisely the same tropological strategies, the same modalities of representing relationships in words, that the poet or novelist uses. In the unprocessed historical record and in the chronicle of events which the historian extracts from the record, the facts exist only as a congeries of contiguously related fragments. These fragments have to be put together to make a whole of a particular, not a general, kind. And they are put together in the same ways that novelists use to put together figments of their imaginations to display an ordered world, a cosmos, where only disorder or chaos might appear.

So much for manifestoes. On what grounds can such a reactionary position be justified? On what grounds can the assertion that historical discourse shares more than it divides with novelistic discourse be sustained? The first ground is to be found in recent developments in literary theory - especially in the insistence by modern Structuralist and text critics on the necessity of dissolving the distinction between prose and poetry in order to identify their shared attributes as forms of linguistic behavior that are as much constitutive of their objects of representation as they are reflective of external reality, on the one side, and projective of internal emotional states, on the other. It appears that Stalin was right when he opined that language belonged neither to the superstructure nor the base of cultural praxis, but was, in some unspecified way, *prior to both*. We do not know the origin of language and never shall, but it is certain today that language is more adequately characterized as being neither a free creation of human consciousness nor merely a product of environmental forces acting on the psyche, but rather the *instrument of mediation* between the consciousness and the world that consciousness inhabits.

This will not be news to literary theorists, but it has not yet reached the historians buried in the archives hoping, by what they call a 'sifting of the facts' or 'the manipulation of the data', to *find* the form of the reality that will serve as the object of representation in the account that they will write when 'all the facts are known' and they have finally 'got the story straight'.

So, too, contemporary critical theory permits us to believe more confidently than ever before that 'poetizing' is not an activity that hovers over, transcends, or otherwise remains alienated from life or reality, but represents a mode of praxis which serves as the immediate base of all cultural activity (this an insight of Vico, Hegel, and Nietzsche, no less than of Freud and Lévi-Strauss), even of science itself. We are no longer compelled, therefore, to believe - as historians in the post-Romantic period had to believe - that fiction is the antithesis of fact (in the way that superstition or magic is the antithesis of science) or that we can relate facts to one another without the aid of some enabling and generically fictional matrix. This too would be news to many historians were they not so fetishistically enamored of the notion of 'facts' and so congenitally hostile to 'theory' in any form that the presence in a historical work of a formal theory used to explicate the relationship between facts and concepts is enough to earn them the charge of having defected to the despised sociology or of having lapsed into the nefarious philosophy of history.

Every discipline, I suppose, is, as Nietzsche saw most clearly, constituted by what it *forbids* its

practitioners to do. Every discipline is made up of a set of restrictions on thought and imagination, and none is more hedged about with taboos than professional historiography - so much so that the so-called 'historical method' consists of little more than the injunction to 'get the story straight' (without any notion of what the relation of 'story' to 'fact' might be) and to avoid both conceptual overdetermination and imaginative excess (i.e., 'enthusiasm') at any price.

Yet the price paid is a considerable one. It has resulted in the repression of the *conceptual apparatus* (without which atomic facts cannot be aggregated into complex macrostructures and constituted as objects of discursive representation in a historical narrative) and the remission of the *poetic moment* in historical writing to the interior of the discourse (where it functions as an unacknowledged - and therefore uncriticizable - *content* of the historical narrative).

Those historians who draw a firm line between history and philosophy of history fail to recognize that every historical discourse contains within it a full-blown, if only implicit, philosophy of history. And this is as true of what is conventionally called narrative (or diachronic) historiography as it is of conceptual (or synchronic) historical representation. The principal difference between history and philosophy of history is that the latter brings the conceptual apparatus by which the facts are ordered in the discourse to the surface of the text, while history proper (as it is called) buries it in the interior of the narrative, where it serves as a hidden or implicit shaping device, in precisely the same way that Professor [Northrop] Frye conceives his *archetypes* to do in narrative fictions. History does not, therefore, stand over against myth as its cognitive antithesis, but represents merely another, and more extreme form of that 'displacement' which Professor Frye has analyzed in his *Anatomy [of Criticism]* (1965). Every history has its myth; and if there are different fictional modes based on different identifiable mythical archetypes, so too there are different historiographical modes - different ways of hypotactically ordering the 'facts' contained in the chronicle of events occurring in a specific time-space location, such that events in the same set are capable of functioning differently in order to figure forth different *meanings* - moral, cognitive, or aesthetic - within different fictional matrices.

In fact, I would argue that these mythic modes are more easily identifiable in historiographical than they are in literary texts. For historians usually work with much less *linguistic* (and therefore less *poetic*) self-consciousness than writers of fiction do. They tend to treat language as a transparent vehicle of representation that brings no cognitive baggage of its own into the discourse. Great works of fiction will usually - if Roman Jakobson is right - not only be *about* their putative subject matter, but also *about* language itself and the problematical relation between language, consciousness, and reality - including the writer's own language. Most historians' concern with language extends only to the effort to speak plainly, to avoid florid figures of speech, to assure that the persona of the author appears nowhere identifiable in the text, and to make clear what technical terms mean, when they dare to use any.

This is not, of course, the case with the great philosophers of history - from Augustine, Machiavelli, and Vico to Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Croce, and Spengler. The problematical status of language (including their own linguistic protocols) constitutes a crucial element in their own *apparatus criticus*. And it is not the case with the great classic writers of historiography - from Thucydides and Tacitus to Michelet, Carlyle, Ranke, Droysen, Tocqueville, and Burckhardt. These historians at least had a rhetorical self-consciousness that permitted them to recognize that any set of facts was variously, and equally legitimately, describable, that there is no such thing as a single correct original description of anything, on the basis of which an interpretation of that thing can *subsequently* be brought to bear. They recognized, in short, that all original descriptions of any field of phenomena are *already* interpretations of its structure, and that the linguistic mode in which the original description (or taxonomy) of the field is cast will implicitly rule out certain modes of representation and modes of explanation regarding the field's structure and tacitly sanction others. In other words, the favored mode of original description of a field of historical phenomena (and this includes the field of literary texts) already contains implicitly a limited range of modes of emplotment and modes of argument by which to disclose the meaning of the field in a discursive prose representation. If, that is, the description is anything more than a random registering of impressions. The plot structure of a historical narrative (*how* things turned out as they did) and the formal argument or explanation of *why* things happened or turned out as they did are prefigured by the original description (of the 'facts' to be explained) in a given dominant modality of language use: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony.

Now, I want to make clear that I am myself using these terms as metaphors for the different ways we construe fields or sets of phenomena in order to 'work them up' into *possible objects of narrative*

representation and *discursive analysis*. Anyone who originally encodes the world in the mode of metaphor will be inclined to decode it - that is, narratively 'explicate' and discursively analyze it - as a congeries of individualities. To those for whom there is no real resemblance in the world, decodation must take the form of a disclosure, either of the simple *contiguity* of things (the mode of metonymy) or of the *contrast* that lies hidden within every apparent resemblance or unity (the mode of irony). In the first case, the narrative representation of the field, construed as a diachronic process, will favor as a privileged mode of emplotment the archetype of Romance and a mode of explanation that identifies knowledge with the appreciation and delineation of the particularity and individuality of things. In the second case, an original description of the field in the mode of metonymy will favor a tragic plot structure as a privileged mode of emplotment and mechanistic causal connection as the favored mode of explanation, to account for changes topographically outlined in the emplotment. So too an ironic original description of the field will generate a tendency to favor emplotment in the mode of satire and pragmatic or contextual explanation of the structures thus illuminated. Finally, to round out the list, fields originally described in the synecdochic mode will tend to generate comic emplotments and organicist explanations of why these fields change as they do.¹

Note, for example, that both those great narrative hulks produced by such classic historians as Michelet, Tocqueville, Burckhardt, and Ranke, on the one side, and the elegant synopses produced by philosophers of history such as Herder, Marx, Nietzsche, and Hegel, on the other, become more easily relatable one to the other if we see them as both victims and exploiters of the linguistic mode in which they originally describe a field of historical events *before* they apply their characteristic modalities of narrative representation and explanation, that is, their 'interpretations' of the field's 'meaning'. In addition, each of the linguistic modes, modes of emplotment, and modes of explanation has affinities with a specific ideological position: anarchist, radical, liberal, and conservative, respectively. The issue of ideology points to the fact that there is no value-neutral mode of emplotment, explanation, or even description of any field of events, whether imaginary or real, and suggests that the very use of language itself implies or entails a specific posture before the world which is ethical, ideological, or more generally political: not only all interpretation, but also all language is politically contaminated.

Now, in my view, any historian who simply described a set of facts in, let us say, metonymic terms and then went on to emplot its processes in the mode of tragedy and proceeded to explain those processes mechanistically, and finally drew explicit ideological implications from it - as most vulgar Marxists and materialistic determinists do - would not only not be very interesting but could legitimately be labelled a *doctrinaire* thinker who had 'bent the facts' to fit a preconceived theory. The peculiar dialectic of historical discourse - and of other forms of discursive prose as well, perhaps even the novel - comes from the effort of the author to mediate between alternative modes of emplotment and explanation, which means, finally, *mediating between alternative modes of language use or tropological strategies* for originally describing a given field of phenomena and constituting it as a possible object of representation. It is this sensitivity to alternative linguistic protocols, cast in the modes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, that distinguishes the great historians and philosophers of history from their less interesting counterparts among the technicians of these two crafts. This is what makes Tocqueville so much more interesting (and a source of so many different later thinkers) than either his contemporary, the doctrinaire Guizot, or most of his modern liberal or conservative followers, whose knowledge is greater than his and whose retrospective vision is more extensive but whose dialectical capacity is so much more weakly developed. Tocqueville writes about the French Revolution, but he writes even more meaningfully about the difficulty of ever attaining to a definitive *objective characterization* of the complex web of facts that comprise the Revolution as a graspable totality or structured whole. The contradiction, the *aporia*, at the heart of Tocqueville's discourse is born of his awareness that alternative, mutually exclusive, original descriptions of what the Revolution is are possible. He recognizes that *both* metonymical and synecdochic linguistic protocols can be used, equally legitimately, to describe the field of facts that comprise the 'Revolution' and to constitute it as a *possible object of historical discourse*. He moves feverishly between the two modes of original description testing both, trying to assign them to different mental sets or cultural types (what he means by a 'democratic' consciousness is a metonymic transcription of phenomena; 'aristocratic' consciousness is synecdochic). He himself is satisfied with neither mode, although he recognizes that each gives access to a specific aspect of reality and represents a possible way of apprehending it. His aim, ultimately, is to contrive a language capable of mediating between the two modes of consciousness which these linguistic modes represent. This aim of mediation, in turn, drives him progressively toward the ironic recognition that any given linguistic protocol will

¹ I have tried to exemplify at length each of these webs of relationships in given historians in my book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1973).

obscure as much as it reveals about the reality it seeks to capture in an order of words. This *aporia* or sense of contradiction residing at the heart of language itself is present in *all* of the classic historians. It is this linguistic self-consciousness which distinguishes them from their mundane counterparts and followers, who think that language can serve as a perfectly transparent medium of representation and who think that if one can only find the right language for describing events, the meaning of the events will *display itself* to consciousness.

This movement between alternative linguistic modes conceived as alternative descriptive protocols is, I would argue, a distinguishing feature of all of the great classics of the 'literature of fact'. Consider, for example, Darwin's *Origin of Species*,² a work which must rank as a classic in any list of the great monuments of this kind of literature. This work which, more than any other, desires to remain within the ambit of plain fact, is just as much about the problem of classification as it is about its ostensible subject matter, the data of natural history. This means that it deals with two problems: how are events to be described as possible elements of an argument; and what kind of argument do they add up to once they are so described?

Darwin claims to be concerned with a single, crucial question: 'Why are not all organic things linked together in inextricable chaos?' (p. 453). But he wishes to answer this question in particular terms. He does not wish to suggest, as many of his contemporaries held, that all systems of classification are arbitrary, that is, mere products of the minds of the classifiers; he insists that there is a *real* order in nature. On the other hand, he does not wish to regard this order as a product of some spiritual or teleological power. The order which he seeks in the data, then, must be manifest in the facts themselves but not manifested in such a way as to display the operations of any transcendental power. In order to establish this notion of nature's plan, he purports, first, simply to entertain 'objectively' all of the 'facts' of natural history provided by field naturalists, domestic breeders, and students of the geological record – in much the same way that the historian entertains the data provided by the archives. But this entertainment of the record is no simple reception of the facts; it is an entertainment of the facts with a view toward the discrediting of all previous taxonomic systems in which they have previously been encoded.

Like Kant before him, Darwin insists that the source of all error is semblance. Analogy, he says again and again, is always a 'deceitful guide' (see pp. 6i, 66, 473). As against analogy, or as I would say merely metaphorical characterizations of the facts, Darwin wishes to make a case for the existence of real 'affinities' genealogically construed. The establishment of these affinities will permit him to postulate the linkage of all living things to all others by the 'laws' or 'principles' of genealogical descent, variation, and natural selection. These laws and principles are the formal elements in his mechanistic explanation of why creatures are arranged in families in a time series. But this explanation could not be offered as long as the data remained encoded in the linguistic modes of either metaphor or synecdoche, the modes of qualitative connection. As long as creatures are classified in terms of either semblance or essential unity, the realm of organic things must remain either a chaos of arbitrarily affirmed connectedness or a hierarchy of higher and lower forms. Science as Darwin understood it, however, cannot deal in the categories of the 'higher' and 'lower' any more than it can deal in the categories of the 'normal' and 'monstrous'. Everything must be entertained as what it manifestly *seems to be*. Nothing can be regarded as 'surprising', any more than anything can be regarded as 'miraculous'.

There are many kinds of facts invoked in *The Origin of Species*: Darwin speaks of 'astonishing' facts (p. 301), 'remarkable' facts (p. 384), 'leading' facts (pp. 444, 447), 'unimportant' facts (p. 58), 'well-established' facts, even 'strange' facts (p. 105); but there are no 'surprising' facts. Everything, for Darwin no less than for Nietzsche, is just what it appears to be – but what things appear to be are data inscribed under the aspect of *mere contiguity in space* (all the facts gathered by naturalists all over the world) *and time* (the records of domestic breeders and the geological record). As the elements of a problem (or rather, of a puzzle, for Darwin is confident that there is a solution to his problem), the facts of natural history are conceived to exist in that mode of relationship which is presupposed in the operation of the linguistic trope of metonymy, which is the favored trope of all *modern* scientific discourse (this is one of the crucial distinctions between modern and premodern sciences). The substitution of the name of a part of a thing for the name of the whole is prelinguistically sanctioned by the importance which the scientific consciousness grants to mere contiguity. Considerations of *semblance* are tacitly retired in the employment of this trope, and so are considerations of *difference* and *contrast*. This is what gives to metonymic consciousness what Kenneth Burke calls its 'reductive' aspect. Things exist in contiguity

² References in the text to Darwin's *Origin of Species* are to the Dolphin Edition (New York: n.d.).

relationships that are only spatially and temporally definable. This metonymizing of the world, this preliminary encoding of the facts in terms of merely contiguous relationships, is necessary to the removal of metaphor and teleology from phenomena which every *modern* science seeks to effect. And Darwin spends the greater part of his book on the justification of this encodation, or original description, of reality, in order to discharge the errors and confusion which a *merely* metaphorical profile of it has produced.

But this is only a preliminary operation. Darwin then proceeds to restructure the facts - but *only along one axis* of the time-space grid on which he has originally deployed them. Instead of stressing the mere contiguity of the phenomena, he shifts gears, or rather tropological modes, and begins to concentrate on differences – but two kinds of differences: *variations within species*, on the one side, and *contrasts between the species*, on the other. 'Systematists,' he writes, '... have only to decide ... whether any form be sufficiently *constant* and *distinct* from other forms, to be capable of definition; and if definable, whether the differences be sufficiently important to deserve a specific name.' But the distinction between a species and a variety is only a matter of degree.

Hereafter we shall be compelled to acknowledge that the only distinction between species and well-marked varieties is, that the latter are known, or believed, to be connected at the present day by intermediate gradation, whereas *species* were formerly thus connected. Hence, without rejecting the consideration of the *present existence* of intermediate gradations between any two forms, we shall be led to weigh more carefully and to *value higher* the *actual amount of difference between them*. It is quite possible that forms now generally acknowledged to be merely varieties *may hereafter* be thought worthy of *specific names*; and in this case *scientific and common language will come into accordance*. In short, we shall have to treat species in the same manner as those naturalists treat genera, who admit that genera are merely artificial combinations made for convenience. This may not be a cheering prospect; but we shall at least be free from the vain search for the undiscovered and undiscoverable *essence* of the term species. (pp. 474–75 italics added)

And yet Darwin has smuggled in his own conception of the 'essence' of the term *species*. And he has done it by falling back on the geological record, which, following Lyell, he calls 'a history of the world imperfectly kept, ... written in a changing dialect' and of which 'we possess the last volume alone' (p. 331). Using this record, he postulates the descent of all species and varieties from some four or five prototypes governed by what he calls the 'rule' of 'gradual transition' (pp. 180ff.) or 'the great principle of gradation' (p. 251). *Difference* has been dissolved in the *mystery of transition*, such that *continuity-in-variation* is seen as the 'rule' and radical discontinuity or variation as an 'anomaly' (p. 33). But this 'mystery' of transition (see his highly tentative, confused, and truncated discussion of the possible 'modes of transition', pp. 179–82, 310) is nothing but the facts laid out on a time-line, rather than spatially disposed, and treated as a 'series' which is permitted to '*impress ... the mind with the idea of an actual passage*' (p. 66). All organic beings are then (gratuitously on the basis of both the facts and the theories available to Darwin) treated (metaphorically on the literal level of the text but synecdochically on the allegorical level) as belonging to families linked by genealogical descent (through the operation of variation and natural selection) from the postulated four or five prototypes. It is only his distaste for 'analogy', he tells us, that keeps him from going 'one step further, namely, to the belief that all plants and animals are descended from some one prototype' (p. 473). But he has approached as close to a doctrine of organic unity as his respect for the 'facts', in their original encodation in the mode of contiguity, will permit him to go. He has *transformed* 'the facts' from a structure of merely contiguously related particulars into a sublimated synecdoche. And this in order to put a new and more comforting (as well as, in his view, a more interesting and comprehensible) vision of nature in place of that of his vitalistic opponents.

The image which he finally offers - of an unbroken succession of generations - may have had a disquieting effect on his readers, inasmuch as it dissolved the distinction between both the 'higher' and 'lower' in nature (and by implication, therefore, in society) and the 'normal' and the 'monstrous' in life (and therefore in culture). But in Darwin's view, the new image of organic nature as an essential continuity of beings gave assurance that no 'cataclysm' had ever 'desolated the world' and permitted him to look forward to a 'secure future and progress toward perfection' (p. 477). For 'cataclysm' we can of course read 'revolution' and for 'secure future', 'social status quo'. But all of this is presented, not as image, but as plain fact. Darwin is ironic only with respect to those systems of classification that would ground 'reality' in fictions of which he does not approve. Darwin distinguishes between tropological codes that are 'responsible' to the data and those that are not. But the criterion of responsibility to the data is

not extrinsic to the operation by which the 'facts' are ordered in his initial description of them; this criterion is intrinsic to that operation.

As thus envisaged, even the *Origin of Species*, that *summa* of 'the literature of fact' of the nineteenth century, must be read as a kind of allegory - a history of nature meant to be understood literally but appealing ultimately to an image of coherency and orderliness which it constructs by linguistic 'turns' alone. And if this is true of the *Origin*, how much more true must it be of any history of human societies? In point of fact, historians have not agreed upon a terminological system for the description of the events which they wish to treat as facts and embed in their discourses as self-revealing data. Most historiographical disputes - among scholars of roughly equal erudition and intelligence - turn precisely on the matter of which among several linguistic protocols is to be used to *describe* the events under contention, not what explanatory system is to be applied to the events in order to reveal their meaning. Historians remain under the same illusion that had seized Darwin, the illusion that a value-neutral description of the facts, prior to their interpretation or analysis, is possible. It was not the doctrine of natural selection advanced by Darwin that commended him to other students of natural history as the Copernicus of natural history. That doctrine had been known and elaborated long before Darwin advanced it in the *Origin*. What had been required was a redescription of the facts to be explained in a language which would sanction the application to them of the doctrine as the most adequate way of explaining them.

And so too for historians seeking to 'explain' the 'facts' of the French Revolution, the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, the effects of slavery on American society, or the meaning of the Russian Revolution. What is at issue here is not 'What are the facts?' but rather, 'How are the facts to be described in order to sanction one mode of explaining them rather than another?' Some historians will insist that history cannot become a science until it finds the technical terminology adequate to the correct characterization of its objects of study, in the way that physics did in the calculus and chemistry did in the periodic tables. Such is the recommendation of Marxists, Positivists, Cliometricians, and so on. Others will continue to insist that the integrity of historiography depends on its use of ordinary language, its avoidance of jargon. These latter suppose that ordinary language is a safeguard against ideological deformations of the 'facts'. What they fail to recognize is that ordinary language itself has its own forms of terminological determinism, represented by the figures of speech without which discourse itself is impossible.

Mieke Bal : Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting

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It is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.

Karl Marx¹

In the same process that constructs the world as a view, man is constructed as subject.

Martin Heidegger²

When you leave fiction you rediscover fictions.

Jonathan Culler³

Narrative introduction

This paper comes from two directions, reflecting two major interests I have been pursuing for some time. The one concerns narrative as a discursive mode; the other, collecting. It seems to me that an integration of these two interests is worth the attempt, and the subject of this collection of essays the best opportunity I can imagine.

To begin with a narrative of my own: I have been working on narrative through the eras of structuralism and poststructuralism. In the beginning, I was interested in analysing literary narratives, and when my search for reliable tools was frustrated, I stepped aside to fix a few, develop some others, and construct one or two more. But I became dissatisfied, for a while, with what I had, or perhaps I lost interest in simply 'applying' those tools. A sense of purpose was lacking. As soon as I understood how narrative was made, I wanted to know how it functioned. Thus I got caught in the question of how narrative functions socially, ideologically, historically; how it changes and what people do to make it change, and to what purpose. All along, the question of what kinds of texts can be called narrative, what makes a narrative special, was part of what I was trying to understand.

Although there are many aspects to narrative, the one I was most fascinated by is the interplay between subjectivity and the cultural basis of understanding, whether you call it objectivity or intersubjectivity. Not that these two concepts are identical, of course; but they both claim to cover the status of things *outside* the individual subject. This is, of course, the paradoxical status of all art and literature, of all cultural expressions. On the one hand, both in the production and in the reception, subjectivity is the bottom line. Yet, the object produced and interpreted must be accessible, materially (objectively) and discursively (semiotically, *qua* meaning that is). Cultural objects must signify through common codes, conventions of meaning-making that both producer and reader understand. That is why they have to be inter-subjectively accessible. A culture consists of the people who share enough of these conventions to exchange their views (inter-subjectively), so that making cultural artefacts is worth some subject's while.

Here lies my particular fascination with narrative - and, as I will bring up later, with collecting. In narrative, I discovered, this paradoxical situation is doubled up. Objectively, narratives exist as texts, printed and made accessible; at the same time, they are subjectively produced by writer and reader. Analogously, the discursive mode of narrative feeds on this paradox. They are ostentatiously 'objective': in terms of speech-act theory,⁴ narratives are *constative* texts: like affirmative sentences, they make a statement - describing situations and events, characters and objects, places and atmospheres. Like

¹ *Capital*, I, p. 72, cited in W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Language, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1986), p. 189.

² 'The Age of the World View', *Measure*, 2, pp. 269-84, cited in E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London, 1992), p. 82

³ *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (London, 1988), p. 203

⁴ Speech-act theory considers language from the angle of its effectivity. It was first developed by J. L. Austin, and set out in his posthumously published *How to Do Things With Words* (1962). Austin proposes a distinction between utterances that are constative, informative, and those that are performative - that have no meaning other than the act they, in fact, *are* (like promising). When you say 'I promise', you *do* it; that is the only meaning the verb has.

newspaper reports - a narrative genre - all narratives sustain the claim that 'facts' are being put on the table. Yet all narratives are not only told by a narrative agent, the narrator, who is the linguistic subject of utterance; the report given by that narrator is also, inevitably, focused by a subjective point of view, an agent of vision whose view of the events will influence our interpretation of them. In my previous works I have given this subjective presence in narratives the name of *focalisor*, and the activity in question, *focalisation*.⁵ In many analyses of narratives I have since been engaged in, this concept turned out to be crucial for insight into the tension between socially accessible objecthood and the characteristic subjectivity of narratives. This makes all narratives by definition more or less fictional; or, conversely, it makes fictionality a matter of degree.⁶

Narratives fascinate me because of this dual ambiguity that makes them almost exasperatingly difficult to understand; a difficulty that is at odds with the widespread use of this mode. Not only are the large majority of verbal texts narrative, it is also obvious that verbal texts are not the only objects capable of conveying a narrative. Language is just one medium, perhaps the most conspicuous one, in which narratives can be constructed. Images, as the tradition of history painting demonstrates, can do so as well, not to speak of mixed media like film, opera and comic strips. I began to wonder if the exclusive focus on language in the study of narrative didn't limit the range of observations in a somewhat arbitrary way. But here as with the subjectivity question, one way of exploring the impact of such doubt is to take an apparently extreme counter-example, and see if that is the exception that *breaks* the rule. While stretching the concept beyond its confining force, one must also ask the question: how far can you go? What if the medium consists of real, hard material objects? Things, called objects for a good reason, appear to be the most 'pure' form of objectivity. So examining the question of the inherent fictionality of all narratives can as well begin here. In other words, can things be, or tell, stories? Objects as subjectivised elements in a narrative: this possibility adds a third level to the duality of narrative's paradox.

From the other direction comes a totally private interest in collecting. Not necessarily in collections, but in what might be called the collector's mind-set, or the collecting attitude. Whereas it is virtually impossible to define collecting, and, narratively speaking, to mark where that activity begins, a collecting attitude is unmistakable and distinct. Yet, definitions of collecting tend to be irremediably fuzzy. Thus Susan M. Pearce's useful textbook for museum studies, *Museums, Objects and Collections* (1992), defines collecting through a definition of museum collections, which 'are made up of objects' that 'come to us from the past', and which have been assembled with intention by someone 'who believed that the whole was somehow more than the sum of its parts'.⁷ If, we take the 'past' element loosely, as I think we must, as loosely as the existence of museums of contemporary art and of contemporary 'exotica' forces us to take it, this definition appears to hold equally for interior decorating, the composition of a wardrobe, and subscribing to a journal or book series, even for finishing reading a book. Starting an inquiry with a definition of its subject-matter inevitably leads to frustration: either the definition is too narrow and doesn't cover the whole range of its objects; or it is so broad that a lot of other things are covered by it too. But perhaps - and here my private interest joins the academic one - these attempts at a priori definition are themselves contingent on a view of knowledge that is ultimately at stake in the problem of collecting. As enigmatic as this may sound, knowledge that begins with definitions is very much like knowledge based on collections and classifications of objects.

If one begins reflecting on collecting in a narrative mode, it is equally hard to say when collecting begins to be collecting, as opposed to, say, buying a thing or two. If you buy a vase, and you then come upon a similar one, you can buy the second one because it matches the first one so nicely. That doesn't make you a collector, not yet. Even when you buy six vases, in different sizes but in matching colour and similar in material, style and historical provenance, you can still argue that you need six different sizes to accommodate the different lengths flowers come in, and you like the matching for the harmony it provides within the house. As someone who lacks the collecting spirit, that is how far I would go myself. But my friend who has the spirit in him pushed on after vase number six, and now he has 50, all beautiful, undamaged period pieces of roughly the same style, and the flower justification doesn't work any more. He doesn't need any justification, because one day he happily found himself a collector. Since then, I have kept an eye on his buying behaviour in general. I see it happening much earlier now, when

⁵ My theory of narrative can be found in M. Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, 1992). For discussions with other narrative theories, see M. Bal, *On Story-telling: Essays in Narratology* (Sonoma, Calif., 1991).

⁶ This conclusion is reached through different routes by historiographers like Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973); idem, 'Interpretation in History', *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 51-80.

⁷ S. M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester and London, 1992).

he starts to collect some new 'series' of objects - a special kind of moulded plastic box, cheap little things; or baskets, or books in first impressions, or bits of stained-glass windows. Sometimes I can see the attraction, and shyly go for an item for a collector's reason myself, but so far it hasn't really happened to me in any serious way.

If I try to integrate my professional interest in narrative with that private one in collecting, I can imagine seeing collecting as a process consisting of the confrontation between objects and subjective agency informed by an attitude. Objects, subjective *agency*, confrontations as events: such a working definition makes for a narrative, and enables me to discuss and interpret the meaning of collecting in narrative terms. Perhaps it can bring to light aspects of the topic that tend to be overlooked. This, then, will be my particular focus on the subject in this essay. I will discuss collecting as a narrative; not as a process about which a narrative can be told, but as itself a narrative.

Collecting as a narrative

Briefly put, I need the following concepts to discuss narrative, in the subject-oriented sense in which I choose to consider it. I understand narrative to be an account in any semiotic system in which a subjectively focalised sequence of events is presented and communicated. A few terms need clarification here. The sequence of events, brought about and undergone by agents, is the *fabula*, more commonly called plot; the agents - subjects of action - on this level are called *actors*. As I said earlier, the subjectivisation is called focalisation and its agents, focalisers. The subjectivised plot is called *story*: it is what is being told in signs - words, gestures, images or objects - that others can understand. The semiotic subject producing or uttering that account is called the *narrator*. The distinction between focaliser and narrator is necessary because a narrator is able to subsume and present the subjective view of another, as in 'I felt her quiver at the sight of her nerve-wrecking father', where the first-person narrator renders in the compound *nerve-wrecking* the subjectified vision of the other person. This split between narrator and focaliser can even accumulate in several degrees, as in 'He saw that she realized he had noticed that she was aware of the lipstick on his collar.'

According to Aristotle, Western cultural history's first narratologist, a *fabula* has a beginning, a middle and an end. The story, precisely, manipulates that order, as when it reverses beginning and middle in the structure called *in medias res*, and the possibility of such manipulations is the very characteristic feature of narrative. More often than not, chronology is mixed up in narrative. To consider collecting as a narrative makes us focus, precisely, on the non-obviousness of chronology. So, our first inquiry might be: where does it all begin?

Beginnings: many

Looking back at the story of my friend's vase collection, it is noticeable that the beginning is exactly what is lacking. One object must have been the first to be acquired, but then, when it was first it was not being collected - merely purchased, given or found, and kept because it was especially gratifying. In relation to the plot of collecting, the initial event is arbitrary, contingent, accidental. What makes this beginning a specifically narrative one is precisely that. Only retrospectively, through a narrative manipulation of the sequence of events, can the accidental acquisition of the first object *become* the beginning of a collection. In the plot it is pre-historic, in the story it intervenes *in medias res*. The beginning, instead, is a meaning, not an act. Collecting comes to mean collecting precisely when a series of haphazard purchases or gifts suddenly becomes a meaningful sequence. That is the moment when a selfconscious narrator begins to 'tell' its story, bringing about a semiotics for a narrative of identity, history, and situation. Hence, one can also look at it from the perspective of the collector as agent in this narrative. Would that make it easier to pinpoint the beginning? I think not. Even when a person knows him- or herself to have the collector's mind-set, the category of objects that will fall under the spell of that attitude cannot be foreseen. The individual one day becomes aware of the presence of an eagerness that can only be realised *after* it has developed far enough to become noticeable. Initial blindness is even a precondition for that eagerness to be developed, hidden from any internalized ethical, financial or political censorship. It is of the nature of eagerness to be accumulative, and again, only retrospectively can it be seen. Stories of collecting begin by initial blindness - by visual lack. So this beginning, too, is of a narrative nature.

Between the object and the collector stands the question of motivation, the 'motor' of the narrative. Just as Peter Brooks asked the pertinent question, 'What, in a narrative, makes us read on?'⁸ – so we may ask what, in this virtual narrative, makes one pursue the potential collection? Motivation is what makes the collector 'collect on', hence, collect at all. Most museologists have that question at the forefront of their inquiry, and in a moment I will survey some of their answers. From the narratological perspective of this essay, the question of motivation underlies the unclear beginning, the false start. This question is called to replace, or repress, that other beginning, which is that of the object itself *before* it became an object of collecting. Motivation is, then, both another narrative aspect of collecting and its intrinsically ungraspable beginning.

When we look at explanations of motivation, however, articulation of understanding recedes and yields to another narrative. Pearce begins her discussion of motivation with yet another beginning:

The emotional relationship of projection and internalization which we have with objects seems to belong with our very earliest experience and (probably therefore) remains important to us all our lives. Equally, this line of thought brings us back to the intrinsic link between our understanding of our own bodies and the imaginative construction of the material world ...⁹

This view is part and parcel of the story of origins of psychic life as constructed by psychoanalysis, in particular the British branch of object-relations theory.¹⁰ Although I cannot go into this theory and its specifically narrative slant here,¹¹ the unspoken assumption of this quotation is directly indebted to that theory, and therefore deserves mentioning: the desire to collect is, if not innate, at least inherent in the human subject from childhood on. This type of explanation partakes of a narrative bias that, in its popular uses, both explains and excuses adult behaviour.

From motivation in childhood Pearce moves to phenomenologically defined essential humanness – and storytelling is again an indispensable ingredient:

The potential inwardness of objects is one of their most powerful characteristics, ambiguous and elusive though it may be. Objects hang before the eyes of the imagination, continuously re-presenting ourselves to ourselves, and telling the stories of our lives in ways which would be impossible otherwise.¹²

According to this statement, collecting is an essential human feature that originates in the need to tell stories, but for which there are neither words nor other conventional narrative modes. Hence, collecting is a story, and everyone needs to tell it. Yet, it is obvious that not every human being is, or can afford to be, a collector. The essentialising gesture obscures the class privilege that is thereby projected on the human species as a whole. From this doubly narrative perspective, Pearce goes on to discuss as many as sixteen possible motivations. It is worth listing these, for the list is significant in itself, and each motivation mentioned implies a story in which it unfolds: leisure, aesthetics, competition, risk, fantasy, a sense of community, prestige, domination, sensual gratification, sexual foreplay, desire to reframe objects, the pleasing rhythm of sameness and difference, ambition to achieve perfection, extending the self, reaffirming the body, producing gender-identity, achieving immortality. Most of these motivations have a sharply political edge to them, and the more difficult they are to define, the less innocent they appear when one tries. Thus the aesthetic impulse, probably the most commonly alleged motivation and the least obviously political one, is defined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in terms that are both tautological and political-utopian:

The aesthetic disposition, a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function, can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves.¹³

In other words, you can only bracket off practical ends if you truly do so, and to have this disposition (or

⁸ P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York, 1984).

⁹ Pearce, op. cit., p. 47

¹⁰ Represented primarily by Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-analysis of Children* (New York, 1975), and by D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London, 1980)

¹¹ But for the persistent carry-over between explicating articulation and explanations of origin in psychoanalysis, see T. Pavel, 'Origin and Articulation: Comments on the Papers by Peter Brooks and Lucienne Frappier-Mazur', *Style*, XVIII (1984), pp. 355-68.

¹² Pearce, op. cit., p. 47.

¹³ Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), p. 54, cited in Pearce, op. cit., p. 50.

'capacity!') you need to be rich - so rich, that the rest of the world hardly matters. The means are projected first as disposition, then as capacity: I recognise again the essentializing move that defines humanness through an extension of a feature of one privileged group.

Pearce's list is both troubling and compelling. What makes the list so compelling is the sense of increasing urgency in the 'collecting drive', from relative luxuries like aesthetics to needs as 'deep' as extending body limits, constructing gender identity, and, climactically in the final position, achieving immortality. The trouble with the list, however, is its character as list, the enumeration of what thereby appear to be different motivations, none of them explicitly political. Discussed one by one, each motivation is neutralised by its insertion in this mixed list. But the paradigmatic character of this presentation conflicts with the implicit systematic, which appears when the items are ordered differently. The desire for domination, inconspicuously mentioned somewhere in the middle of the list, might receive more emphasis were the list to be turned into a coherent set of aspects of the same impulse, connected, that is, with the construction of gender identity, the achievement of sexual gratification, and the divine - or childish - desire for immortality, to mention only the most obvious ones. Underlying most of these motivations, I would suggest, is another kind of developmental narrative, that of the many strands, developments and framings of a concept capable of connecting them all: fetishism.

This missing term is the one that has a long tradition of connecting the psychoanalytic narrative explanation to the Marxist-political critique. Yet fetishism conflates and sums up the large majority of the motivations in Pearce's list. To help get this concept and its implications for the beginning of collecting as a narrative into focus, let us turn to James Clifford's seminal essay, 'On Collecting Art and Culture'.¹⁴ In answer to the question 'Why do we collect?', the question that enmeshes explanation and origin, articulating the one through narration of the other, Clifford qualifies a certain form of collecting as typical of the Western world:

In the West, however, collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity.¹⁵

And Clifford goes on to explore the relevant aspects of that particular collecting attitude. Such an attitude, then, is predicated on a particular view of subject-object relations as based on domination. The separation between subject and object this entails makes it impossible for a subject, caught in the individualism characteristic of that separation, to be part of, or even fully engage with, a group. To the extent that this is a cultural feature, one cannot simply escape it; the most one can do is 'make it strange', make it lose its self-evident universality.¹⁶

This merciless separation between subject and object makes for an incurable loneliness that, in turn, impels the subject to gather things, in order to surround him- or herself with a subject-domain that is not-other. Small children do this, collecting gravel, sticks, the odd pieces that grown-ups call junk but which, for the child, has no quality other than constituting an extension of the self, called for to remedy the sense of being cut-off. Adults are likely to disavow the similarity between their own forms of collecting and this childish gathering: they would rather claim that the collection makes their environment more 'interesting'; but 'interesting' is a catch-phrase destined to obscure more specific *interests* in the stronger sense of German critical philosophy.¹⁷ This stronger sense of *interests* becomes painfully obvious when, as tends to be the case, the object of gathering is 'the other'. For then, objects of cultural alterity must be made 'not-other'. Clearly, the act of collecting then becomes a form of subordination, appropriation, de-personification.

This process of meaning-production is paradoxical. The 'not-other' objectsto-be must first be made to become 'absolute other' so as to be possessible to all.¹⁸ This is done by cutting objects off from their context. It is relevant to notice that the desire to extend the limits of the self - to appropriate, through 'de-othering' - is already entwined with a need to dominate, which in turn depends on a further 'alterisation'

¹⁴ Clifford, 'On Collecting Art and Culture', *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), pp. 215-51.

¹⁵ Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

¹⁶ This was the purpose of my analysis of a few rooms of the American Museum of Natural History, published as 'Telling, Showing, Showing Off', *Critical Inquiry*, XVIII/3 (1992), pp. 556-94.

¹⁷ For a good, succinct discussion of this concept of interest, see R. Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 45-54, and, of course, Habermas's own seminal book *Knowledge and Human Interest* (London, 1972)

¹⁸ To clarify the issue, I am radicalizing Clifford's argument slightly.

of alterity. This paradoxical move, I will argue, is precisely the defining feature of fetishism in all senses of the term.

In Clifford's analysis, collecting defines subjectivity in an institutional practice, a definition he qualifies, with Baudrillard, as both essential and imaginary: 'as essential as dreams'.¹⁹ Essential, but not universal; rather, this particular need is for him an essential aspect of being a member of a culture that values possessions, a qualification that might need further qualification according to class and gender. And it is imaginary to the extent that it partakes of the formation of subjectivity in the unconscious, which is itself the product of the collision and the collusion of imaginary and symbolic orders. Deceptively, collections, especially when publicly accessible, appear to 'reach out', but through this complex and half-hidden aspect they in fact 'reach in', helping the collector - and, to a certain extent, the viewer - to develop their sense of self while providing them with an ethical or educational alibi.

Beginnings: one

With this reflection as background it becomes easier to understand the narrative nature of fetishism as a crucial motivation for collecting. The literature on fetishism is immense; I will limit myself here to the common ground between the three most directly relevant domains: psychoanalysis, social theory - say, in the guise of Marxist analysis - and visuality. As for the anthropological concept of fetishism, it will be conceived here as largely a Western projection, and as such integrated in both Freudian and Marxist views. Psychoanalytically speaking, fetishism is a strong, mostly eroticised attachment to a single object or category. As is invariably the case in this discipline, that attachment is explained through a story of origin - the perception, crucially visual, of women's lack - and of semiotic behaviour.

It is a story that has been told and retold.²⁰ The child 'seeing in a flash' that the mother has no penis, identifies with this shocking sight in a first metaphorical transfer of 'absence of penis' to 'fundamental, existential lack', and acts on it. This negative 'presence' in the mother, because of its negativity, can only be the product of symbolisation; visual as the experience is, there is nothing objective about vision. 'Lack' is not the object seen, but the supplement provided by the seeing subject. If this negative vision is as crucial in the formation of subjectivity as it appears to be in Freudian theory, I wish to emphasise the crucial negativity of vision it implies. Vision, then, is both bound up with gender formation and with semiotic behaviour; it is an act of interpretation, of construction out of nothingness. If the penis must have this founding status, so be it. But then, it is not the member that makes members of the ruling class, but its absence that is the foundation of vision as a basically negative, gendered, act of fictionalisation.

The child denies the absence in a second act of symbolisation. This time, he denies the negativity. Superposing fiction upon fiction, the absence becomes presence, and the child is back to square one in more than one sense. Later on, the fixation of this denial results in the displacement of the absent penis onto some other element of the body, which must then be eroticized for the grown-up child to become fetishistic. This constitutes the third act of symbolization. This other element of the body - this object that must become the paradigm of objectivity: semiotically invested objecthood - is subjected to a complex rhetorical strategy. In this strategy three tropes contribute to the perversion of meaning: *synecdoche*, the figure where a part comes to stand for the whole from which it was taken; *metonymy*, where one thing stands for another adjacent to it in place, time or logic; and *metaphor*, where one thing stands for another on the basis of similarity, that is, something both have in common.

Examples of these tropes in general use are well known. A sail stands for a sailboat as a synecdoche: it is part of what it signifies. Smoke stands for fire as a metonymy: it is contiguous to fire, both in space, since you see the smoke above the fire, and in time, since it develops out of the fire; and even in logic, as is suggested in the expression 'no smoke without fire'. A rose stands for love as a metaphor: both rose and love are transient, beautiful, and have the potential to hurt. These rhetorical strategies work as follows in the structure of fetishism. First, the substitute for the penis is synecdochically taken to stand for the whole body of which it is a part, through synecdoche: a foot can become eroticised in this way, for example, or 'a shine on the nose', as in Freud's case history of the English governess 'Miss Lucy R'. in

¹⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Le Système des objets* (Paris, 1968), p. 135; Clifford, op. cit., p. 220.

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes' (1925), in J. Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, XXI (London, 1963), pp. 149-57; Otto Fenichel, 'Fetishism', in *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (London, 1936), pp. 341-51

Studies in Hysteria (1895). Or the substitute can be valued as contiguous to the body, through metonymy: for example, a fur coat, stockings, or a golden chain. But second, the whole is defined, in its wholeness, by the presence of a single part that is in turn a synecdoche for wholeness, the penis whose absence is denied. In another world this body-part might not have the meaning of wholeness, and therefore of the lack 'we' assign to it. But, if taken synecdochically, the penis can only represent masculinity, whereas the object of fetishism in this story is the woman's body, essentially the mother's. Hence, metaphor intervenes at this other end of the process, in other words, the representation of one thing through another with which it has something in common. The wholeness of the female body can only be synecdochically represented by the stand-in penis that is the fetish, if that body is simultaneously to be metaphorically represented by the male body.²¹

Note that this entire rhetorical machine, which puts the female subject safely at several removes, is set in motion by a *visual* experience.²² This multiple removal allows us to get a first glimpse of the violence involved in this story, which might well become a classic horror story. I contend that it is this intrinsic violence that connects this Freudian concept of fetishism with the Marxian one, at least, as the latter has been analysed by W. J. T. Mitchell in his seminal study of discourses on word and image distinctions.²³

Mitchell compares and confronts Marx's uses of the terms *ideology*, with its visual and semiotic roots, *commodity* and *fetish*, and brings to the fore a number of fascinating tensions in those uses. Fetish, Mitchell reminds us, is the specifically concrete term Marx used in order to refer to commodities, a strikingly forceful choice, especially when one considers it against the background of the developments in anthropology at the time. 'Part of this force is rhetorical,' Mitchell states:

The figure of 'commodity fetishism' (*der Fetischcharacter der Ware*) is a kind of catachresis, a violent yoking of the most primitive, exotic, irrational, degraded objects of human value with the most modern, ordinary, rational, and civilized.²⁴

The anthropological notion of the fetish is clearly needed for the rhetorical purpose of this contrast in the well-known process of radical 'othering' of other cultural practices - which is why it seems inappropriate even to bring it in as anything other than this Western projection. Mitchell pursues this rhetorical analysis of the concept in a footnote that is worth quoting in full:

The translation of *Ware* by the term 'commodities' loses some of the connotations of commonness and ordinariness one senses in the German. But the etymology of 'commodities', with its associations of fitness, proportion, and rational convenience (cf. 'commodious') sustains the *violence* of Marx's figure, as does the obvious tension between the sacred and the secular. The origin of the word 'fetish', on the other hand (literally, a 'made object') tends to sustain the propriety of the comparison, insofar as both commodities and fetishes are products of human labor.²⁵

The violence, both in the Freudian and in the Marxian conception of fetishism, is brought to light through rhetorical analysis, and consists of multiple degrees of *detachment*.

In both cases, it is also through the *visual* nature of the event (Freud) or object (Marx) respectively that this violence is necessary. Mitchell's analysis of the way the visual metaphor functions in Marx's cluster of concepts - ideology, commodity, fetish - convincingly demonstrates how crucial this visuality is for Marx's rhetoric. For my purposes the insistence on vision of both Marx and Freud in their accounts of the (narrative) emergence of fetishism and of fetishism's essence, respectively, matters primarily because of the paradoxical subjectivation of objects that is the intrinsic other side of the objectification of subjectivity described in these theories. What gives visuality its central relevance is the deceptiveness of its objectivity. Vision is by no means more reliable, or literal, than perception through the other senses; on the contrary, it is a semiotic activity of an inherently rhetorical kind. The violence Mitchell points out is not due to the rhetoric itself, but to the need to obscure it.

²¹ For a feminist critique of fetishism, see Naomi Schor, 'Salammbô Bound', in *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory and French Realist Fiction* (New York, 1985), pp. 111-26; and for a feminist reflection on female fetishism, idem, 'Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand', in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. S. Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), pp. 363-72

²² For a more extensive analysis of the intimate - and narrative - connections between psychoanalysis and visuality, see 'Blindness or Insight? Psychoanalysis and Visual Art' in M. Bal, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (New York, 1991), pp 286-325.

²³ Mitchell, op. cit., pp. 160-208, esp. p. 191.

²⁴ Mitchell, op. cit., p. 191.

²⁵ Ibid.

This paradox enables Slavoj Žižek to push this subject-constructing power of objects one step further, and to come up, not with a Marxian Freud, but with a Lacanian Marx. In his discussion of ideology he writes:

we have established a new way to read the Marxian formula 'they do not know it, but they are doing it': the illusion is not on the side of knowledge, it is already on the side of reality itself, of what the people are doing. What they do not know is that their social reality itself, their activity, is guided by an illusion, by a fetishistic inversion.²⁶

And a little further on he 'translates' this relational social reality onto the objects that are positioned in it. Putting it as strongly as he can, Žižek writes:

The point of Marx's analysis, however, is that *the things (commodities) themselves believe in their place*, instead of the subjects; it is as if all their beliefs, superstitions and metaphysical mystifications, supposedly surmounted by the rational, utilitarian personality, are embodied in the 'social relations between things'. They no longer believe, *but the things themselves believe for them*.²⁷

Žižek goes on to argue that this is a Lacanian view to the extent that it is a conception of belief as 'radically exterior, embodied in the practical, effective procedure of people'.²⁸ The function of ideology – Žižek's concern here – is, then, like the junk accumulated by the child, or the objects collected by our hero the collector: 'not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel'.²⁹

There is no point in pushing the similarity between Marx and Freud too far, however. On the contrary, the concept of fetishism needs to be rigorously reinstated in its full ambiguity as *a hybrid*. True, both appear to be not only fixating on the visual aspect of fetishism, but also in its wake on the twisted relation between subject and object to the extent that, for Lacan, they can change places. They both articulate these aspects in a narrative of origin where vision as both positive knowledge and perverting subjectivity constitutes the core event. Yet, it is in the plot of their respective narratives that their crucial difference lies. Freud's story is that of individual development, of the little boy growing up with the burden of his early negative mis-vision. Marx's story is the grand narrative of History. In both cases, there is a discrepancy between the narrator and the focalisor. The narrator 'tells' his story in a non-verbal way, the Freudian subject by acting out his erotic fetishism, the Marxian subject by living his historical role, including the acquisition of commodities, perhaps in the mode of collecting. For Freud, the narrator is an adult male agent, for Marx, the historical agent. This narrator is by necessity stuck with a double vision, embedding the focalisation of adult and child, of lucid agent and deceived idolator, indistinguishably. Freud's focalisor has fully endorsed the doubly negative vision of the child, including the remedial denial and the fetishistic displacement. Marx's focalisor is a selfconscious agent standing within the historical process and endorsing as well as denouncing false consciousness and the idols of the mind.³⁰ Far from demystifying commodity fetishism from a transcendental position outside history, Marx turns commodities themselves into figurative, allegorical entities, 'possessed of a mysterious life and aura'.³¹ The self-evident acceptance of motivations listed by Pearce is an acknowledgement of the inevitability of this double focalisor.

If this double focalisor can be retained as the most central feature of fetishism in both Freud's and Marx's sense, and, in turn, this double-edged fetishism as a crucial element of motivation, then it becomes easier to see, not the self-evidence but the inevitability of the impulse to collect within a cultural situation that is itself hybridic: a mixture of capitalism and individualism enmeshed with alternative modes of historical and psycho-logical existence. In other words, rather than presenting that impulse through a list of independently possible motivations that sound innocent, collecting must become, through an analysis of its complex of motivations, a true *problematic*. A problematic is a complex epistemological problem that is at the same time a political hybrid; it is neither dismissible as simply ethically objectionable, subject to the moralism that sustains liberalism, nor is it ethically indifferent and politically irrelevant. In contrast, the hybrid notion of fetishism, able to account for the entanglement of agency in a political *and*

²⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, 1989), p. 32.

²⁷ Žižek, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45

³⁰ Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

individual history, should be assigned its rightful - because productive - place as the *beginning* of the beginning of collecting seen as narrative. This is why there is no unambiguous beginning. For its very search is bound up with, as Naomi Schor put it in her interpretation of a broken gold chain in Flaubert's *Salammbô*: the 'original and intimate relationship that links the fetish and the shiny, the undecidable and the ornamental'.³² Collecting fits this bill more than nicely.

Middle

Aristotle wasn't stating the obvious when he insisted that narratives also have a middle. For whereas the beginning is by definition elusive, it is the development of the plot that is the most recognizable characteristic of a narrative. The retrospective fallacy that alone enabled the speculative beginning is itself the *res* in whose middle the structure of *in medias res* takes shape; the beginning is the middle, and it is constituted as beginning only to mark the boundaries of the narrative once the latter is called into being. Conversely, once a beginning is established, it becomes easier to perceive the development of the plot of collecting. Again, one can focus on either the objects or the collector as narrative agents, and again, their stories do not converge. The objects are radically deprived of any function they might possibly have outside of being collected items. According to an early theorist of collecting, this deprivation is so fundamental as to change the nature of the objects:

If the *predominant* value of an object or idea for the person possessing it is intrinsic, i.e., if it is valued primarily for use, or purpose, or aesthetically pleasing quality, or other value inherent in the object or accruing to it by whatever circumstances of custom, training, or habit, it is not a collection. If the predominant value is representative or representational, i.e., if said object or idea is valued chiefly for the relation it bears to some other object or idea, or objects, or ideas, such as being one of a series, part of a whole, a specimen of a class, then it is the subject of a collection.³³

If this change in the nature of the object is not taken as an articulation of a definition but as an event, it might be illuminating to see this event of deprivation as the core of collecting as itself a narrative, particularly as such a change in nature is a *narrator's* decision. Note the strikingly modern semiotic vocabulary employed: objects are inserted into the narrative perspective when their status is turned from objective to semiotic, from thing to sign, from collapse to separation of thing and meaning, or from presence to absence. The object is turned away, abducted, from itself, its inherent value, and denuded of its defining function so as to be available for use as a sign. I use the words 'abducted' and 'denuded' purposefully; they suggest that the violence done to the objects might have a gendered quality. This will become more explicit below.

The new meaning assigned to the object, Durost suggests, is determined by the syntagmatic relations it enters into with other objects. These relations may be synecdochic ('part of a whole', 'one of a series') or metonymic ('valued chiefly for the relation it bears to some other object or idea'). But this relation is also always metaphoric ('a specimen of a class'): the object can only be *made* to be representative when it is made representational, standing for other objects with which it has this representational capacity in common. This insertion, by means of rhetoric, of objects defined by objecthood into a syntagm of signs is the body of the narrative that emerges when we choose to consider collecting so. Violence is done to the objects in each episode of collecting, each event of insertion that is also an act of deprivation. This is not a one-time act, for meaning changes as the collection as a whole changes. As the narrative develops, each object already inserted is modified anew.

This narrative development can perhaps be made clearer through apparent counter-examples. Aberrant plots like single-object collections, aborted collections, as well as anti-collecting - the accumulation of objects *not* related - demonstrate the plotted nature of collecting conceived through the objects. Another way to emphasise this aspect of collecting is the frequently occurring change in the ordering of an extant collection, or a number of different collections whose intersections are reorganised. A striking example of this re-plotting is provided by Debora J. Meijers's analysis of the new organisation by Christian von Mechel around 1780 of the Habsburg painting collection.³⁴

Whereas the objects in the collection remained virtually the same, the collection itself was set up in such a different way, conveying, through this re-plotting, such a different conception - not only of this

³² Schor, *Salammbô Bound*, p. 119.

³³ W. Durost, *Children's Collecting Activity Related to Social Factors* (New York, 1932), p. 10; cited in Pearce, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

³⁴ D. J. Meijers, *Kunst als natuur: De Habsburgse schilderijengalerij in Wenen omstreeks 1780* (Amsterdam, 1991).

particular collection but of collecting itself as a mode of knowledge production - that Meijers is able to argue for an epistemic break as the meaning-producing agency. In terms of the present discussion, the objects as things remained the same, but the objects *as signs* became radically different, since they were inserted into a different syntagm. The act of insertion, accompanied by the act of deprivation of objecthood as well as of previous meanings, propels the plot forward as it constitutes the development of the narrative. In spite of the anti-narrative synchronicity of Meijers's Foucaultian perspective, in which the two epistemes, before and after the break, are compared in their static epistemological make-up, the dynamic 'life' of the objects during the process of their insertion into a collection clearly stands out in her analysis.

Considering the collector as a narrative agent, the motivation itself is subjected to the development of plot. Unlike the suggestion emanating from Pearce's listing of motivations, motivation changes according to its place in the narrative. The notion, developed above, that a complex and hybrid kind of fetishism - indebted to childhood gendering as well as to submission to political history, to memory as well as to lived experience in the present - underlies collecting in the Western world, implies a fundamental instability of meaning. If initially - always retrospectively understood - the predominant aspect of the fetishism that informs collecting is anchored in anxiety over gender, this emphasis is likely to shift on the way. It may shift, for example, from obsessive attachment to each one of the objects in itself to investment in collecting as an occupation; or from accumulating to ordering. But more significantly, the relation to the fragility of subjectivity itself may shift. In one episode of this narrative, the extension of subjectivity through investment in the series of objects fit to stand in for the absent attribute of the past may overrule other affects. In another episode, not gender but time - death - can get the upper hand. In accordance with Freud's concept of the death instinct, subjects constantly work their way through the difficulty of constituting themselves by re-enacting a primal scenario of separation, of loss and recovery, in order to defer death. Collecting can be attractive as a gesture of endless deferral of death in this way; this view provides Pearce's 'achieving immortality' with a meaning more intimately related to narrative. As Peter Brooks has argued,³⁵ this need to repeat events in order to hold off death is the very motor of narrative.

But this elaboration of collecting as a narrative of death can also come to stand in tension with its other side: the desire to reach the ending. What if, to recall another of Pearce's categories, the perfection, or completion, strived for is actually reached? Of course, it is not a question of real, 'objective' perfection - although when the series is finite, completion is quite possible. Perfection, as a subjectively construed standard of idealisation, may come so dangerously close that the collector cannot bear to pursue it. Unlike what one might tend to assume, this is not a happy, but an extremely unhappy, ending of our narrative.

Endings

If completion is possible, perfection is dangerous. Completion may be a simple way of putting an end to a collecting narrative - defining it, so to speak, as a short story - in order to begin a new one. The collection that harbours all items of a given series will have no trouble extending itself laterally, and will start a new one. Perfection, the equivalent of death in the sense that it can only be closely approximated, not achieved 'during the life time' of the subject, is one of those typically elusive objects of desire like happiness, or the satisfaction of any other desire. Perfection can only be defined as the ending; as what brings collecting to a close by default. It is an imaginary ending that owes its meaning to the contrast between it and what can be called the contingent ending. The latter is the product of such contingent happenings as running out of space, disposing of collections, changes in desires, changes in forms of storage, sales, gifts or death - not death as constitutive force in subjectivity but as arbitrary event.

Again, in order to make sense of this random set of notions, a narrative perspective can be helpful. According to the logic of plot, or of theories of fabula, of structuralist genealogy, the particular combinations of beginnings, middles and endings that make up a story of collecting allow illuminating specifications of collectings. Reduced to its bare minimum, the structuralist model designed by Claude Bremond, for example, which is the simplest of its kind, presents 'narrative cycles' as processes of amelioration or deterioration of a situation, according to the wish or desire of a primary agent. The

³⁵ Brooks, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

possibilities Claude Bremond lists in his model are not so much 'logical' in the general sense (as he claims), but rather, specifically, ideological and psychological.³⁶ Thus a fetishistic subject whose gender and historical identity heavily depend on the possession of certain objects supposedly undertakes to acquire these. The episode leading up to the acquisition of each object that so contributes to this subject's sense of self and fulfilment constitutes one step in the process of amelioration for this subject. The accomplishment of acquisition constitutes the closing of the cycle, which opens up the next one: either the renewed desire for a similar object that typically indicates the collector's mind-set, or the desire for a different kind of fulfilment that signals the premature ending of the story of collecting. Rendered in this way, the process of amelioration takes place at the intersection of private and public, psychic and historic existence, and the episode contributes to the shaping of this subject as much as the subject shapes the episode.

This structure can, and indeed must, be complicated in two ways. The position of the initiating subject can be filled in differently. A process that brings amelioration to the collector, for example, can bring deterioration to the object-being as it forfeits its function and, by extension, to the subject who held, used or owned it before. Thus, the same process needs to be assessed twice over, in order to expose the subjective nature of the meaning of the event. The second complication is constituted by a further specification of the amelioration itself - or the deterioration. Bremond distinguishes processes like accomplishment of a task, intervention of an ally, elimination of an opponent, negotiation, attack, retribution. These types are obviously derived from folk tales, and their relevance for collecting seems far-fetched. Yet, their allegiance to a specific type of plot - one in which hostility is a major factor - unexpectedly illuminates a side of collecting that was already present in Pearce's list: competition, domination. Each of these - and others are of course conceivable - turn the event into something other than what it seems in the cheerful light of most of the many isolated motivations.

For at the intersection of psychic and capitalist fetishism, the narratives such analyses entail turn collecting into something else again: a tale of social struggle. This struggle over 'ameliorations' by means of an attack on someone else's property with the help of money; negotiation over prices; elimination of a rival; accomplishment of the task of developing 'taste'; expertise competing with that of others - all these plots engage subjects on both sides of the 'logic of narrative possibilities', and on both sides of gender, colonialist and capitalist splits. If the plot evolves so easily around struggle, then the collector's opponents are bound to be the 'other': the one who loses the object, literally by having to sell or otherwise yield it, or, according to the visual rhetoric of Freud's little boy, by forfeiting that for which the collector's item is a stand-in. Paradoxically, the narratives of collecting enable a clearer vision of this social meaning.

³⁶ C. Bremond, *Logique du récit* (Paris, 1973); idem, 'The Logic of Narrative Possibilities', *New Literary History*, XI (1980), pp. 398-411.

Michael Fehr: A Brief Description of my ideal Museum

Preamble

My ideal museum does not exist. I can only describe it as an interpolation of existing museums and various works of art, as a fictitious museum that comes to mind whenever I think about trying to improve upon the museum in which I work. I will begin by describing the museum's exterior, followed by its interior structure, including several of the rooms that I would establish, and conclude by saying a few words about how it would work. The whole thing should be regarded as a work in progress.

Before I begin describing the museum, I would just like to say something about its economic footing and potential public. The museum I envisage can only exist as an economically independent institution, with enough financial funding on hand from whatever source, to enable those who run it to concentrate on their tasks without having to worry about basic financial matters. I am not suggesting that there should be an unlimited availability of funds, but that the economic basis should be sound enough to ensure that the museum can function on a long-term basis and enable it to operate its economic matters successfully. This is not asking too much. It just takes account of the fact that, generally speaking, museums are never able to recoup their costs. Or, to put it another way: anyone wanting a museum must accept that, as with every form of infrastructure, a certain amount of money will have to be kept permanently on hand to maintain it. If this is not recognized at the outset or is not available, there is no point in building a museum in the first place.

I would like the position to be made equally clear with regard to the visiting public. It is not the number of visitors, but the intensity and quality of their visits that should constitute the parameters by which an institution's success is measured. For a visit to a museum will, in future, mean an opportunity to enjoy a special, individual and potentially unexpected experience. This absolutely precludes the possibility of the museum being a venue or an event for large crowds of people, as well as the idea that every museum should be there for everyone, as it were, an institution for the entire population. Apart from a few very big museums holding vast collections, such as the Louvre, the British or the Metropolitan Museum, museums will have to develop their own distinct characters in order to attract a specific section of the public. Herein lies a unique, if frequently overlooked, opportunity for museums, which unlike mass media are individual entities in themselves, completely exempt from the usual norms or any form of standardization. Developing an individual identity, as museums clearly can, does not spoil but, on the contrary, actually enhances their chances of reaching a wider public – for instance, as specialist institutions specializing in certain areas or issues, or as ones highlighting specific awareness's among certain sections of the population or interest groups.

Accordingly, I would like to characterize my intended public, for whom my fictitious museum is created and which I am now about to describe, as a public that is interested in the reflection and development of all forms of fabrication and presentation of discoveries and knowledge; that seeks alternatives to the media's style of political argumentation and to the functional, rational and lineal thought processes of science; that understands the power of images and is serious about accepting images as images; that is sensitive to locations: to moods and atmospheres and can and will form an opinion of its own. (I am referring in other words to the sort of people who feel at home both in flea markets as well as in specialist shops, who are not afraid to shop at Hertie's or Aldi's who frequent good but simple restaurants, who read the "Frankfurter Allgemeine" as well as the "Tageszeitung", possess more books than CDs, do not consider their jobs purely as a means of earning money, and are aware that everything that is given can be taken away again.)

Exterior

The museum I envisage is not distinguishable by its architecture. Since one cannot walk around it, no real idea of its dimensions can be gleaned from the outside. It is situated on the outskirts of the town's centre, consists of a complex of a number of interconnected buildings of different periods, which form part of a larger, partly residential urban development built on a small hill.

The museum has at least seven façades. One elevation (1) resembles an 1960s German apartment block. At the entrance door, one of the many bell pushes is inscribed with the word 'Museum'. Another elevation (2) resembles Gent's railway station – the open entrance leading into a large lobby. A third side (3) has all the charm of an ancient ruin, and there is a great deal of evidence that the museum was indeed built on the site of an ancient temple, which may once have been a palace. The partly ruined entrance leads into catacombs, which can only be accessed in the company of a guide. Viewed from another side (4), the museum has the appearance of an American 1930s warehouse with a ramp and large roller door the only visible features. Yet another side (5) features a broad flight of stairs of some hundred steps, the lowest of which ends in a steep rock-face; this staircase offers a panoramic view across the landscape. Its sixth side (6) resembles an early twentieth-century business-building including a restaurant on the ground floor. The final elevation (7) to be mentioned has all the characteristics of a large greenhouse.

The museum's various façades are arranged in such a way that only one of them can be seen at any given time, so that visitors consequently – at least on the first visit – assume that there is no other entrance to the museum than the one used. Whichever entrance you choose is entirely up to you and depends on your mood or the purpose of your visit to the museum.

Entrances

The different entrances lead by various routes into various sections within the museum. Anyone approaching by way of the business façade is bound to find something interesting in the well-stocked museum shop and can enjoy an excellent meal in the museum restaurant. From here, however, you can only access one, albeit large, room, which will be described in more detail below. If you opt to use the entrance in the ruin façade, you will be treated to a comprehensive guided tour of its technical installations, ending up in the restaurant. Anyone using the warehouse entrance into the museum will only be admitted if delivering something. The hall behind the railway station entrance is freely accessible but the only exhibits on display here are temporary ones; and the outside flight of stairs can only be accessed from inside the museum. The only way to gain entry to all the rooms in the museum is by ringing the doorbell at the entrance to the apartment block. You will more than likely be greeted by a surly housekeeper, to whom you must explain what you want to see and experience within the building. Once he is satisfied with your reasons, you will be allowed free access to every room. The simplest way into the museum, however, is through the greenhouse, even though this is the entrance that visitors are least likely to choose spontaneously since they are on the look-out for artefacts and not interested in natural exhibits. The greenhouse's main role, however, is to function as the museum's natural climate control system, and one may walk through it even if one is not interested in the beauties of nature.

The museum interior

At first glance, the interior of the museum may seem somewhat confusing to the visitor, simply because it has so many floors and mezzanines. Also, the central staircase does not provide much sense of direction. The individual floors and mezzanines are connected by short flights of stairs. On the different levels, large rooms alternate with smaller ones, followed by a similar haphazard sequence of rooms. Every room has solid walls. Some rooms have fanlights in the ceiling, while others have no daylight, some offer views over the town and across the countryside. No two rooms are alike.

It is not difficult to find one's way around, however, if one simply follows the series of rooms. You will soon realize that the museum is organized around the principle of a double helix of room layouts spiralling around the central core of the stairwell, which opens out at various points into smaller side rooms, linked by short flights of steps. It is possible, therefore, to experience the spiral structure without comprehending it, nor is there any compulsion to follow its entire course.

Due to their size and layout some rooms are very distinctive in character. They are placed horizontally to the spiral structure of the building and are virtually transversed by it. The three most important rooms are the library, the archive and the auditorium. Situated between and around them are exhibition rooms, study rooms and cabinets, rest rooms, offices, workshops and storage rooms, as well as a few other rooms, which I will describe later. The museum is constantly adding new rooms, but only when property becomes vacant in this part of town.

Atmosphere and working methods

In my ideal museum, there are no guards, and all the rooms are freely accessible to visitors as a matter of principle, as long as their presence does not hinder any work in progress. Once a visitor has entered the museum, he should be able to move around as freely as his interests dictate, make full use of its facilities and, where possible and if so desired, play an active role in its development. In return, visitors are expected to respect other people's interests and show consideration in exercising their own.

The museum has its own select workforce, consisting of staff of both sexes and varying ages with a range of professional qualifications. It is the duty of all members of staff, regardless of their job description, to assist visitors, if so required, to answer any requests for information, as far as they are able, to guide them, if necessary, and, furthermore, to encourage them, by means of whatever personal contribution is required, to look at the museum's exhibits.

The museum has a relaxed, albeit focused working atmosphere, which involves the visitor, is built on individual contributions – ranging from simple viewing to hands-on help – and strives for cooperative achievements. In some aspects the museum resembles a workshop, in others a laboratory or a studio, while sometimes it would be reminiscent of a scientific academy, resemble classical gallery rooms or echo the atmosphere of a salon or a domestic dwelling.

The museum does not have a specific policy on hanging exhibits. On the contrary, the staff, giving due consideration to visitors' views, try to do justice to every exhibit, depending on its individual characteristics, by presenting it in a specially devised format. This leads to pictures being hung in a very varied, if somewhat confusing pattern. There is one principle, however, that is applied to every presentation: Individual exhibits should never be displayed in isolation, but always in conjunction with other items. In the interests of dealing with this problem satisfactorily, extensive research, theoretical simulations and practical experimentation is carried out. Many of the solutions found by these means end up being discarded almost immediately, while others turn out to last for generations.

My imaginary museum does not operate as a closed shop – its resources are always available, whether in its storerooms or exhibition halls. The museum is relatively well-stocked. There are exhibits in every room. If any item on display is moved or hung elsewhere, room must be made accordingly, even if this means moving another item from the collection to a different place. Consequently, even small alterations in the presentation of a collection can cause a cascade effect in the redeployment of items, sweeping like waves through large sections of the museum. Since there is always some change taking place, the museum is in a constant state of internal flux, and appears as a dynamic spatial image. This process of change is not uniform, however, but dependent on different time horizons and rotation rates. Some exhibits are seldom disturbed, while others get swapped around to different locations in the museum after only a short time. Every move is meticulously documented, however, and replicated in a model so that every step in the history of how the museum has utilized its collections can be viewed without difficulty.

My imaginary museum has always had such a rich and varied collection of pieces from all areas of artistic endeavour that it could easily refrain entirely from augmenting its collections. It only accepts new objects, therefore, if they give a new slant to existing collections or cause a rethink in the way in which the exhibits are arranged or presented. Accordingly, the museum's collections do not aspire to being absolutely complete but are based instead on the abundant importance and diversity of individual pieces. It is irrelevant, as far as the museum is concerned, whether individual items in the collection are regarded as valuable in the conventional sense of the word or not. For the value of the individual pieces can only be seen assessed as part of the context that is created by themselves within the museum.

Most of the acquisitions have generally been bestowed in the form of gifts and are frequently brought along by visitors. The latter have the opportunity to decide by themselves whether the item they are prepared to contribute does indeed fit into and can remain a specific part of the museum. This process, which can be long-winded at times, often results in the exhibits in question being withdrawn. It also happens occasionally, however, that the museum wants to acquire a particular item for its collection, in which case it brings all its considerable financial resources to bear – and always gets what it wants.

The special rooms

One might well ask how such a museum could ever come about and establish itself in the face of the numerous and contradictory interests within the art world, pressure on the part of the art dealers and collectors, criticism levied by art critics and art historians alike, the demands of curators, not to mention the noise of the art tourists and the demands of trade unions and politicians. To deal with these adversities, my ideal museum employs a simple device from its box of tricks: it devotes appropriate rooms to representing these different interests, desires, demands, pressures and requirements – thereby musealising them. It only remains for me to list these special museum rooms below:

The cloakroom of art theories
The lounge of art professors
The lobby of the art trade
The dome of stylistic arrangement systems
The archive of museum theories
The office of the director (the curator's cabinet)
The restorers' studio
The school of curators
The copyists' room
The media room
The art critics' writing room
The Valhalla of the collectors
The storage room of dead capital
The project cellar of the installation artists
The tea room for the unemployed supervisors
The TV studio for cultural affairs politicians
And, in a room which can only be accessed from the restaurant and the museum shop:
The museum of museum signs

Conclusion

In a talk delivered in Hagen in 2001, Donald Preziosi summed up my general ideas about such a museum, as it were, echoing my innermost feelings, as follows:

"The museum and its ancillary epistemological technologies such as history or art history are heirs to an ancient European tradition of using things to think with; to reckon with; and of using them to fabricate and factualize the realities that in our modernity they so coyly and convincingly present themselves as simply re-presenting. Museums, in short, are modernity's pragmatic artifice, and the active, mediating, enabling instrument of all that we have learned to desire we might become. It is time to begin to understand exactly what we see when we see ourselves seeing museums imagining us."¹

Learning to understand what we see when we see ourselves seeing museums imagining us: that is the heart of the statement. It sounds complicated and is indeed a complex, new mode of thinking, but only with respect to museums. In terms of visual arts, on the other hand, it describes something that is virtually a standard experience. For no matter how one perceives a work of art: the viewing experience is inevitably bound up with confronting such a structure of sensory perception and experience, making you aware of one thing at least: that 'you cannot take through your eye without simultaneously giving.' This fundamental correlation, which Georg Simmel observed in his *Soziologie der Sinne* (Sociology of the Senses), as to how individuals perceive each other,² can be also be applied *cum grano salis* to how pictures and objects are perceived that are made to be viewed. For in order to be able to appreciate such a picture or object, I have to look at it and let it work on me, I have to open myself to it, surrender myself to it – I can only get to grips with it by letting its influence wash over me. It goes without saying that the relationship between an individual and a picture can never equal the active two-way relationship that makes eye-to-eye perception so characteristic and unique. It remains the ideal, albeit superficial model for visual interaction. Nevertheless, the lively relationship of awareness between individuals can be reconstructed and reflected in the relationship between an individual and a picture – and not only in

¹ Donald Preziosi, *Haunted by Things. Utopias and Their Consequences*, Lecture given on 3 March 2001, Hohenhof, Hagen.

² Georg Simmel, *Soziologie der Sinne* (1907), in: *idem, Soziologische Ästhetik*, Klaus Lichtblau (ed.), Bodenheim 1998, p. 139.

pictures, like *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez, for example, which have human interaction as their subject. For the culminating moment of this interaction, the fundamental willingness of the observer to surrender to the observed during the observation, continues to be a *sine qua non* with regard to the debate surrounding non-representational art. In other words: to facilitate a genuine interaction between the observer and the observed, making this a museum's objective once more – that is what I expect of a museum, an expectation that I see seldom fulfilled in newer museums, which have been remodelled into pretentious art-stations or are specifically designed as such. Or, to put it yet another way: in order to begin to understand what we see, when we see ourselves seeing museums imagining us, we must endeavour to recapture and restore to the museum something that is currently regarded as thoroughly unfashionable – namely, the leisure factor, leisure being the fundamental prerequisite for appreciating an aesthetic experience.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: The Museum-A Refuge for Utopian Thought

Appeared in German translation in *Die Unruhe der Kultur: Potentiale des Utopischen*, eds. Jörn Rüsen, Michael Fehr, and Annelie Ramsbrock (Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2004)

A history of museums could be written that would reveal the museum to be a series of utopian projects. It is the capacity to imagine a world in a particular key that distinguishes the utopian imagination, no matter what the medium of expression. While utopia in the strict sense of the word is a literary genre—Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) is the *locus classicus*—the utopian imagination is by no means confined to what can be expressed in writing. How do museums engage the utopian imagination and how do their methods differ from those of literary utopias? The museum is at once an architectural form, a concrete environment for reflection, a reservoir of tangibilities, a school for the senses, a space of conviviality, an autopoietic system, and a projection of the ideal society, notwithstanding the amply documented tensions between the utopian ideal of the museum and its instrumentalizations.

Both literary utopias and museums are engaged in worldmaking. They engage the imagination in the possibility of a complete and perfect universe. During the Renaissance, both utopia and museum were imagined as circular, set apart, and ordered: utopia was an ideally governed island, the ideal museum was a domed rotunda on a mountaintop.¹ When envisioned in terms of its collection, the ideal museum was a Noah's Ark, with a complete set of specimens providing the entire DNA needed to regenerate the world in its entirety, or a Temple of Solomon, imagined as a miniature world, a complete archive of knowledge, and a treasure house.

While all utopian worlds are built out of other worlds, only better, the museum literally takes the world apart at its joints, collects the pieces, and holds them in suspension. Identified, classified, and arranged, objects withdrawn from the world and released into the museum are held in a space of infinite recombination. A refuge for things and people—literally, a building dedicated to the muses and the arts they inspire, a space in which to muse, to be inspired—the museum puts people and things into a relationship quite unlike anything encountered in the world outside. The museum brings past, present, and future together in ways distinctly its own. It is a theatre in the root sense of the word, from the theater (Greek: *theatron*) as a space structured to accommodate viewers, and theory (Greek: *theôria*), which links viewing with contemplation or speculation. But the museum is also theater in the sense of dramaturgy, stagecraft, and performance, as Donald Preziosi explores in his contribution to this volume.²

Let us recover the protean nature of museum in the spirit of a Renaissance idea of the museum as "the axis through which all other structures of collection, categorizing, and knowing intersected; interweaving with words, images, and things it provided a space common to all."³ to Paula Findlen, "the Renaissance notion of museum defined imaginary space...[and] was a methodological premise that translated itself into a wide variety of social and cultural forms."⁴ The many terms by which it was known are indicative of the ways in which an expansive notion of museum "allowed it to cross and confuse the intellectual and philosophical categories of *biblioteca*, *thesaurus*, and *pandechion* with visual constructs such as *cornucopia* and *gazophylacium*, and spatial constructs such as *studio*, *casino*, *cabinet/gabinetto*, *galleria* and *teatro*."⁵ The museum was a *theatrum* (or *domus*) *sapientiae*, a *theatrum mundi*, a microcosm. It was a treasure, mirror, forest, and archive.⁶ As a physical entity, the museum might take the form of a free-standing cabinet, a room, a building, a garden, or a book, which provided a defined space for the gathering and arranging of objects and the contemplation or study of them, whether according to a pastoral or monastic ideal. Whatever it was called and whatever form it took, the museum was above all an idea and a set of practices.

¹ Marcin Fabiński, "Iconography of the Architecture of the Ideal *Musea* in the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of the History of Collections* 2, no. 2 (1990): 95-134.

² Donald Preziosi, "Haunted by Things. Utopias and their Consequences," in this volume.

³ Findlen, Paula, "The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy," *Journal of the History of Collections* 1, no. 1 (1989): 59-78. Seep. 63.

⁴ Findlen, "The Museum," p. 63.

⁵ Findlen, "The Museum," p. 59.

⁶ Findlen, "The Museum," p. 63.

Both utopia and the museum are an art practice. As Michael Fehr makes clear in his contribution to this volume, the art museum is in a special position because the very idea of art is itself linked to utopian ideals. The faith in the power of art to make the world a better place animated the nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts movement, the Hagen Impulse at the turn of that century, and the various twentieth-century avant-gardes (Futurism, Surrealism, Expressionism). These movements and those that have followed continue to alter the very nature of the museum itself, by intervening in its physical and social fabric, challenging its ability to accommodate new kinds of art, and questioning the nature of art and of the museum in relation to society, as it is and as it might be imagined. Art and the museum are mutually constitutive.

As an art practice, the museum is marked by concreteness, materiality, and performance. It is a making that is a doing. This making is no less speculative for being so concrete. Thus, the museum is not simply a place for representing utopia, but rather a site for practicing it as a way of imagining. This is the basis for the Museutopia project at the Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum. The approach is, to use Gregory L. Ulmer's formulation, *heuristic*, rather than *hermeneutic*, experimental and constructive rather than exegetical and anatomical: as Ulmer explains, "the artists demonstrate the consequences of the theories for the arts by practicing the arts themselves, generating models of prototypes that function critically as well as aesthetically. The vanguardist does not analyze existing art but composes alternatives to it (or uses it as a step toward achieving alternatives)."⁷ Ulmer proposes to "make a theory of method" by bringing together critical interpretation and artistic experimentation, precisely the program of Museutopia.⁸

While literary utopias locate their imagined perfect society in a purely imaginative space, the museum as we know it is both located somewhere and locational. It is a place and it places, which is essential to its power to mobilize memory. The museum is a place of deep, not dead, storage. "Because, says Aristotle, in order to remember things, it suffices to recognize the place where they happen to be (place is therefore the element of an association of ideas, of a conditioning, of a training, of a mnemonics)...."⁹ The museum as Mnemosyne, mother of the muses and of memory itself, not only spares the past from oblivion, saves it for future recall, calls forth and calls back, remembers-lest we forget. The museum is also a place of experience that actively works with and on memory, which is precisely what Proust so loved about it. Adorno captures this idea when he writes that "He adores museums as though they were God's true creation, which in Proust's metaphysics is never complete but always occurring anew in each concrete experience, each original artistic intuition."¹⁰ This is the museum as "'force field' between subject and object," with memory the mediating term: "works of art return home when they become elements of the observer's subjective stream of consciousness."¹¹ The same can be said for many other kinds of objects in museums.

The disjointed world brought into the museum, its pieces arranged in space, is defined by gaps (gaps in the record, gaps in the collection, gaps in the narrative) and by leaps (intuitive leaps, poetic leaps, leaps of faith). The gaps, the air between things, are not simply voids. They are openings. The creator of the Dennis Severs House in Spitalfields, London, an eighteenth-century house inhabited by a felt, but never seen, fictional Huguenot family, asks, rhetorically, "In fact, is it the *space between* things-not as strong as, if not stronger, than anything else?... The Space Between is the invisible, shared third element that lies between any two sides."¹² This "still-life drama," which is how Severs characterizes his creation, is not to be mistaken for an historic house or set of period rooms. It is rather an opera in as many acts as there rooms, each filled with tangible indices of unseen presences and actions interrupted (a half-eaten pear, a fresh pie, one slice removed, a glass of wine just poured, the rustle of a curtain, sound of door closing, a creaking floor board) and the intangibles of heavy air, pale light, flickering fire, cold draft, perfect stillness: "The experience is conducted in silence, and its level is *poetic*; and like anything so-it works best on those who are *endowed, willing and able* to meet it halfway. The house's motto is '*You either see it or you don't.*' Post-materialist, it seeks to remind a visitor of a scientific thing: that *what we*

⁷ Gregory L. Ulmer, *Heuristics: The Logic of Invention* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. xii.

⁸ Ulmer, *Heuristics*, p. 1.

⁹ Roland Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: An Aide-Memoire," *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1988), p. 65, quoted by Ulmer, *Heuristics*, p. 33.

¹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber, 175-85 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), p. 181.

¹¹ Adorno, p. 184.

¹² Dennis Severs. *18 Folgate Street: The Life of a House in Spitalfields* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001), p. 37. Severs, pp. 99-100.

cannot see is essential to what we do."¹³

Though deeply knowledgeable about the periods evoked in the house, Severs has proceeded, not hermeneutically, but heuristically (from *heuresis* or invention, in rhetorical theory and logic). It is not what he makes of his collection of antiques, but rather what he makes with them that matters.¹⁴ His project is not exegetical but generative. It is premised on an intuitive art of discovery and invention, not one that is transparent to reason.¹⁵ Such places cannot be grasped in one visit. As Ivan Chtcheglov, a Russian political theorist who took up Fourier's ideas, wrote of Chirico, "He was grappling with the problems of absences and presences in time and space":

We know that an object that is not consciously noticed at the time of a first visit can, by its absence during subsequent visits, provoke an indefinable impression: as a result of this sighting backward in time, the absence of the object becomes a presence one can feel. More precisely: although the quality of the impression generally remains indefinite, it nevertheless varies with the nature of the removed object and the importance accorded it by the visitor, ranging from serene joy to terror.¹⁶

The illusiveness of such sites-not only because of what is felt but not seen, but also because of what was seen but went unnoticed-requires that one return to them over and over again.

To think about the museum as an art practice-not only museums of art but museums of anything-is to recognize that art is itself a mode of inquiry, that science is an art, and that the capacity to think is linked to the capacity to feel.¹⁷ Roland Barthes identifies the poetics of the images in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* with an overflow of meanings that arise because-not in spite of-their demonstrative intent and insistent didacticism. He defines poetics in this context as "the sphere of the infinite vibrations of meaning, at the center of which is placed the literal object. We can say there is not one plate of the *Encyclopédie* that does not vibrate well beyond its demonstrative intent. This singular vibration is above all an astonishment."¹⁸ The *Encyclopédie*, which Barthes identifies with the museum and the world's fair, makes literal objects mysterious and mythical by virtue of a distinct set of practices. Those practices include not only the transformative power of "depth of time" and the capacity of metaphor to make the literal ambiguous, but also the act of "isolating elements from their practical context," doubling "the explained world by a new world to be explained," attending scrupulously to detail, and shifting levels of perception, so that "it is by dint of didacticism that a kind of wild surrealism is generated here."¹⁹ In contrast with the printed page of the *Encyclopédie* and of literary utopias, the disposition of things and persons in the space of the museum organizes the sensory experience of a mobile observer. This experience calls for spatial and kinetic intelligence, for an ability to think with and within a materialized space of a very special kind. The senses are intelligent. The body knows. Facts are felt. Curiosity is an emotion. Historian of science Lorraine Daston writes a history of curiosity (and its emotional structure) in relation to the other emotions as a way of illuminating the history of science in the early modern period. As curiosity "shifted its position in the European map of the emotions from a close proximity to lust and pride, to a similarly close relationship to greed and avarice," the "curious object" came to be associated with the exotic, bizarre, beautiful, rare, novel, monstrous, diverse, small, detailed, hidden²⁰ Wonder arose from an ignorance of causes, but a major shift occurred from a divine explanation of what were viewed as marvels and miracles to a search for natural causes and the understanding that "Without wonder, there would be no curiosity, and without curiosity, no science."²¹

Museums are important here, first, because those with long histories and old collections are in a good position to illuminate the history of "how intellectual work is saturated with moral, emotional and aesthetic elements at a collective, and not just biographical level."²² Museums are not only instruments

¹³ Visitor pamphlet, Dennis Severs' House, 2002.

¹⁴ See Michael Jarrett, "Heuristics Defined," <http://www.yk.psu.edu/~jmi3/defheu.htm>. Date of last access January 19, 2004.

¹⁵ See Ulmer, *Heuristics*, pp. ix-xiii.

¹⁶ Ivan Chtcheglov (pseudonym: Gilles Ivain), "Formulary for a New Urbanism," translated by Ken Knabb, slightly modified from the version in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/Chtcheglov.htm>. Date of last access January 19, 2004. Chtcheglov drafted this piece in 1953 and published it in the first issue of *Internationale Situationniste* (1958).

¹⁷ Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 79.

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, "The Plates of the Encyclopedia," *New Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard, 23-40 (Berkeley: University of California, 1990), p. 35.

¹⁹ Barthes, "The Plates of the Encyclopedia," pp. 34, 35, 38, 39.

²⁰ Lorraine Daston, "Curiosity in Early Modern Science," *Word & Image* 11, no. 4 (1995): 391-404. P. 392.

²¹ Daston, "Curiosity in Early Modern Science," p. 397.

²² Daston, "Curiosity in Early Modern Science," p. 403.

for the shaping of sensibility, as Tony Bennett and others have argued, but also their collections hold within them a history of sensibilities, their rise, demise, and potential for recuperation.²³ How might an older constellation of wonder, curiosity, and intense attention animate the museum as a contemporary utopian laboratory? This is an invitation to find the utopian potential of the museum not only in the achievements of the past, but also in its history as a materialized subjunctive space. It is in the museum's capacity to provoke and sustain speculation, reflection, retrospection, prospection, whether reasoned or dreamed, that its utopian possibilities lie. What this might look like is suggested by Lesley Sharp in the manifesto, in this volume, for the National Museum of Museum and Industry, a "family of museums," in the United Kingdom.

The collection is essential to the museum, as envisioned here, not only because of the value of each and every object in it, but above all by virtue of being a collection. True, the whole may be greater than the sum of the parts. But it is the loosely jointed nature of that whole that makes the collection not only a reservoir from which to draw but also an active field of infinite combinatory potential, a space of coincidence, accident, and incident. And, a space of information, "if we define 'information' (as cybernetics does) as a function of unpredictability"- "The more predictable the message, the less information it contains."²⁴ How does the museum, despite its best efforts to create certainty, produce unpredictability? Through fragmentation, aggregation, selection, juxtaposition, connection, contrast, excess, and confusion.

If there are two major utopian models, one the reasoned, ordered world, the other Breton's utopia of the dream, with all of its surrealist ideals, the museum's utopian potential draws from both. For Proust, the caesuras of the museum-the severing of things from the world outside-is necessary for "the exhilarating happiness that can be had only in a museum, where the rooms, in their sober abstinence from all decorative detail, symbolize the inner spaces into which the artist withdraws to create the work."²⁵ The utopian quality of the museum arises not only from the experience of individual works of art found within its walls, but from the museum experience as an art form. This is an autotelic experience, one that has its aim and its end, its telos, in itself, as is also the case with play. Indeed, the autotelic is fundamental to the museum, as a space of soft rather than hard mastery.²⁶

What is the nature of that space? Museums of all kinds are defined by an arrangement of objects in space that requires the visitor to walk. Indeed, it could be said that mobility is a defining feature of the museum and that utopian possibilities lie hidden within the museum's psychogeography, that is, within the felt quality of its navigated space. However carefully planned, no matter how many maps, signs pointing the way, footsteps painted on the floor, or guards giving directions, the space of the museums is neither a seamless continuity, nor a continuous surface. And, while the space of the museum may seem overdetermined by its spatialized program and master narrative, it is finally underdetermined. It must be navigated. Those who so desire can move in ways not intended by the museum's plan, letting chance play a part in the creation of situations, giving disorientation a chance, and allowing uncertainty in a rich environment to open one to surprise, to connections one makes for oneself, to "things that make one's heart beat faster," to "dreamy excitement."²⁷

Above all, the utopian imagination is about visualizing and modeling, whether in literary or material form. The utopian imagination catalyzes a kind of envisioning, a kind of modeling, that reflects on what is, by projecting what could be, either in the spirit of critique or in the hope of a transformative program. Utopias at their most utopian are unrealizable. They are neither models of something that already exists nor necessarily models for something to be brought into being. Literary utopias are well suited to this ideal. So too are museums.

²³ See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995) and Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995).

²⁴ Robert B. Ray, *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 6, and Robert B Ray, *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 13.

²⁵ Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," p. 178, 179.

²⁶ Inspired by Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York : Simon & Schuster, 1995), I discuss these distinctions more fully in "The Museum As Catalyst," *Museum 2000 - Confirmation or Challenge?*, ed. Per-Ulvo Agren (Stockholm: Stockholm: Riksställningar [Swedish Travelling Exhibitions], Svenska museiföreningen [Swedish Museum Association], 2002), 55-66.

²⁷ Robert Harbison, *Eccentric Spaces* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 143 and 154. On psychogeography as an avant-garde art practice, see Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1992).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett The museum as catalyst

Keynote address, Museums 2000: Confirmation or Challenge, organized by ICOM Sweden, the Swedish Museum Association and the Swedish Travelling Exhibition/Riksställningar in Vadstena, Sept 29, 2000.

As museums look to the future they are redefining their relationship to their past. New models of citizenship, changes in knowledge formations, and competing media environments have challenged museums to rethink both what they are as a medium and their role in society. I will explore three approaches to these issues:

- First, some museums attempt to forget their past as a museum and start a fresh page as a new kind of institution. In the process, they may search for a different genealogy and find a past in world's fairs that is better suited to how they envision themselves as a medium. After considering two cases - the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington and the American Museum of Natural History in New York - I explore paradigmatic shifts that have redefined the relationship of information to experience, knowing to feeling, and things to stories, consistent with a more theatrical approach to the museum experience.
- Second, some view the museum as a distinctive medium and historical formation in its own right. Museums such as the Mutter Museum of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia and the Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum in Hagen embrace the museum's past, reflect on it, and discover unrealized possibilities in older often outmoded or repudiated practices.
- Third, contemporary art has blurred the distinction between artist and curator, treated the museum as an art practice in its own right, and developed concepts and models such as the project and the social sculpture. Prime examples are *The Gun Sculpture*, which was part of the Canada Pavilion at Expo 2000 in Hanover, and *Difficult Matters: Objects and Narratives that Disturb and Affect*, 2 which was organized by Riksställningar, Swedish Travelling Exhibitions and SAMDOK.

I. The Expo Model

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Why would a museum flee from its past? New models of citizenship prompted New Zealand to create a new national museum, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, by amalgamating two institutions, the National Museum and the National Gallery.¹ In abandoning two historic buildings prominently situated on a hill overlooking the city and forming a new entity in a new building in a new location, the new national museum also jettisoned the history of compartmentalization that those buildings represented. The National Museum had housed natural history and the culture of indigenous peoples. The art of European settlers was in the National Gallery. Museums in New Zealand have been forced to reconceptualize and restructure themselves in response to the Maori renaissance, the development of a policy of biculturalism, and more recent shift to new right economics forced.

From a New Zealand perspective there was no way to reform old museums. A revolution, not an evolution, was called for and Te Papa rejected its past as a museum. Entering a new pavilion-style building on landfill along the waterfront of Wellington, visitors find not a trace of Te Papa's earlier incarnation as the National Museum and National Gallery. Instead, an exhibition entitled *Exhibiting Ourselves* locates the new national museum with a history of New Zealand's appearances at world's fairs, from the Crystal Palace in 1851 to Seville in 1992. *Exhibiting Ourselves* carried the implicit message that Te Papa was New Zealand's most recent pavilion by tracing a distinguished genealogy for Te Papa and using it as a mandate for Te Papa's expo style. It is after all at world's fairs, more than in museums, that New Zealand has historically performed its national self-image, one of the purposes of Te Papa.

Moreover, world's fairs are more like what museums are increasingly being asked to become: "customer focused" and "commercially positive," with exhibitions driving the agenda and exciting installations a

¹ The National Museum had been updated several times as seen in the change of name from Colonial Museum, which opened in 1865, to Dominion Museum (1907), National Museum (1972), and Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, which opened in 1998.

priority. While this is particularly true in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, museums in Continental Europe, which have historically enjoyed greater state sponsorship, are gradually moving in this direction as well. Committed to attracting visitors who have never visited a museum before, but who do understand shopping malls and amusement parks, Te Papa promises the richly embodied experiences associated with such settings. One of its brochures promises to shake you, transport you, soak you, rock and roll you, blast you, move you, and feed you. Before entering any of the museum's exhibitions, visitors pass the gift shop, destination restaurant, and Time Warp, "the entertainment heart" of the museum, which features two motion simulation rides. Blastback "jolts you back millions of years in a rock 'n' roll ride to witness the formation of our land" and Future Rush launches you into the year 2055 in Wellington. There are also a coin-operated virtual bungy jump and sheep shearing competition.²

Te Papa is but the most recent phase in a long and entangled history of world's fairs and museums. Despite the decision to reject its past as a museum and embrace its heritage as an expo, Te Papa did not deny that it was still a museum. Rather it claimed to be redefining the word museum and repositioning itself within the museum genre. As the national museum and with state funding, it was expected to make good on a new model of civil society based on the concept of biculturalism. It was to be a model of biculturalism in all respects, from its name and its two directors (one Maori and the other of European descent) to the stories it would tell and the way it would handle Maori treasures. Consistent with its civic mission, the centrepiece of this museum is the Treaty of Waitangi, which was signed by Maori chiefs and representatives of the British crown in 1840. The Treaty of Waitangi is the charter document for the formation of New Zealand as a political entity and, since its 150th anniversary in 1990, it has become the touchstone for an intensified commitment to biculturalism.

American Museum of Natural History. If new models of citizenship and new forms of national self-understanding made old museum arrangements untenable, new knowledge formations have made museums custodians of the outmoded disciplines materialized in their collections. The American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan has addressed this issue by transforming its geology gallery, which once featured systematic collections of rocks, into the spectacular Gottesman Hall of Planet Earth and making the Hayden Planetarium into the dazzling digital centrepiece of the new Rose Center for Earth and Space, a transparent glass extension to the museum.

The challenge here is how to convey theories, concepts (red giants, white dwarfs, black holes, big bangs, dark energy, invisible galaxies, cosmic time and space), and discoveries of astrophysics and astronomy, which are very difficult to fathom under the best of conditions, and how to do so in the absence of conventional museum artifacts. One of the few artifacts is the Willamette Meteorite, which weighs more than fifteen tons. Acquired by the museum in 1906, it is in dispute. The museum recently signed an agreement with the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, which considers the meteorite as its patrimony. The agreement stipulates that in exchange for the Tribe's dropping the repatriation claim, the museum would display the meteorite with a label explaining what it means to the Clackamas, who call it "Tomanowos."³

While the meteorite is a tangible fragment of the solar system and a spectacular object, it does not in itself tell the larger story that is the organizing principle for the major exhibits in the Rose Center. Those exhibits attempt to convey the timeline of the universe and its scale by having visitors walk down a spiral ramp. The ramp is punctuated by computer terminals and lined with a cosmic tape measure. Planets hang in the space as points of scalar reference. Manhattan is visible through the floor to ceiling glass curtain walls. Multimedia installations and films at the base of the ramp- and a digital dome in the state-of-the-art Space Theatre-attempt to convey such basic concepts as stars, planets, and galaxies and theories of the beginnings of space and time, the edges of the universe as we know it, the evolution of the universe, and our own origins in the hearts of stars. The museum has become a new kind of information space, one that puts information into space and into a relationship with the visitor's body.

II. *Paradigmatic Shifts*

² See Te Papa's website, http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/for_your_dollar/time_warp.html.

³ See the museum's press release (22 June 2000), http://www.amnh.org/rose/meteorite_agreement.html.

Te Papa and the American Museum of Natural History exemplify several principles of what might be called the expo mode of the new generation museum. This mode is by its very nature theatrical. Consistent with a theatrical approach, this mode marks new relationships between:

- information and experience
- display and *mise-en-scène*
- things and stories
- thinking and feeling
- hard mastery and soft mastery
- identity and identification
- visitor and customer

Information and experience. The information space of the museum has historically taken the form of taxonomic displays of specimens, developmental series of artifacts, and chronological and national arrangements of art. Replicas, facsimiles, models, and diagrams, whether as alternatives or supplements to original artifacts, give priority to information over aura, though models, as they become artifacts in their own right, can come to have aura in their own right.

New information technologies, including digitized collections, electronic databases, and online access, provide greater information in a more accessible format than exhibitions. Museum galleries cannot compete with them on that ground, even by incorporating new information media into the gallery itself.

Since electronic information can be accessed from anywhere, why waste precious exhibition real estate and visitor attention on computers in the gallery? Screens, whether for accessing databases or projecting images, are now common in exhibitions although their effectiveness has yet to be properly assessed. Museums need to provide an experience in high contrast to clicking on a screen if visitors are to be drawn away from their computers and into the galleries.

Display and mise-en-scène. In contrast with taxonomic displays and electronic databases, habitat displays are prime examples of museum theatre and draw on such theatrical practices as scenography, *mise-en-scène*, and tableau. The histories of theatre, cinema, museums, and world's fairs converge in habitat displays.⁴ As they have become historical and acquired an aura of their own, some museums have retained them even though they are actually quite limited in the information they can convey and may even represent ideas that have come under considerable criticism.⁵ They continue to be popular with children and adults alike.

Museum theatre, understood as the theatrical nature of the entire situation (and not only particular techniques like the habitat group), has become a dominant mode in the expo style of the new generation museum. This mode gives precedence to drama (narrative and emotional engagement) and *mise-en-scène* (installation). Objects are selected for their iconic value as props to support the story. This is a special kind of theatre and its point is not information but "experience," a term that is at once ubiquitous and undertheorized. "Experience" indexes the sensory, somatic, and emotional engagement that we associate with theatre, world's fairs, amusement parks, and tourism. Museums such as Te Papa and the American Museum draw upon their techniques, even as popular entertainment draws upon the museum, to note only the linking of casinos and museums (and the incorporation of museums into Disney's Epcot).⁶

It is no accident that at the Hanover 2000 Exposition, those who create the exhibitions are called scenographers and some of the theme pavilions were curated by artists and museum professionals.⁷ They do not display objects. They create a *mise-en-scène*, a situation, a scenario—a total environment. Such environments, whether the glass cube of the Rose Center or the black box of the Gottesman Hall of

⁴ See Karen Wonders, *Habitat dioramas: illusions of wilderness in museums of natural history*, Figura Nova Series, 25 (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1993) and Angela Miller, "The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular," *Wide Angle* 18(2), 1996:34-69.

⁵ See Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908- 36," *Social Text* 11 (May 1984): 19-64.

⁶ See the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art in Las Vegas <http://www.bellagio.com/>, Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center and Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut <http://www.mashantucket.com/>, the Apartheid Museum, a "social responsibility project" of the Gold Reef City Casino, just outside Johannesburg <http://www.apartheidmuseum.org.za/>, and Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz, "Wonder and Worth: Disney Museums in World Showcase," *Museum Anthropology* 17 (3) 1993:32-42.

⁷ Antony Miralda was responsible for the Nutrition Pavilion and Martin Roth of the Deutsches Hygiene Museum was in charge of the *Mensch* pavilion.

Planet Earth, are immersive, absorbing, and affecting. Quite apart from the concepts and information they set out to convey, such installations are stimulating in their own right. This is a first principle in the work of leading exhibition designer Ralph Appelbaum, who strives for "the greatest possible fusion of the exhibition subject and the design environment in which it is presented. Through architectural metaphor and all environmental means at our disposal, we seek to go beyond the presentation of artifacts, specimens, and information to create atmospheres of intrigue, inspiration, and beauty that immerse visitors in some of the less tangible qualities of an exhibition's subject."⁸ To that end, Appelbaum uses explicitly theatrical techniques. Describing his approach to the permanent installation at the United States Holocaust Museum, he said, "the exhibition itself was designed theatrically in three acts."⁹

Things and stories. In addition to exhibiting collections, which has historically been their role, museums create exhibitions for which there are few artifacts. Exhibitions driven by a concept or story, a legacy of expos, refuse to limit themselves to what is in a collection. They may, as a matter of principle, refuse to form collections or exhibit real things or, consistent with Appelbaum's approach, they may use things as props to support a story.

A pioneer in developing the story museum is the late Jeshajahu Weinberg, founding director of Beth Hatefutsoth and director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Weinberg insisted that the story come first and there be no restriction on the means used to convey it. Beth Hatefutsoth made it a cardinal principle to not collect and not to exhibit original objects, opting instead for dioramas, scale models, facsimiles, media, and didactic installations of various kinds. While there are some original artifacts (and castings from original artifacts) in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, they tend to be iconic and they are relatively few in number. This museum is more evidentiary and televisual than artifactual and uses environments such as the Tower of Faces, the footbridges and train, and the casting of a crematorium to balance information with emotional engagement. As Appelbaum explained, "Artifacts, documents, photographs, and film are treated with great straightforwardness and literalness, like evidence in a court of law. But the environments everywhere support an emotional connection, a visceral grasp of this or that aspect of what it was like to be caught in the net of the fascist state."¹⁰

In the absence of collections, what then is a museum? I posed this question to Weinberg, who answered, "A museum is a story in three-dimensional space." Not surprisingly, the same could be said of theatre, but with this critical difference. In theatre, the audience is stationary and the show moves. In the museum, the show is stationary and the visitor moves. Mode of locomotion is defining of the museum experience. Not only is a story told in three-dimensional space, but the visitor walks the plot. Not surprisingly, Weinberg was a theatre director, before he became a museum curator. Like Weinberg, Appelbaum has made narrative a hallmark of his approach to exhibition design. As Appelbaum explains, "I use the word narrative broadly, to mean not just the interpretive text associated with collections, but also the ways in which a whole environment and sequence of events, in the museum can be used to communicate a culture's history."¹¹ This principle links narrative to *mise-en-scène*, which is fundamental to the museum as a genre of theatre.

Thinking and feeling. An emphasis on emotional engagement is not only a pedagogical principle but also consistent with a scenographic and narrative approach to installation. A first principle in the work of Appelbaum is the notion that "learning is inseparable from emotional engagement."¹² This principle is have been deeply influence by his approach. For example, Ken Gorbey, who played an instrumental role in the creation of Te Papa and is familiar with Appelbaum's work, recently directed the creation of the permanent exhibition at the new Jewish Museum in Berlin.¹³ For Gorbey, "a good museum is like a good film, a good TV program, a good piece of theatre: it is a paced experience where you have fortissimos

⁸ Ralph Appelbaum Associates Incorporated. <http://www.raany.com/capabilities2.html#Anchor-36445> (Consulted 10 January 2002).

⁹ Ralph Appelbaum Associates Incorporated. <http://www.raany.com/capabilities2.html#Anchor-36445> (Consulted 10 January 2002).

¹⁰ Ralph Appelbaum, "Designing for collective memory: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," *Design Management Journal* (Fall 1996): 21. In a similar vein, *New York Times* Page One Picture Editor Philip Gefter said that words are cerebral, images visceral, when characterizing his approach to the use photographs in covering the events of September 11 and their aftermath at the panel "Confronting September 11 and Beyond" on October 30, 2001 at New York University.

¹¹ Ralph Appelbaum, "Anthropology, history, and the changing role of the museum," Lecture at the International Conference on Anthropology and the Museum, Taiwan Museum, Taipei, 1995. <http://www.raany.com/anthropologylecture.html>.

¹² Ralph Appelbaum Associates Incorporated. <http://www.raany.com/capabilities2.html#Anchor-36445> (Consulted 10 January 2002).

¹³ Ralph Appelbaum made an exhibition proposal to Te Papa, which was not accepted. While Appelbaum did not get the exhibition contract, his approach did inform Te Papa's installation style.

and pianissimos. So, that is one of the things we have been looking at: where are the people going to get an adrenaline rush; where are they going to be surprised and happy; where are they going to be rather subdued and contemplative?"¹⁴ When Gorby refers to "adrenaline rush" and to the visitor's moods (surprise, happiness, subdued, contemplative), he is indexing an important shift in exhibition philosophy from the visual and cognitive to the somatic and affective.

An historical formation, the museum tends to be conserving and conservative institution, subject to the catalyzing effects of avant-garde artists that engage and attempt to destabilize its very premises on the premises, so to speak, and to pressures (financial and otherwise) to appeal to a wider public. That public, particularly younger generations, comes to the museum with a new sensorium, one that has been shaped not only by radio, television, video, and cinema, but also the digital technologies that are a more pervasive part of their lives than is any other medium. Their capacities for multi-tasking and their thresholds for arousal are high. Not only can they respond quickly and do several things at the same time, but also their arousal threshold rises as the media that they consume deliver ever more stimulating effects. A prime site of the adrenalin rush are intense somatic experiences like "extreme rides" and "extreme adventures," which offset the cerebral manipulations of code and disembodiment of life on the screen.

What can museums, by their very nature a slow medium paced in footsteps, an orderly place of quiet contemplation and focused attention, offer a generation that Peter LaBier, an art student at Vassar College characterized as follows: "There's just this urge with kids my age to derange your senses."¹⁵ If the museum has always been a school for the senses, clearly the curriculum has changed, as have the museum's epistemology and pedagogy.

Hard and soft mastery. These developments are consistent with new approaches to interface design. Sherri Turkle, Professor of the Sociology of Science at the Massachusetts Institute of echnology, traces two important shifts in the learning styles of oftware developers and the conception of interface. First, there is the shift from hard mastery to soft mastery. Second, there is the hift from a cognitive to an affective concept of interface.

Hard mastery characterizes pedagogies that proceed systematically from rules, the way that foreign languages, mathematics, and the sciences are taught. Start with the undamentals and build from simple to complex, in an hierarchical fashion. The learning process is carefully scripted. Soft mastery, in contrast, is playful, improvisatory, exploratory,speculative, intuitive, and associative. It is more lateral than hierarchical. It proceeds by tinkering and by trial and error, more like noodling around than reading manuals and following rules. It is more like the way artists work-more like bricolage.

In an era of scientific uncertainty, the apparent "confusion" of early cabinets of curiosities was a prime site of soft mastery. With the development of systematic taxonomies and the arrangement of specimens according to them, the physical space of the museum became one of hard mastery, everything in its place within a hierarchical scheme. More recently, museums have taken a variety of approaches, from highly controlled narrative that prescribe the path visitors will take through an exhibition to more fluid and flexible arrangements that encourage visitors to follow their own interests and create their own paths through the installation.

The shift from a cognitive to an affective concept of interface reflects a significant change in how software designers understand their medium. Instead of thinking in terms of artificial intelligence and "smart" technologies, they are conceiving of machines with personality. The presumption is that interfaces will work better if they provide well-developed characters with whom users can interact. It is not enough for a machine to recognize your words and carry out your instructions. Human computer interaction will be enhanced if an agent with human attributes can actually *communicate* with humans. For "embodied conversational agents" or "realistic avatars" to be believable and effective, they need, first, to have a personality, "give the illusion of communicative *intent*" through gesture, and not only generate emotional responses but also recognize emotional responses in a human user.¹⁶ The presumption is that a human interface is the best interface (I will return to this point below in the discussion of *Difficult Matters*).

¹⁴ Alessandra Galizzi Kroegel, "The Jewish Museum in Berlin opens to the public on 9 September," *The Artnewspaper.com*. 3 September 2001. <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/article.asp?idart=7254> (Consulted 10 January 2002).

¹⁵ Paul Zielbauer, " New campus high: illicit prescription drugs," *New York Times*, 24 March 2000, A1.

¹⁶ According to Cassell, "Our models of emotion, of personality, of conversation are still rudimentary. And the number of conversational behaviors that we can realize in real time using animated bodies is still extremely limited."

Identity and identification. Older museum regimes, as spaces of hard mastery, encouraged an attitude of detachment in the spirit of objectivity and the museum's claim to authoritative knowledge. Responding to modes of citizenship informed by diversity policies such as multiculturalism or biculturalism, museums become instruments of identity politics and sites of redress. There has emerged a new category, "museums of conscience," for museums that deal with such subjects as genocide, slavery, apartheid, civil rights, and crimes against humanity. Some have been created by, or at the urging of, victims of injustice. Others, like *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944*, which was created by the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, are part of a larger effort to confront a shameful national past.¹⁷ Others reflect the maturing of museums, according to Appelbaum, who sees "the museum in its entirety as a moral artifact—a summation not of our biological, or technical, or even artistic progress, but of our slowly evolving humanity." Museums can no longer simply celebrate history. "A new honesty" has encouraged museums to "open up for public interpretation the darker side of human society" and to do so more reflexively and self-critically.¹⁸ In this spirit, all museums could become museums of conscience in relation to their own histories, collections, and audiences. Such developments separate museums of the late twentieth century from the nineteenth-century ones that Tony Bennett characterizes as a sphere of regulation for the production of disciplined subjects.¹⁹

Thus, Te Papa proceeds from the idea that visitors come to the museum to find themselves. It follows that the museum plays an important role in affirming the cultural identities of visitors. For exhibitions to be effective, Te Papa assumes that the visitor must identify with what is shown. The visitor must feel connected or personally involved. Exhibitions based on narrative, iconic artifacts, emotional engagement, and personal relevance are well suited to the questions of individual and collective identity.

Identity operates in the sphere of cultural production not simply as a psychological category but as a way of mobilizing political claims. The National Museum of the American Indian has addressed these issues in creative ways to make the point that although their collections were predicated on the disappearance of Native Americans, Native Americans did not disappear. The meaning those collections hold for Native Americans today and the role of the museum in the survival of Native American communities are the museum's highest priorities. Their survival depends on their ability to make authoritative identity claims and on that basis to secure rights to sovereignty, land, fishing, and the proceeds from lucrative casinos, among others.

Identity questions are thus closely linked to issues of rights and redress—to conscience—and entail the kinds of institutional changes exemplified by Te Papa, which must put forward a national identity that is by definition heterogeneous. Those changes involve representation in two senses. The issue is not only about being in the picture—the representation—but also being represented in the institution's infrastructure, on its staff, and in its audience.

Visitor and customer. When New Zealand's social welfare government gave way to new right economics, the model for the citizen became the customer and the model for the state became the market. Taxpaying citizens were customers with every right to expect services for their money. In Australia and New Zealand, following the United Kingdom model, museums such as Te Papa came to define their mission as "customer focused" and "commercially positive." I had never thought of myself as a customer in a museum and was somewhat taken aback to read in a pamphlet for the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney that I, the customer, would receive excellent service.

This language signals the museum's commitment to a business model, including the appointment of museum directors with business experience, use of management theories derived from corporate culture, and application of such marketing techniques as branding. These developments parallel what is happening in the political sphere. The most recent president of the United States brings an MBA and a career in business to the position and there are indications that the forging of national identity is becoming a matter of branding. Tony Blair declared, shortly after coming into office, that he would rebrand the United Kingdom. Heritage, the current brand, might be a great place to visit, but it was not a

¹⁷ See the responses to this exhibition on the H-German discussion list, "Discussion: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht/ Wehrmacht Exhibit 1995-2000" <http://www2.hnet.msu.edu/~german/discuss/other/wehrmacht.htm>.

¹⁸ Appelbaum, "Anthropology, history, and the changing role of the museum."

¹⁹ Bennett, Tony. *The birth of the museum* (London: Routledge; 1995).

great place to live. As the millenium approached, the United Kingdom needed to be identified with youthful enterprise if it was to attract investment.

Customers are expected to pay, visitors are not, and having paid, customers expect value for their money. The commercially positive museum is expected to meet standards of excellence not only as regards its core mission but also as a business that provides a service. To that end, museums are undertaking such extensive market and visitor research that some of them may well know more about their visitors than about their collections. This knowledge is as important to marketing the museum as it is to the museum's educational mission.

*From an informing to a performing museology.*²⁰ As knowledge formations change and research moves into the university, museums have been left with collections that materialized outmoded knowledge, epistemologies, and pedagogies. Unless they changed, they would become doubly historical. They would become museums of themselves. Some, like Te Papa and the National Museum of the American Indian, shunned this possibility, while others embraced it.

What happens when museums embrace their history rather than work against it? Whether because of inertia, neglect, or lack of funds or because of foresight or thanks to a bequest to ensure that nothing would change, some museums have discovered that their greatest value is as an historical artifact. Among the finest examples are the Sir John Soane's Museum in London, the Tylers Museum in Haarlem, Hallwylska Palatset in Stockholm, and the Mütter Museum of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. They have escaped obsolescence by becoming metamuseums. Each in their own way produces an utterly contemporary historicity.

With advances in medical science and changes in how doctors were trained, the Mütter Museum became obsolete and a source of embarrassment to the College of Physicians. It was no longer effective as an *informing* museology, by which I mean that it had ceased to function as a neutral vehicle for the transmission of useful information in the training of doctors. To survive it needed to devise a *performing* museology, that is, it needed to take a reflexive approach to itself in order to reveal the historical role of the museum in the teaching of medicine. This approach is a performing museology because it does not treat the museum as neutral conduit for the transmission of information but rather it makes the museum itself, as a technology and as a medium in its own right, the subject. Think of the museum, not as a place to which one brings technology, but as a technology in its own right- a set of skills, techniques, and methods. Think of the museum as a distinctive medium, not as an empty vessel for all kinds of musealia. Consider it as a medium in its own right. A performing museology makes that medium transparent? A performing museology makes the museum perform itself by making the museum qua museum visible to the visitor. Museums do this in various ways. The Mütter Museum is one example.

The Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum is another. A museum of contemporary art that opened in 1902 as the Folkwang Museum in Hagen, KEOM has devised its own way to deal with its troubled past.²¹ After Osthaus's death in 1921, his heirs sold the collection, which contained works by Gauguin, Cézanne, Matisse, van Gogh, Manet, Renoir, and others. The memory of this phantom collection haunts the work of the museum today. Under the inspired directorship of Michael Fehr, KEOM's history informs everything the museum does, but the museum does not attempt in a literal way to restore or recreate what was. Instead, KEOM thematizes the very idea of the museum through a process of self-reflection. Fehr characterizes the museum as an autopoietic system, which means that however much the museum presents what is brought into it, the museum is finally a self-referential system. This does not mean that the museum is isolated or separated from society. Rather, Fehr believes that focusing on the specificity of the museum, rather than making it conform to other media, can produce new possibilities and distinctive experiences. Treating the museum as an art practice is one way of understanding the museum as a medium.

III. *The Project*

The project, as we know it from contemporary public art, is particularly well suited to this approach, which is closer to social sculpture than to conventional museum practice. Because everything follows

²⁰ I take the distinction between informing and performing from Johannes Fabian Fabian, " ...From informative to performative ethnography." *Power and performance: ethnographic explorations through proverbial wisdom and theater in Shaba, Zaire* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 3-20.

²¹ See the Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum's website http://www.keom.de/home_e.html.

from the organizing concept, form and content emerge from process. Exhibition may well not be the end, but only a phase in a process. Process is often more important than the exhibition itself. Often collaborative, projects can set new benchmarks for participation and "interactivity."

What would happen if we stopped thinking about visitors or customers, which suggests consumers, learners, absorbers, or receivers of that which has been created for them? We would then need to think about them as producers. What if exhibitions were regarded as an interface or agent or catalyst? An exhibition, if indeed the project produces an exhibition, could then be anything, but not an end in itself. Two projects—*The Gun Sculpture* and *Difficult Matters: Objects and Narratives that Disturb and Affect*—exemplify the promise of a project model.²²

The Gun Sculpture. As I was about to exit the Canadian pavilion at Expo 2000 in Hanover, I detected the smell of machine oil and followed my nose to a startling installation, *The Gun Sculpture*. I had been disappointed with Canada's pavilion, which attempted to match the sensation Canada had created with IMAX at Expo '70 in Osaka. For Canada's pavilion in Hanover, which was one of the largest at the Expo 2000, the government allocated \$25 million, ninety percent of which was for "multi-media and other installations." They included a "virtual river," a multimedia tour of Canadian subjects, involving hundreds of screens on the floor reflecting the changing seasons," a "360-degree 'multi-sensorial' theatre," where audiences were "caressed by more astonishing sound and visual effects," a "40 foot-diameter overhead screen, and eight circular screens each eight feet in diameter," and a "cyber-lounge, where 12 computer terminals are set up."²³ The result was an unimpressive high tech show with little substance.

The Gun Sculpture was a stunning exception. It is exemplary of what I mean by a project. The installation grows out of a process and is itself an agent in that process. In 1995, Sandra Bromley and Wallis Kendal, artists living and working in Edmonton, Alberta, founded the *i human 2000 Peace Initiative*, a millennium collaboration whose goal is to end violence.²⁴ They engaged youth in the project, not only in Edmonton, but also in many other countries, to contribute their experiences, writing, and images to a journal. They put out a call for weapons and documentation. More than 45 countries responded. Using the tools of the sculptor's trade, they deactivated more than 7000 guns, grenades, land mines, knives, and artillery shells weapons. While technically scrap metal, these decommissioned weapons retained "the mystique and myth of the firearm."²⁵ The artists had to create a secure place for storing the weapons and take great care in presenting objects that are at once seductive and repellent. They welded more than five tons of deactivated weapons into a crypt in the exact proportions of a prison cell.

Everything was made out of these mutilated instruments of violence—the walls, inside and out, the floor, and the ceiling. Each weapon, still discernable and discernibly altered, exudes the pain of violence and the tragedy of death. Many of them come with a story. There is postal van bombing shrapnel from Belfast, a rubber bullet contributed by an anonymous Catholic priest from a border town in Northern Ireland, crime weapons from RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) Forensics Laboratory, and military firearms and land mines from the Canadian Department of National Defence, to mention but a few examples. There are also stories associated with the collecting of weapons. Law students in Brazil "took it upon themselves to get involved by going to the streets and collecting as many as 200 weapons. Then in a public event it was arranged for the military to drive tanks over the weapons, thereby deactivating them in a very ritualistic way."²⁶

The installation includes a videotape that documents the project, photographs of victims of violence, a guestbook, and a blackboard for visitor comments. The blackboard was photographed at intervals and then erased to make room for more comments. The total installation, including the smell of gun oil, mobilized intense feeling by making the violence of weapons so tangible and by linking them to photographs of victims and their stories. The project works as a catalyst to take concrete steps in

²² Other projects deserve mention in this context: Sigrid Sigurdsson's "In Face of The Silence" at the Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum http://www.keom.de/kuenstler/texte/sigurdsson_e.html; *Here is New York*, a response to the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, <http://hereisnewyork.org/> (I have written briefly about *Here is New York* in "Our beautiful towers," *Samtid & museer* 3-4 (2001):4-7); and The Names Project (AIDS Memorial Quilt) <http://www.aidsquilt.org/>.

²³ Carmen Sylvain, Deputy Commissioner General for EXPO 2000, is quoted by Hilary McLaughlin, "Expo 2000 Canada's showcase," *Embassy Newspaper Online* 1, 1 (February 2000), http://www.germanembassyottawa.org/news/Perspectives/winter2000/expo_canada.html.

²⁴ See *i human 2000 Peace Initiative* <http://www.ihuman.org/index.htm>.

²⁵ Newsletter of *i human 2000 Peace Initiative*, 1,1 (December 1998), 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

stopping violence, starting with weapons, and as a space of witnessing, debate, reflection, and memory that is global in its reach. The collecting of weapons, creating of this particular sculpture, and the installation and exhibition of it are parts a larger process that mobilizes people all over the world. It is a prime case of what the artists call “the fine art of peacemaking.”

Such projects engage their constituencies neither in the older museum mode of citizen as someone to be reformed nor in the newer one of customer expecting good service. Those who send in weapons, the youth who collaborate on the project, victims who submit their photographs and stories, and visitors who register their reactions are producers, not visitors.

*Difficult Matters: Objects and Narratives that Disturb and Affect.*²⁷ I had the opportunity to hear about *Difficult Matters* in the planning stage and was delighted to have the chance to see the actual exhibition in Vadstena, one of its stops during the period December 1999 to September 2000. Installed in an enormous truck, the exhibition traveled throughout Sweden, making stops in the town squares. Local people going about their daily chores would pass by the truck without knowing quite what to expect, even if they had read announcements in the town paper. Their curiosity was piqued by the large stenciled letters, red and black, on each side of the white truck. With the words SVÅRA SAKER / FARLIGA SAKER, this clinically white box announced itself as a container of hazardous material. It was a mysterious presence in the well-preserved historic town square. It emanated a feeling of danger. *Difficult Matters*, a project that includes not only the truck installation, but also seminars and publications, uses the idea of “dangerous things and difficult narratives” to animate a collaborative process. That process started with an invitation to curators to select an object from their collections and write about it. Fifty-four curators from fifty-four museums responded. Curators not only transmitted the stories that had traveled with the objects, but also conveyed their own difficulties with the material. Should some of these things even be in the museum’s collection? Even if they should be in the collection, is it proper to exhibit them? One curator sent the story but not the artifact, a skull. The place where the skull would have been displayed was empty. The curators’ dilemmas and responses became part of the object’s story.

The kinds of things that people and curators find difficult can also appeal to visitors for the wrong reasons and a powerful exhibition could become a house of horrors. How then to show a grenade, a spoon modified to cook drugs, an empty food container used by a homeless person, a tiny coffin for a dead fetus, or radioactive dirt without sensationalizing them on the one hand or provoking uncontrollable disturbance in visitors on the other? Even an object as apparently innocuous as a bottle of Evian water can be a sinister reminder of a traumatic event that contaminated the water supply. The texts, signed by those who authored them, conveyed the struggle of each curator to walk the line between his or her own professional and personal relationship to the object.

The process continued during the exhibition as some 300 visitors were inspired to bring difficult objects that were part of their own lives into the installation space. The curatorial process that began before the exhibition opened was now in the hands of visitors, who continued to produce the exhibition. This made *Difficult Matters* a truly interactive work of many authors and many voices. The fiftyfour contributing curators were in a conversation not only with those who gave the objects and stories to the museum but also with those who visited the exhibition, recorded their reactions, and contributed their own objects and stories. Conceived as a “mobile field station,” the installation was a work in progress. The exhibition was but one element, albeit an important one, in a larger process. It was a catalyst. It did not only display. It also made things happen.

This project performs much of the theory that interests me. It configures the relationship between information and experience, things and stories, thinking and feeling, and hard and soft mastery in ways that are consistent with a performing museology. In a kind of reverse engineering, it does not try to make a technological interface more personable, but rather it installs the curators within the exhibition and provides an actual human interface.

Working reflexively, *Difficult Matters* plumbs the possibilities of the museum as a distinctive medium. It too is museum theatre, but not in an expo mode. *Difficult Matters* is object performance in the sense that

²⁷ I would like to thank curator Eva Silvén and designer Mats Brunander, as well as Brita Johansson and Carolyn Östberg, the two curators who have lived, breathed, and traveled with this exhibition throughout Sweden. They have helped me to understand the process of creating the exhibition.

a thing is a slow event.²⁸ But, the exhibition is not a play in three acts. Visitors do not walk the plot. Objects are not props. They are not staged in a series of *mise-en-scènes* that carry a narrative through line. There is no orchestration of emotion between adrenaline rush and quiet contemplation. The total installation is nonetheless an expressive artifact, from the exterior of the truck that houses the exhibition down to every aspect of the installation within.²⁹

What I especially value in this exhibition is the relationship of what it does to what it is about. *Difficult Matters* is not only *in* the medium of the exhibition and *in* the medium of the museum. It is also *about* the medium of exhibition, it is also *about* the museum. It is at once museological and metamuseological. That is to say it reflects on the museum. It reflects on what it does. And, it encourages its visitors to do the same. It does this through the compression and intensity that comes from being so small and compact, so sharply conceived and focused. When the focus is so tight and clear, the scale so reduced, the pace so slow, the air so still and quiet, it is possible to pay close attention to detail.

The installation itself is exquisite in its attention to detail, from the choice of materials and the red archival boxes to the efficiency of the space, which is as economical as a ship's galley. With so few and such singular objects and nothing else but a single long text for each, visitors are drawn into the space and towards each thing. Such compression encourages absorption, intense focus, attention to detail, and deep emotional resonance. One has the feeling of being inside a studiolo, a cabinet, or a private study, where one's thoughts and feelings are inspired by objects. This effect is created by the intimacy of the space, the beautifully crafted wooden cabinets, the precise arrangement of arresting and mysterious objects, the reading material, warm lighting, places to sit, and slow pace. Going against received museum wisdom, *Difficult Matters* provided visitors with long texts, but in a comfortable format.

Each text was in its own large folder. Visitors could hold the text, at a comfortable reading distance, while standing or sitting. The beauty of the museum medium is its slowness. New generation museums try to speed things up to keep pace with competing media. *Difficult Matters* took its time and so did those who visited it.

Consistent with its dedication to what is distinctive and powerful about the museum as a medium, *Difficult Matters* is low tech. There were two little tape recorders, but they did not play to the visitor. Rather, visitors were encouraged to record their reactions. Not only does this reverse the way media are usually used in museum exhibitions, but it highlights the specificity of the museum as a medium. At a time when museums worry that visitors will not find objects interesting and look to media to create more "exciting" exhibitions, which usually means more technology in the galleries, *Difficult Matters* took the opposite approach. It probed the museum medium even more deeply. It tapped museum collections, presented artifacts directly and simply, provided a lengthy text for each object, collected examples from visitors, accessioned and stored the material in red boxes by material, according to an old museum classification system, to underscore the museological point, and provided additional reading material.

By creating a richly artifactual space that is both exhibition and laboratory, *Difficult Matters* integrated collection, documentation, archiving, and exhibition, brought them out in the open and involved visitors collaboratively. As Eva Silvén explained to me, why should the entire process be hidden backstage and only the display, the final result, be on stage. *Difficult Matters* brought some of that back region into the front region so that visitors could not only see what curators do, but also participate in the curatorial process.

Even the curators were brought into the front region. They did their curatorial work right in the space of the exhibition. They traveled with the exhibition and interacted with visitors. However, their role was less didactic, than it was responsive. They were not there to give guided tours or talks. Their role was to respond to visitors and to interact with them, rather than to teach or lecture. They blurred the line between curator and educator, as they gently guided visitors through the rough emotional terrain of the exhibition. They watched for opportunities to engage visitors in conversation about the objects. They encouraged visitors to bring their own difficult things into the exhibition. Although they did not keep the objects, they did mount documentation of new material on the walls, logged each new entry on a computer, and filed the documentation away in the red boxes. Above all, they helped to establish and

²⁸ The source of "An object is just a slow event" is Stanley Eveling, professor of existential philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. It was reported to me by Katharine Young, who studied with Eveling during the late sixties.

²⁹ Appelbaum has characterized the museum as an expressive artifact. See Appelbaum, "Anthropology, history, and the changing role of the museum."

maintain the appropriate tone in this volatile situation. What they learned about visitors and their responses to the exhibition is of greater value to the museum than many visitor surveys.

Considering the cost of producing high tech interfaces for exhibitions, whether in the gallery, online, or in the form of CDroms, videos, and the like, dollar for dollar, the curators were better value. The human interface they provided was far more effective than the most sophisticated high tech interface-and in the spirit of the most recent thinking on interface, which is now being conceptualized as a machine with personality whose effectiveness has more to do with communication than information. The live presence of curators, the refusal to delegate their function to machines, and the insistence on nothing less than curators is a statement in itself. It is consistent with the entire concept of the project doing what it is about-*Difficult Matters* was not only in the medium of the museum, but also it was about the medium of the museum.

New technologies may do a much better job of providing certain kinds information than a museum exhibition can. The sheer volume of information and the way it is structured in databases makes it possible to find and relate more information more quickly than ever before. *Difficult Matters* demonstrated what museums are good at. It made the case for the affective presence of objects, for their effectivity as agents in the world in their own right, in all their materiality and tangibility. If anything, the very immateriality of digital technologies have made the material world harder to take for granted and more interesting and, as a consequence, carved out an important role for museums as a medium in their own right. The tangibility of *Difficult Matters* had very much to do with touch in both in the sense of objects that had touched (and been touched by) the people and events that made them so difficult, as well as in the sense that they were touching. They are more than signs, symbols, and indexes. They are tangible. They have the capacity to arouse by sheer dint of their material presence.

Projects like *The Gun Sculpture* and *Difficult Matters* have the quality of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. A challenge for large and expensive institutions with long histories is how to approximate the processual and collaborative character of such projects. The museum's past, reflexively engaged, is a rich resource for contemporary practice. So too are new technologies, which are not only integrated into installations, but also become exhibition spaces in their own right. Most promising are ways that conceptualizations of new media might illuminate the specificity of the museum as a medium, paradigmatic shifts in embodied experience, and the role of the museum in society.³⁰

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³⁰ See, for example, *Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality* <http://www.artmuseum.net/w2vr/contents.html>, which inscribes multimedia within a history of art and performance from the Lascaux caves to Wagner and John Cage.

Tomislav Sola: A Contribution to Understanding of Museums: Why Would the Museums Count?

The experts should know how to anticipate the questions that the users of museums, be it present ones or the future ones, might pose. One should bear in mind that non-users are often in the situation to decide upon the future of museum profession and priorities among its aims. They can do it as taxpayers in different functions in the society, or they can do it as the consumers of our products. Museums fail to explain their role in the contemporary *society* to their respective communities and, one might claim, have difficulty themselves to understand it. In the situation of the speeding change and implosion of value systems, museums are rarely successful to prove their "rentability". To anticipate questions, answer them, assure quality of services and plan their future, they need a theory. So, museology appeared when first questions about appearing profession started to be posed, i.e. some hundred years ago. The astonishing rate of growth in the museum field in the last fifty years, gave it further importance.

As the part of an established culture, museums are rarely the object of public questioning which allows them in their functioning to rely upon (conservative) traditional public or on the rather arbitrary estimates of what is needed from them. Of course, "the needs" would refer to how they perceive their role in serving their community. The feedback is often lacking or ignored. More often than is thought, museum professionals are inapt to deliver the usable product. That is the consequence of low understanding and motivation in their own profession. Approaching relative autonomy that comprises market logic and competition, museums find themselves in a vulnerable and delicate position. The almighty state administration is a retreating boss.

The Usual Misconceptions of the Professionals Museums are Scientific Institutions

The best, the biggest and the greatest by their collections, experts and funds - are. The rest are not. But those have, nevertheless, an obligation to follow the scientific standards and be faithful to the unbiased truth. With the dynamic fluctuation of experts and easy communication due to the new technologies and new channels of collaboration -the sole obstacle to the museum research activity remains usual lack of finances. But, to be very clear, museums as majority are communicational institutions founded upon scientific standards.

Museums are About Past

Yes, but only to bring it into the present and future, with some sound reason. In fact, they are always about present and how the present sees the past. The advanced museums speak about present using the past.

Museums Should Stay Away from the Problems and Dilemmas of Today

Just the contrary. The world of today is burdened with problems, which are extremely dramatic and deal with the issues of survival of human kind. There is no historical distance as the luxury of past functioning of museums. We take risks by getting insight into the present and by comparing it to the inherited experience. But we do not give in museums final answers nor we judge options: we only honestly talk about them. One may apply to their position the modern saying: if you are not part of the solution, you must be part of the problem (which indeed is the case, if the museums affirm by their attitude the political and social passivity).

Museums are not Political Institutions

Yes they are, if understood properly. The role of social and political outsiders cannot be the position of good (which is inherent in their invention) nor can it help their flourishing, Excluded from social, cultural,

economical and environmental strategies, museums become irrelevant, therefore unnecessary. The long-lived servitude of museums to the dominant forces of any society is to be blamed for their relatively low profile in the life of community where they exist.

Museums are about Positive Values

If they want to be educational or even to be regarded as a source of relevant wisdom, they better be able to speak about the dark side of their objects and themes too. Ignoring the existence of evil, they deny it, and join those institutions and individuals in the society whose main aim is manipulation of people's mind.

Museums are There to Tell the Scientific Truth

What is meant, usually, is to tell the final and indisputable truth. Well, the name of the one is the Absolute, and whatever that is, it does not live either in the museum or in school and, almost as surely, not in the temples, To be more precise: museums are there to pose questions disregarding whether they would endanger any power structure or position.

Museums are the Institutions of Knowledge

Of course, the knowledge is an ingredient of their rich complexity, but far from being their substance. Knowing facts, truths and principles is an obligation of museums. Transferring it is another business, that of educating, whereas doing something with the knowledge is still further from the passive knowledge producer. As to the knowledge, museums cannot stand the comparison to any institution from the knowledge industry. But, correctly understood, museums are, although knowledge relevant, something else: the active knowledge. The abundance of knowledge does not teach men to be wise, whereas the latter should be the ultimate (however seemingly imprecise) purpose of museums.

The Misconceptions of the Laymen Museums are Money Spenders

The truth is that they earn it. Of course, we talk about correctly conceived and well-run museum. Museums are non-profit institutions which now means that any direct profit they make in some of their activities must return to the museum working process itself, i.e. must serve the quality of the museum output. Museums for the majority must depend on the public money, as they contribute to the public well being and prosperity. They are like any similar service industry: social and health security, public transportation, obligatory education etc. In some cases of very effective museums, the new econometric methods show that revenue they indirectly create in the community exceeds the usual business effects. Some measurements show that museums create almost double number of jobs around them as the consequence of their activity. This public image of money spenders costs museums dearly. The rising neo-liberalism sees them as burden to the respective society.

Museums are There for Old Things

To be "for museum" means in any western inspired culture to be outdated, outmoded, obsolete, unnecessary, in brief - useless. Therefore, in popular mind, museums are full of things which we keep out of nostalgia for the past times. The scientific interest there is taken as a sort of curiosity of eccentric experts. The next layer is the superlativist: because the things there are rare, the biggest, the best, the most expensive, the most elaborated, the most beautiful, the exceptional in any possible sense and so on, Belonging to the past, all of them are old, i.e. the older the better. But that notion is now lost in the best museums because "old" for them is literally yesterday. We want to document our cultures and civilization so that at any moment we can study it for the different purposes. Marking the change makes the future more obvious and less frightening, and, besides, enables us to adapt and correct when we believe it does not correspond with what we need. Of course, museums are learning the lesson, with

difficulties though, but they are becoming the institutions for today and about today, including its reflections: one in the past and one in the future.

Museums are Temples of National Pride

All too often they are, and not much more than that. Pride is legitimate ingredient of self-esteem and knowing one's own identity: pride of being different, rich of inherited experiences and cultural practices; pride of quality. But, museums should have been able to impose the realistic picture of the history, and explain it as experience upon which one can learn how to improve human state and its natural dispositions. This was rarely the case, so we have national museums, especially those of so called big nations, as temples of vanity: only domination and superiority over others and over nature: roughly speaking, - an illustrated 3-D encyclopedia of conquests, All too often, they are not only national but also nationalistic. That is not the way to pave the secure path to national identity; right in front of their museums the very national identity is crumbling under the globalizing processes. They watch scrupulously and do nothing and yet, almost any member of the public would understand that museums are there to protect and present the identity they stand for. Those museums jealously dust the picture of past, but the majority of there employed curators know poorly the present.

What is good in past should direct us today by its values. There is nothing wrong in having the dead as guides if their messages are interpreted correctly and according to our specific circumstances.

The True Nature of Museums

Museum is many things and will become still many more, For the moment being, the profession functions upon a definition, which for a longtime satisfies the majority of museum people.

It is an important social function. This is why we have so many mediators and interpreters of the inherited human experience: historians, archaeologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, art historians, curators (all of them and still others if working in a museum), philosophers, scientific researchers, clergymen, politicians, opinion-makers...

Museums have an advantage of being all of it at one time and in one place, a sort of easy-to-recognize post-pored invention (if we forget their two odd centuries of institutional experience). The truth is that not many have recognized this potential, but those who have demonstrate an institutional success. They have a major specific difference to all others by the fact of their collections of original artifacts and not less original documentation that accompanies them. We talk, obviously, about literally immense storages of objects. It is a pure guess of experienced professional but I would say that world's museums keep, care and, very partly, expose up to u billion of objects. That is the materialized memory: a curious invention of our civilization. The more we shall ruin the balance by the virtualization of our world, the more there would be the same old need to keep the solid material traces behind. Collection of fetishes? Yes, to quite an extent, but also the collection of encoded meanings we like to keep for another mind to come to wonder, experience and research with some new knowledge, some new technique, some new mind and some new needs to guide their interests.

The knowledge being available in such quantities from so many resources and at such an ease (www), makes museums freer to recognize their true nature: that of communication. They are social institutions with multiple tasks so communication should mean many things:

- social space;
- information and orientation in past and present values;
- direct role in promotion and (scrupulous) revival of identities they stand for;
- developmental agency;

As a wise social device working to the advantage of its community, it adapts the community to the changing conditions in its surroundings and in itself, creating thus viable preconditions for its prosperity. Envisaged as a cybernetic mechanism attached to the community or society it is supposed to serve, it corrects what may be judged as misleading and wrong helping thus harmony and the common well being. It goes without saying that these functions so described are for the most practical circumstances a mere wishful thinking. It would be also wrong to think that museums are supernatural force able to solve the problems of the society that finances it. Nearer to the truth would be to say that museums so conceived are one of the institutions in modern societies which help them survive in the circumstances of threat. What is at stake is not some nostalgic feature that might disappear under the wheels of the globalization. It is the variety that makes the substance of the entire richness, active and inherited, that

may dramatically disappear in front of our bewildered eyes. So, museums today have the role to play which is very demanding. That role means participation in the destiny of their community, but the participation of an elder which means responsibility and moral commitment. Correctly understood, this role would also give them new importance. The rich world we still know is in peril. Hence the pressure to found ever new museums. (Part of the push comes from tourist industry driven arguments and ever present local chauvinism.) The true impetus is the widespread feeling that we live in a managed world where the viable balance must also be an outcome of our own action. That might be evident in the man-made part of reality. But, that is also true in the natural environment that is unable to re-gain balance without serious effort of institutions we devise for the purpose. To illustrate the point, natural parks and nature conservation policies are just one emanation of the museum idea. Their numbers rise proportionally to the evidence of degradation of the environment.

Evidently, museums are expected to offer usable product that public mind is not able to describe, but instinctively feels that museums are important means of protecting the disappearing values (by which communities continue to be spiritually or even physically alive). Dramatic tones forgotten - there stays however enough arguments to claim that museums were never different in their role of securing or augmenting vitality, or, indeed, returning life to the dying identities. Only now their tasks become conspicuous and practical at the same time.

That, of course, does not mean that museums should forget about traditional duties of collecting, research, care for collections, presentation and education. Their role is only expanding and being in their public part of functions enveloped by the communicational capacity.

What Should Be the Aim of Museums?

Globalization forces us into retreat and defend ourselves as all identities are at stake. The oneness and uniformity of the planet is, presumably, the dream of any multinational corporation, but this prospect is a nightmare of any culture. The state of threat by overwhelming globalization will give the new impetus to the development of action in the field of heritage. The number, variety and capacity of institutions that will exercise the counter-action will grow accordingly. The frontline must be as far as possible from the "heart-land" of the identities. That is the part of, emphatically saying, the only world war we are left with: global devastation of the inherited richness by the dominating models of managed culture vs. group, local, regional and national identities. The theory of heritage¹ reflects upon strategies needed or possible to protect what is being threaten. The traditional museum did it by securing the documentation of, say, disappearing culture and keeping it in a researched and secure way in museums. The reformed one, i.e. the one that looks at the problem as the situation of cybernetic dichotomy, does it by supporting what is being endangered and by reinforcing the vitality of it. We have a natural reaction of preserving what is specific and different from becoming general and nondescript, be it cultural entity, natural environment or even individual identity. Free, creative energy (and intelligence) stemming from the tradition can only be expected only at the level of some individual, group or community. The global culture or global processes are counter-productive or directly harmful to these fine structures and processes.

Museums nowadays use any business technique and skill to perform better. One of the reasons is the competitive environment and the other is, as stipulated, the need to become problem-solving institution. Who wants the objectives, wants also the means (as J. J. Rousseau suggested). One of the means is the marketing. As it may be obvious, marketing is part of any management, and by its logic strange to the nature of museums. Any ambitious museum will take it up, but not without dangers. This is why the marketing has to be tamed for the cultural purposes, i.e. the notion of product and profit must be differently understood.

Marketing, instead of serving as an important means of the advance of museum mission, can become its master. (Ames 1989:9)

"Between a museum and any commercial enterprise the boundary is clear" (Le nouveau... 1990:23), or maybe it is, theoretically speaking. In the valid definition of museums² it is only claimed that museums are non-profit institutions. Avoiding negation in the definition would probably lead to assert it as charitable status, which is nearer to its public commitment. At the same time it might suggest that the material "profit" they may generate serves the same set of charitable, pious purposes enveloped into the mission statements. When about marketing techniques, it serves the purpose well to define the product as quality set of services, and the profit as beneficial effects upon the society.

¹ In 1982 I have proposed the provocative term of "heritology"; nowadays it is part of the curriculum of the Chair of Museology at the University of Zagreb.

² ICOM (International Council of Museums, Unesco's NGO) I.

Museums are the invention of Western civilization.³ But, there are differences: the culturally different English-speaking North America understands museums, to an extent, differently than Europe. Their museums are also oriented on community and visitors, and quite a few claim to be visitor-friendly or even customer friendly, The orientation is there mostly induced by the argument of serving fairly the taxpayers who finance them. The impression is that that the motivation is more humanist in Europe and can be explained as:

- the need to influence the community/society with an aim to assist its (sustainable) development;
- the need to understand the identity (the museum takes care of) as ethical obligation of the community and its individuals.

The first case is about economical and environmental survival, whereas the second is concerned with spiritual continuation. Both motives are, indeed, about quality of life. The notion of inherited values weights less in North America than the notion of management, so the management of those values is preferred order of priorities so well obvious in American invention of heritage industry.* As a whole, European museums tend to be more socially concerned and more sensitive to the fine tissue of inherited values, but are probably managed with less efficiency.

Museums decide upon many facets of their own existence, but rarely propose a clear, convincing set of arguments about their final objectives. Most of their decisions are framed by conventions, political and social preconceptions and immanent reticence to function with the real-time circumstances. Anchored in the ocean of scientific, political or cultural truths, they can hardly react to any problem of their users, let alone those to come. Trough whose eyes will they look at the world? Which world will they look at: that of the past, or that of the present, only using past to understand it better? Whose museum will that be, and whose interests should it serve? If local museums interpret the place, whose sense of place do they interpret (Lenouveau.,.1990)? Will they position themselves as an institution that only cares for certain heritage (collecting, researching, caring, presenting) or will they go further than that? Do they understand themselves as careers or sharers; is their job prevalently conservationist or communicational?

To make those dilemma even harder, one has to know that most of the public consists of conformists when it comes to the traditional museum values. They simply obey the authority of institution, the same way they do it with other societal institutions. When proposed a different museum, they often reiterate in embarrassment. For some museums this is the way to loose authority. They are conditioned beyond being a usable ally. The worrying fact is that some 50-70% of population consists of non-museum goers. Of course, they pay museums and have definite needs for identity and problems that stem from the lack of understanding not only their past but also their present. Can museums help? Well the question should be, why don't they, for the most part? Educating population to use museums is a good conclusion that has many answers in practice. But the best way to attract new audiences is to offer museum that is felt useful in many obvious and subtle ways. Museums should achieve this by knowing the needs of the population and respecting some of their wishes.

In the double natured developmental paradigm, where we have forces of change on one side and forces of culture on the other, museums should join the later. By the immense capacity hidden or partly communicated in their storages and galleries, they can extract impulses of wisdom into the process where culture acts as conscience of science. This way they would sometimes be offering adaptation to the changing world (closing the gap of fear and misunderstanding) and sometimes corrective impulses with an aim to balance what is often carried away by the profit or uncontrolled globalizing forces. The aims are many but reduced to one, may mean that museums are there to help us retain the inherited richness of diversity we have inherited - be it plants, animals, languages, or concepts. Museums are not different from well understood schools by their effort to create free citizens, individuals conscientious of the collective solidarity, tolerant towards any difference be it other fellow beings, other animals, or plants - able and willing to seek the eternity in any of them and not in metastased self.

All museums are different. Some are so much part of the identity themselves that they should remain as they are. The new ones should be new, but all should reflect the character of the identity they stand for. The profit they make should be more than mercantilist, should be the difference in quality of life, the material prosperity included.

- Can it influence the increase of economic wealth of the community?
- Can it raise the employment?
- Can it influence the quality of information?

³ The export of their mode! toother area of the world is sometimes itself an attack on local identity. Of course, these assertions are simplifications which only make things more obvious, because one might argue that more of it was actually started in Great Britain, the only European country where heritage industry is recognised as a system of importance.

- Can it be useful in developmental strategies of the community?
- How far can it be useful in the complex promotion of the community/society, in its political and cultural maturing and in the amelioration of its image?
- Can the museum create a clear and effective sensibility for the values of the heritage, so that, ideally speaking there would be a widening circle of the outer "barefoot" curators to further improve its mission?

The result of the museum activity should be the changed behavior, some more noble juxtaposition of life priorities, some adjusted or even change of value system, a certain embellishment of soul. It should be aim of art museums to elevate the level of aesthetic experience and aesthetic needs of the society in which they act, The usual factographic proliferation of museums may easily look more convincing than this general call. No wonder this is so because we live in the knowledge civilization. Yet, is certainly more difficult and curiously outside of the mental reach of curators. It is quite curious that art museums see no role for themselves in education public how to shop and buy well designed, even simple and accessible objects. How to dress or decorate the living environment stays mysteriously outside their interest. Lot of people live in desperately faceless and derelict environment and there is literally nobody to help them. After having aesthetized pop-art, art museums proclaimed graffiti yet another form of plastic expression, whereas it is, first of all, an outcry for the crisis of identity and sense. Only at the end of this long alley of human strive for harmony lie the masterpieces of artistic creation that museums expose to the uninitiated visitors. Likewise, the museum of natural history is good only if it can generate love and understanding for the natural world. Only then it can tell us details about geological ages or propose us long Latin names of the exposed dead animals. An ethnographic museum becomes good if it helps vanishing rural culture gain momentum and dignity, and serve as precious experience in the multiple dilemma of today. Located in cities, those museums, whether they speak about their own country or distant colonies, expose only the trophies of conquest.

Any activity of a museum should be based upon the needs and wishes of its visitors (Sola 1998), Wishes should be known but relevant ones are only those which do not contradict the needs of the users. Of course it is a touchy subject, because museum professionals should make an effort to understand the needs of their community better than its members: to know and to act. The wishes of this sort differ from the needs only by the imprecision and length and are fully accountable unlike the ones merely concerned with amusement. The later is the basis of entire heritage industry.

The museum must offer what people today like, but not what they like, because a museum must be the stabilizing element of society's cultural life. (Caya 1992)

From obvious wishes to usable gains, there is arrange of the needs that visitors are rarely able to rationalize and formulate. So it remains the permanent task of museum professionals to understand the time in which museums operate, to know the present and potential users and, of course, to provide scientific basis to serving their community. The goal is simple if understood in its noblest dimension: the good.

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Michael Fehr: Understanding Museums. A proposal: The museum as an autopoietic System

One Friday afternoon some years ago, I was driving along the motorway from Cologne to Düsseldorf airport with my two nine-year-old daughters. I was pressed for time because we had been held up in a traffic jam and I was becoming doubtful whether we would reach the airport in time to collect my son; who was flying unaccompanied for the first time. My daughters were playing cards to relieve the boredom and repeatedly asked: "How much further is it?" To distract and entertain them more than anything else, I said: "We're about to cross the bridge spanning the valley where Neanderthal Man lived ...". "We know about him," my daughters cried, "we've seen him in Bonn." Aha, I thought to myself, they must have had a trip to the Rheinisches Landesmuseum. They never mentioned that visit. "We're almost there," I said. "Look to the right". And we drove across the Neanderthal bridge. But unfortunately, because I did not want to slow down and change lanes, we had to overtake a long lorry at that very moment, so we could not see the view from the bridge. "Ah here", my daughters said politely. "But all you can see here is forest". And then came one of those questions that make you realize why you love your children: "Daddy, did Neanderthal man actually live before or after Adam and Eve?"

Now I am not sure how you would have answered such a question under the stress of driving at about 70 mph in heavy motorway traffic and I will not trouble you with the inadequate reply I mumbled at the time. In any case, it brings me to the subject or, to be more precise, the topic, which is the typical starting point for all attempts analyzing museums - namely, an explanation based on the origins of Mankind. The numerous metaphors, which have been applied to Museums, are impressive proof that there is obviously an underlying universal principle which enables the museum to participate symbiotically or - perhaps more accurately - like a vampire in various other human achievements and which makes it into an almost imperial, global organization, comparable perhaps only with that of the Catholic Church.

It is impossible nowadays to give an adequate description of what makes up a museum. Because even if it is perhaps still conceivable to discover how many museums currently exist - that in itself would be a difficult task since new museums are being founded virtually every day and there is also no clear definition of just what a museum is - it would certainly be impossible to ascertain what and how everything is preserved and displayed in these museums. Just compiling a list of all these objects by category would be an enormous and virtually unfeasible task.

But even if one tried to resolve this problem *ex negativo* by asking what in fact cannot be placed in a museum, what category of objects is save from or totally immune to museum collection, one is unlikely to reach a satisfactory conclusion. For experience has taught us that anything which can be collected is the potential basis for a museum and that no one can predict what is collectable and what is actually collected.

However, the fact that it is impossible to come to grips with the concept museum externally does not mean that museums cannot be explained from an internal perspective. And this is precisely what I should like to try to do. My proposal for understanding museums is therefore aimed not at creating a new metaphor. It is rather an attempt to describe museums as a universal and dynamic set of functional connections that is obviously highly adaptable - but has entered a structural crisis that calls its further development into question.

So I should like to attempt firstly to describe the museum as an autopoietic, that is a self-reproducing system; secondly, in a kind of trial run, to characterize the major stages of its development; thirdly, to offer an explanation for the crisis in which museums (in Germany) find themselves; and finally, give a hint for a direction museums might take in the future.

If one speaks of a system this automatically implies that there is something that does not belong to this system. In the General Systems Theory this is called the *environment*. But in the General Systems Theory, systems are defined according to the operational modes with which the system produces itself and distinguishes itself from this environment. So a system is created by a specific operation and this operation in turn defines the system. To put it another way: specific operations coming together create

the difference between system and environment: a structure which has two aspects, an internal aspect called system and an external aspect called environment. Or to formulate the same idea in an even different way: through its own operations, a system places itself in a specific historical condition and this is precisely what distinguishes it from its environment.

What I have expressed here in the rather abstract concepts of the General Systems Theory (along the concept of Niklas Luhmann) is basically quite simple. Perhaps the best image for this theory is the snail-shell. Here we clearly have a structure from which we can recognize the operations, which have led to its development, and furthermore a structure, which becomes self-evident as it develops and in its development recalls its own history.

However, this image once again brings us to the external aspect of the museum and we have to go inside to understand its building plan. It is perhaps advisable to draw a distinction at this stage between the two elements, which apply to all museums (with certain exceptions which I shall come to later). These two elements are the *collection* and the *museum-shell* by which I do not just mean the physical building, but the entire technical, scientific and institutional apparatus. With certain specific exceptions, the collection and the shell are not identical. They are different elements, which constitute the museum as a whole and cannot replace one another; a shell without a collection is no more a museum than a collection without a shell.

The system museum thus operates with at least two elements, which interact in a certain way and are different in character. The term *shell* describes an empty, self-contained whole with a certain internal structure, whereas the term *collection* means an indefinite number of individual items that are in some way comparable or share common aspect - and even if it is merely the fact that they have been gathered together in the same location.

This distinction reveals the fundamental operation of the system museum: in terms of the Systems Theory it is a specifically defined internal space into which a number of objects sharing a common feature are brought from its environment. Now, I know that this systemic definition of the museum does not sound very appealing. But it has the advantage of providing a basis on which to raise a number of precise questions, which determine the process of electing objects for museums.

But before I formulate some of these questions, I should like to emphasize an essential idea of Systems Theory: Autopoietic, or self-reproducing does not mean that all the causes for the self-reproduction of a system are within it or arise from it. It is rather the case that the term system describes only the manner (an operation) in which a specific and more or less stable difference is created within the world. Thus, what has to be described is a set of functional connections, basically a *trivial machine* (as Heinz von Foerster would call it) that converts inputs in a determined manner into certain outputs, and in principle always in the same way.

So what are the operations, what is the set of functional connections of the system museum what is its relationship with the world and from which source does it derive its obviously powerful energy?

I believe the latter is relatively easy to answer because it refers to a basic anthropological momentum which has always applied to all people and societies and continues to apply today: This insight into one's own limitations which develops with growing self-awareness, the fear of losing one's life, the fear of death and of being forgotten. But linked with this insight is the wish somehow to overcome the limits set to life. In short: the consciously aware person lives - whatever specific form the life may take - in a fundamental state of tension between everyday life and the awareness that this is only everyday life. He thus seeks ways and means of overcoming this mere here and now in some manner and rescuing his identity beyond life. This fundamental movement beyond everyday life, this endeavor to gain and preserve an identity can develop in two directions: as an attempt to find security in the past or to determine the future. But memory and the capacity to remember are the essential pre-requisite for both the attempt to find an anchor in the past and the attempt to determine the future.

In our culture, there are two great myths, which deal with the subject of overcoming the contingency of life. They are fundamentally different models of world experience, but both lay claim to universality: the story of Noah and his Ark and the mythical Mouseion, the place where the three or nine muses danced.

I think the story of Noah's Ark can be regarded as one of the original myths of science: Noah was instructed to take two of every species onto his ark; a comprehensive task of differentiating and stock-taking different forms of life, a task which could only be fulfilled with scientific methodology. But in this context, I see two important points in this mythical account: firstly, that the Ark is an artificially created room with an internal structure in which the whole of life is represented by two of each species, and secondly, that this story describes a material collection which is organized in a way that it can have an effect in the future. By contrast, one must imagine the Mouseion, where the Muses danced, as a relatively barren place on Mount Parnassus or some other holy mountain. As a place where capabilities and functions that are important for the development of identity meet and interact: in the shape of the Muses.

I am tempted to regard this mythical Mouseion as the origin of the "Critique of Judgment": as the place where, to borrow Kant's words, it would be possible to compare "the existing ideas against the whole wealth of ideas" and to define "the relationship between imaginations"; or to put in more modern language, as a place of aesthetic rationality with the particular ability to enhance the clarity of an idea without transforming it to a concrete concept. But however one may imagine the mythical Mouseion, it is clear that we are not talking here about a structured space, but merely a place which could theoretically be anywhere and that this place concerns a practice which, however specialized it may be in individual cases, is aimed solely at establishing identity, with no regard for science, by attempting to bring the experiences of the past into the here and now.

Now as far as I am aware, there are no reports of the Muses having danced on Noah's Ark. And if such reports did exist, I doubt that anyone would believe them. For the Ark can hardly have been more than a loud, stinking floating-stable in the form of a ship, where the Muses would never have set a foot of their own free will. On the other hand, one can hardly imagine Noah inviting the Muses onto his Ark, even if God the Father had turned two blind eyes to it. How would Noah have chosen which two of the three or nine Muses to take? But even assuming that he got carried away and did chose two, would these two have been able to reproduce the other Muses like all the other pairs could reproduce their species?

It is sufficiently plausible from just these few considerations to assume that Creation did not envisage a link between these two models of world experience, i.e. no cross-reference between past and future. Creation knows only the eternal process of birth and death, the transitoriness of life. But if that is so, one also has to recognize that neither the Gods nor God planned a connection between the sciences and the arts. Establishing a link between these two fundamentally different, even mutually exclusive principles, is rather a typical project of human beings who do not wish to accept their own mortality and, instead of bowing humbly before Creation, seek ways of extricating their lives from the passage of time. But the place where people attempt to marry what are basically two opposing elements is: the museum.

This is quite easy to see from the basic operation of the system museum. In the museum, the rhetorical techniques used to establish identity are related and applied to an area which owes its existence to science, that is to methods and techniques of differentiation or to put it bluntly: the establishment of non-identity. The aim of this operation is to obtain knowledge and the power that comes with knowledge, but without paying the usual price: the loss of the paradisiacal being-at-one-with-the-world-in-which-we-live. But quite the contrary: for self-affirmation and self-reassurance of one's own cognitive abilities and greatness.

This totally naive desire to have the world as it was given to us, despite the Fall from Grace and all its consequences, is to my mind precisely where the great attraction and dynamism of the system museum lie. On the other hand, this is also the source of its enormous weakness, which unfortunately my wife of all people continually reproaches me for when she says: "You are just toying with bones".

But before I turn to this argument, I should like to attempt a more detailed description of how the system museum operates and what relation it has with the environment. My first thesis is that the relationship between the museum and the reality that it portrays in whatever manner, has an indefinite character but a fixed form. It is not founded on a scientific or methodological base but follows a rhetorical principle, the figure of *synecdoche* or *pars pro toto*, that is the putting of a narrower term for a more comprehensive one or the putting of individual parts for a whole.

The fundamental operation of the system museum therefore consists of a closed circuit which can be outlined as follows: Museum collections are created from interpretations of the reality from which their

objects stem; in this sense, such interpretations precede the objects and legitimize them. On the other hand, interpretations of a reality are always developed with the aid of objects - and to this extent, collections of objects precede the interpretation. Structurally, museum collections thus have a self-evident character. They are object connections, which come about as a result of interpretations, which achieve legitimacy through the objects themselves. This circular mechanism applies at all times and in all museums. It also extends spirally into the spatial realm if further elements of this system are observed. Circularity also exists with regard to the criteria on which interpretations are based - each criterion can be developed both out of the reality from which the objects come and from the reality to which the museum belongs. It continues to exist between the objects and the collections of objects, because only those objects, which fulfill the collection criteria, are accepted into collections. But new collection criteria can quite easily be established in order to accept objects, which have so far not found their way into museums. And finally, circularity also exists between the relationship among all the contents and the shell of a museum insofar this comprises all the content but depends on them for its existence.

So the museum does indeed have the structure of a snail-shell and this above all makes it clear that we are dealing here with a living system and not with science. Science is rather a sub-operation within the system museum, but an operation which lost its subordinate character during the Enlightenment and, by gaining 'the upper hand', made a decisive contribution to the crisis in the museum world.

But before I say a word about this historical phenomenon, I should briefly like to give a systematic portrayal of how the system museum operates in order to accept objects. This is my second thesis: the system museum can only operate with symbols. If objects are not already symbols or - to use Krzysztof Pomian's terminology - *semiophores*, they be converted into such. The system museum achieves this by disarming the objects that is stripping them of their practical functions. This decisive operation is conducted by aesthetizing the objects, that is by perceiving them as objects, taking judgment rather than practical use as the measure-stick.

But the visual arts play a key role in the development of this operation. Which brings me to my third thesis: The ways of presenting world-experience and knowledge developed in the visual arts provide the techniques with which the system museum perceives and acquires objects. In other words, the forms for representing the world developed in the visual art are converted by the system museum into techniques for acquiring, distinguishing and appropriating realities and serve furthermore, at least up to the Enlightenment and again nowadays in individual cases, to establish and present the image of the world which every museum explicitly or implicitly represents.

I should now like to draw to a close. Up to the Age of Enlightenment, museums were systems in which, with the aid of rhetoric, synecdoche and *pars pro toto*, global images of certain communities and their achievements were established. The pyramids of the Pharaohs which embodied ancient Egyptian society; Greek and Roman temples which hoarded and displayed the stolen semiophores of conquered cultures; the Byzantine Constantinople, whose streets were apparently strewn with publicly displayed spoils of war; the church-treasures of the Middle Ages with their numerous relics; St. Mark's Cathedral of the Venetian Republic, a unique agglutination of spiritual and worldly power with its corresponding insignia and spoils; finally, the treasures and miracle chambers of early modern times: they were all constellations in which the respecting connection between the preserved objects was only contingent and where structure and shell were legitimized by rhetorical figures with the following aim: to constitute and represent the identity of the respective owner and preserve it beyond the present day.

The Age of Enlightenment brought radical changes and led to the emergence of museums as we know them today. This movement, which occurred at the same time as major social change and a shift in conditions of ownership, also focused scientific attention on object collections. Consequently, the old connections between objects were broken down and restructured. This new structure had its basis outside the power struggles to which the collections owed their existence, namely in the universal and ideally power-free system of the sciences.

One can well imagine the pleasure early scientists experienced when examining the collections of the mighty, applying their new and infallible criteria to distinguish and determine what was valuable and important. But this process was the beginning of a development, the end of which I believe we have now reached. With the scientifically based reorganization of collections, the scientific system took over the museums and the old image of the world, which the traditional collections represented was distorted and

subordinated to that of the sciences. In other words, when the archiving and documenting, which until then had just been one aspect of the system museum, began to legitimize collections and took the place of rhetorical-decorative, rationally based forms of collection and presentation, a process was initiated which turned museums into dinosaurs.

The claim to scientific documentation – best illustrated by the natural history museums, which were built very early and more or less according to Noah's ark principle – led to a lasting strengthening of the museum world and formed the basis for its enormous expansion, but could not change the basically non-scientific relationship with its environment. Science took and still takes place only inside museums in the context of collections. How certain objects or collections enter a museum has very little to do with science. As you well know, this is usually a question of money, power constellations and other more or less coincidental so-called marginal conditions. But precisely here, in the contingent relationship with reality, lies the decisive weakness of the system "museum" in its relation with the scientific world. This is also precisely where the internal dynamism of the museum has its driving force. Because museums generally administer collections which have not been put together for any specific objective motives, and scientifically based presentations of world images can only be constructed retrospectively, they to have gladly accept any object which supplements their collection with regard to ideal scientific *canones*.

The fact the museums stand on feet of clay as scientific enterprises and interpolate more or less demanding images of the world with contingent and limited collections of objects, would probably not have become a serious problem had museums not been faced with a fierce competition from mass media, primarily television. This conflict exists mainly because the media are structurally related to museums. Their relationship with reality is also highly contingent and they also produce images of the world. But what makes them serious competitors to museums is not the fact that media treat material, which is new, topical and unattainable for museums and deliver it worldwide into people's living rooms. Their decisive lead derives rather from the fact that they create plausible connections with rhetorical figures from their material. They need no further legitimization for this since they operate with technically generated images and data which, unlike everything museums work with, stem from a system – the system of image-generating procedures - which has a scientific basis as an "objective" reproduction of reality.

This thought brings me to my main thesis: If museums continue to be run as in the past, we shall have a gigantic redevelopment task on our hands in the foreseeable future. But the most noticeable phenomenon for this development lies in the hypertrophic, theoretically unlimited growth of the museum-business, the causes of which I have attempted to outline in this paper. Its sign is the claim to a scientific base with which museums justify their existence but which at the same time prevents them from entering into a debate with the media and the trivial images of the world they disseminate. In short, I believe museums must draw the conclusions from their rhetorical scientific structure and find the courage to argue with the knowledge stored within them and to take a position on what we make out of the world. This means that the rhetorical character of museums cannot remain hidden any longer, but must be employed actively to spread information. This is the only way museums and well-founded knowledge stand any chance against the stodgy diet of images we are fed daily by the media. And this is the only way to utilize the considerable strength of museums, which consists in us not having merely pictures of bones, but the bones themselves.

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