

CONFERENCE:  
**The Museal Turn**  
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## **ABSTRACTS**

**Peter Assmann, Oberösterreichische Landesmuseen Linz (Austria)**

### **"Political, Economic and Communicative Dimensions of the Museal Turn"**

In the recent past hardly any other cultural institution has altered its social communication structures as profoundly as the museum. Intense scientific debate has yielded to an intense economic debate. Many museums have become important factors for the tourist industry and are subject to marketing strategies and USP discussions, especially when they belong to the area of urban tourism. All over the world, the number of start-up museums is increasing, and so is the number of museum visitors. (The number of people who go to museums outweighs by far the number of people who go to football stadiums.)

The achievement and maintenance of this touristic intensity necessitates an ever faster succession of exhibitions. Today, the public experiences the museum primarily as a place of exhibitions and no longer as a place of collections supplemented with special exhibitions. The proportion between the classic four pillars of museum work – collecting, preserving, researching, exhibiting – has shifted, placing the focus of museum work on the fourth pillar "exhibiting". This emphasis on exhibition activities concerns art museums much more than other museums.

Current developments in European cultural policies aim to establish a network between smaller museal institutions – historic-cultural as well as natural-historical –, which are crucial for the negotiation and discussion of regional identities and which promote the museum as a site of life-long learning. Thus, "collection mobility", a focus on collection work and the cooperative exchange of collections and know-how, as well as coordinated museum work and sound collection policies represent essential challenges for museums. The pivotal concerns of European museum politics and indeed European cultural development – networking and encouraging life-long learning – exemplify the enormous dynamics of the institution 'museum'.

**Julie Becker-Proriol and Raphaël Chanay, Bruxelles/London (Belgium/Great Britain)**

### **"Have Museums Lost their Voice?"**

Have museums lost their voice? Are they 'copping out' of their traditional role as authoritative providers of 'the Truth' and becoming porous and soft-spoken? Are they giving up the fight for objectivity when faced with the complexity of contemporary society? This paper will explore how, under the influence of a number of factors such as post-modernistic relativism, political agendas advocating for more multiculturalism or the growing influence of user-generated content brought by the web 2.0 revolution, museums seem to have relinquished their voice of authority, increasingly calling upon external groups and individuals to create

their exhibition narratives. Drawing on examples from our practice as exhibition developers in science-related museums in the United Kingdom, we will consider three of the 'voices' speaking louder and louder in museums: the 'artist voice', the 'community voice' and the 'user voice'. In each case, we will try to reveal the mechanisms leading to the apparent retreat of the museum as narrator and the agendas at play behind this 'copping out'.

In the 'artist voice', we will look at the way science-related museums increasingly include art in their galleries. We will also ask why the first time the Natural History Museum (London) wrote the words 'climate change' on its walls it was in an art show. And finally, we will contemplate whether the development of art-science displays is an easy way for museums to avoid taking a stance on sensitive issues.

In the 'community voice', we will explore the growing role of social groups as exhibition narrators. We will speculate as to whether through community-driven projects such as the *Who am I?* youth engagement programme at the Science Museum (London) museums are trying to better reflect the plural society they serve – or the agendas of the governing bodies on whose funding they depend.

In the 'user voice', we will look at the growing importance of the 'ordinary' visitor as a narrator, in instances when, inspired by recent web developments, museums are trying to include user-generated narratives in their displays. Are projects such as the *Antenna* gallery at the Science Museum (London) facilitating a constructive, truly democratic dialogue, or are they failing visitors who, in the age of endless information flow, may be longing for intelligible, authoritative statements on difficult matters?

We will conclude that while it is undeniable that exhibition narratives have become more plural, rather than the end of the 'museum voice' this plurality represents a new form of it. Museums may facilitate an ever more political or individualized dialogue but in virtually all known examples they do so carefully, defining the rules and limits of artist, community or individual involvement and retaining editorial control. We will argue that the emergence of these new voices indicates a more profound shift in the museum's role, from the traditional museum narrative where 'the Truth' was expressed through collection pieces, to a less physical, more subjective museum-forum where visitors, their opinions and emotions have become the new objects on display.

**Chiara Biscella, University of Milan (Italy)**

### **"The Museum as Playwright: A New Idiom of Contemporary Drama"**

Starting from the 1970s, a new trend has found its way into British theatre, delineating an alternative to the so-called In-Yer-Face Theatre. Many plays started to deal with the theme of art, thus bringing on stage characters such as real or fictive painters, art dealers and critics, art – or even artists' – lovers, and, most importantly, the works of art themselves. It is an often entertaining drama, which nonetheless raises significant issues about our contemporary society.

In this kind of drama, the role of the museum becomes more and more relevant. On the one hand the plays themselves turn into a sort of "virtual museum", in which works of art are displayed in different ways:

- a) through the voice of the actors who evoke them (as in *My Matisse* by Howard Ginsberg)
- b) through actorial movements which imitate the disposition of subjects on a canvas (as in *After Magritte* by Tom Stoppard)
- c) through the setting which tends to use the stage as a museum (as in *Picasso's Women* or *Yo, Picasso! Beside Picasso* by Brian McAvera).

On the other hand, in plays such as *The Bay at Nice* by David Hare or *Pentecost* by David Edgar, the museum which the *pièces* seek to recreate is not only virtual, because the dramatic action takes place in artistic or archaeological sites. Finally, the museum sometimes becomes the real stage of a site-specific play, which is rearticulated according to the museum where it is represented: that is, for example, the case of *England* by Tim Crouch.

I shall therefore endeavour to suggest that museological sites and motives are somehow triggering a new dramatic season. Far from mimicking the museum, the canvases and works of art displayed on stage create an exhibition of their own in which urgent questions of identity, memory and amnesia resonate.

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Brian McAvera, *Yo! Picasso! Beside Picasso*, London, Oberon Books, 2002.

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Tom Stoppard, *After Magritte*, London, Faber and Faber, 1971.

Howard Ginsberg, *My Matisse*, manuscript received by the author.

David Hare, *The Bay at Nice*, London, Faber and Faber, 1986.

David Edgar, *Pentecost*, London, Nick Hern Books, 1995.

Tim Crouch, *England*, London, Oberon Books, 2007.

## **Andreea Bratu, University of Craiova (Romania)**

### **"Museums as Learning Spaces"**

"Museum discourse can render the deep changes undergone by contemporary society and multiculturalism. The museum must be a place of reflection and of scholar research on the other's culture; it must be a place where citizenship and cultural diversity may express themselves" (Françoise Wasserman, curator, MCC, Direction of Museums, France)<sup>1</sup>.

The educational component is present and well developed in many museums throughout the world. A change in the perception of the role of museums and of their relation to the public, an urge for more transparent activity, as well as a change in the focus of the cultural life of cities led to the reorganisation of the structure and the activities of museums and to the redefinition of their priorities. The need to attract larger audiences, be it only for financial reasons, makes it imperative for such institutions to orient their policies towards the educational aspect of their activity.

The strengthening of the educational component of a museum's activity is important not only in order to reestablish the role that art and culture have in people's lives, but also to enhance the public's direct participation in the cultural life of their community, through a large range of activities that would encourage their artistic expression.

This presentation focuses on the educational role of museums, many of which function today not only as places of display of collections and thematic exhibitions, but also as research laboratories for future scholars, very often in a direct partnership with prestigious universities. At the same time, through various programmes designed in partnership with the local administration, but also with independent bodies, museums play an important role in the community's efforts for social integration of various disfavoured groups, by enabling them to participate in cultural activities, not only as members of the audience, but also as creators. Examples of real and virtual educational programmes of European museums shall be mentioned in support of the analysis of why and how contemporary museums have become places of education for a wider and more eclectic public.

<sup>1</sup>"Les musées et leurs publics", in *Culture et recherche* n.114-115, hiver 2007-2008, p. 40.

**Mariacristina Cavecchi, University of Milan (Italy)**

**"The Drama of New Galleries"**

From Tom Stoppard's *After Magritte* of the early 1970s to Tim Crouch's most recent play *England*, the British playwrights of the last thirty years have often turned their attention to existing collections, museal spaces or curatorship. My paper, "The Drama of New Galleries", will analyse some plays which explore the world of contemporary British art galleries after the sudden success of the Young British Artists and will reflect on the cultural and political role of galleries in contemporary culture in general and in British drama in particular.

On the one hand, the playwrights put on stage galleries such as Jay Jopling's White Cube; on the other hand, drama goes to the gallery. This is the case of *England: A Play for Galleries*, a piece of site-specific theatre which opened in 2007 at Edinburgh's Fruitmarket Gallery and moved to London's Whitechapel Gallery. In the work the author, Tim Crouch, places the dynamics of visual art and theatre up against each other, questions the spatial position and perspective of audience members and performers, dialogues with elements of the past, present and future, thus contributing to a fresh understanding of the nature and role of the gallery.

**Adina Ciugureanu, Ovidius University Constanta (Romania)**

**"A Museal Turn:**

**Negotiating Memory in Romanian History Museums before and after 1990"**

In his *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson describes the creation of narratives of the past, necessary for the formation of the national state, as dependent on acts of both memorializing 'origins' and forgetting moments that could be labeled as traumatic for the community. The purpose is the configuration of a nation based on a smoother, organic linkage of the 'present' with the 'past'. It is therefore in the joints of history that forgetting and memorializing are strongly negotiated.

The aim of my presentation is to discuss ways in which memory is negotiated in Romanian contemporary history museums with a view to creating specific narratives (such as a communist narrative before 1990 and an anti-communist narrative after the fall of the Iron Curtain). Through apparent amnesia, museums memorialized only those moments that supported the communist politics of creating an imagined unitary communist nation. The traumatic moments of the anti-communist revolt of 1989 caused, besides the formation of new narratives, the 'recovery' of past collective and individual memories, which led to the re-writing of the past and the reorganization of the museum. The political role of the history museum then and now alongside the turn which the museum had to take when 'amnesiac' moments were recovered will thus be explored.

**Jaime da Costa, University of Minho (Portugal)**

**"John Updike and the Museum that Makes Looking Possible"**

Characterized as one of the most visual writers of American literature, John Updike stands out as one of those singular cases in which the visual artist has chosen the written word as his means of expression. Updike's extensive career as a writer by trade is coupled by a no less extensive activity as an art critic. His relationship with the museum possesses an air of reverent casualness: the museum is the site where anyone can stroll through the exhibitions

but it also constitutes the unique place where a writer can attain the much sought-after inspiration: "a temple where I might refresh my own sense of artistic purpose", he tells us.

It is precisely the consideration of the museum as the site of the exceptional encounter between the human and art that constitutes one of the aspects that make Updike's art criticism so special. His two collections of art criticism, *Just Looking* and *Still Looking* constitute his personal testimony of how art works must be allowed to speak from their silence. If it is obvious that his observations and interpretations of art heighten our appreciation of art, it is also true that for Updike the museum should remain as silent as a place of worship: the walls should not speak too much. The museum risks its status by becoming more loquacious than the works of art it shelters – the more scholarly it becomes by attempting to be part of art criticism, the less suggestive and artistic it turns out to be.

We may term Updike's position in this respect as conservative or, even, old-fashioned; however, it is remarkable that from his position as an art critic Updike accompanied both the evolution of art and the museums for more than a century of progress and changes.

**Kornelia Hahn, University of Salzburg (Austria)**

### **"Memorizing in Late Modern Societies:**

#### **From the Cultural Heritage Experience to the Sensual Museum Experience"**

Why do we observe an increasing number of museums in late modern societies? Museums are places where cultural heritage is exposed and at the same time negotiated and defined. However, this exposure is itself a component of culture. As a cultural trait, it seems to fit in structures of mediated communication, consumption and spectacle. By analyzing practices of exposure, we also find out about fashionable ideals, about how to "sensualize" communication and how to create "authentic" experiences in museums.

The paper will reflect on both the medialized and the commodified organization of museums which keep experiences "at a distance" and the new quality of sensual museum experiences. The argument is that the apparently contradictory phenomena we are witnessing in the new museum are embedded in a cultural development which challenges former conceptions of "distance" and "closeness" in communication.

**Claudia Jeschke, University of Salzburg (Austria)**

### **"Dance Performances as 'Imagined Museums'"**

André Malraux's term of the 'imagined museum' shapes the concept of different coexisting art works that can be experienced at the same time despite their historical and cultural distance. The staging and re-staging of dance works has always exerted this concept of perpetuating dialogue between history, memory, and the cultural configuration of embodiment.

*Sphäroide*, a choreography by Rose Breuss with music by Franz Hautzinger, will be used to display the strategies of heterotopia as well as heterochronia, which are characteristic for the understanding of the 'imagined museum' in dance. *Sphäroide* is based on the "neue Pantomime" created by the Viennese Grete Wiesenthal. She and her two sisters were trained as classical dancers and became famous by their unusual performances of Strauss-Waltzes during the "Wiener Sezession". Breuss' and Hautzinger's piece of 2008 is a contemporary comment on the concepts, aesthetics, craft, and techniques of the Wiesenthal waltzes; the working methods of the two artists elucidate the process-oriented aspect of using history to reflect the present. The re-formulation of dialects and idioms of early twentieth-century

dances in Vienna via *Sphäroide* constitute a coherent representation of the ongoing discourse on 'museality' and 'contemporariness' in dance.

**Anna Kérchy, University of Szeged (Hungary)**

**"Imagined Pasts: The Museum as an Institution of (False) Memory?"**

As Thomas Kuhn convincingly argues, the evolution of our cultural knowledge is affected by a succession of paradigms, ways and practices of thinking, which are revolutionarily initiated to be consensually reinforced, socially institutionalised, and with due time necessarily challenged by a new paradigm likely emerging in times of epistemological crisis, when our prevailing interpretive apparati and world-models seem to become insufficient in making sense of our realities. The twentieth century witnessed a series of turns (Rorty) ranging from the 1960s' and 1970s' *linguistic turn* celebrated by poststructuralist semioticians on grounds of Wittgensteinian claims about reality's discursive constitution, to Mitchell's *pictorial turn* returning to the image as "a figure of other things, including figuration", a kernel problematic of iconology, and the 1990s' *corporeal turn* introducing the human body as an adequate meta-model of our modes of being and meaning still being scrutinized by the interdisciplinary field of body studies. The *museal turn's* advent in the new Millenium is unique and anomalous for various reasons. The museum, traditionally a locus of the paradigm's social institutionalization turns into the twenty-first century paradigm's symbolical embodiment itself, offering a model, a meta-frame for our current existential and cognitive strategies, while fusing significant features of earlier paradigms, and keeping its prominent status of a par excellence Foucauldian heterotopia. By virtue of the museum's primary aim of *spectacularization* the museal sphere metaphorically matches as diverse postmodern cultural phenomena as the performatively grounded, bodily-stylised identity of post-industrialist consumer subjects, the panoptical organization of society by hegemonic power-technologies, or the constantly threatening terror attacks hideous means of gaining visibility. In so far as the museum undertakes to put on display mementos of the past, and to record memories of the present for the sake of future generations, we can argue that it performs a *spectacularization of the very process of remembering*. In my paper, I wish to argue that with the museal turn the museum becomes a model of human *memory*, a most significant subject of research in cutting-edge scientific fields as cognitive neuropsychology, trauma studies or oral history. Not only is the museum traditionally an institutionalised staging of human being's infinite Proustian search of times past, but, in my view, recent museal modes of exhibiting traces of cultural History seem to grow consciously aware of museal representations necessarily being a displaced repetition, a substitution, and to a certain extent a misremembering of times past. As Susan A. Crane writes, the museum functions like memory in so far as it confounds and synthesises information. In Ivo Marovic's words, museality enables the objects to express and convey messages through an audience interaction that implies the possibility of the distortion of authentic historical meaning. In this sense, museums are doomed to be storehouses of false memories, sincerely portraying the functioning of human reminiscence instead of a historical reality questioned both in its authenticity and accessibility. The aim of my paper is to examine contemporary museum exhibits which "confound and confabulate", and consciously play with, and perhaps even produce, meta-texts on how remembering inherently implies both forgetting and imaginative fictionalization. These meta-texts have nothing to do with disrespect, untrustworthiness or trivialization. On the contrary, they are serious artistic attempts at challenging the Adornoian concept of the museal as distinct and dead, and revealing it as a dynamic, 'living' space where collective and personal memories and experience clash. After taking a look at early attempts, like David Wilson's *Museum of*

*Jurassic Technology* in LA founded in 1989, or the Haas-Lillienthal architectural historic landmark's 1993 mock-historical-exhibit (mentioned by Crane), I will focus on the May 2010 *Imagined Lives: Mystery Portrait* exhibition in the National Portrait Gallery where leading novelists (Banville, Trollope, Pratchett, Tracy Chevalier, etc) were invited to create imaginary identities and pasts of persons of so far undetected historical significance featuring in Elizabethan portraits. I unveil that these exhibits' aim is to spark the imagination, to transform the museal-memory space into a Curiosity Cabinet cum Laboratory of the Self, where spectators are invited to think about the *possible* beyond the 'real'.

Sources:

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Messias Carbonell, Bettina, ed. *Museum Studies. An Anthology of Contexts*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

### **Ingrid Kuczynski, Berlin (Germany)**

#### **"Private Space and Public Access: A Particular Museal Turn"**

Tourism is one of the great agents of turning landscapes, cultural objects and even cultural practices into objects of museal value and therefore helping to alienate them from their original use value as means and parts of production and reproduction of economic and social life. The paper will explore the causes and consequences of such a transformation of private property and private places into publicly accessible space, which in its course gives a new cultural meaning to objects and, at the same time, turns "travelers and curiosity seekers into consumers of other people's property" (Carole Fabricant).

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, this process created not only museum exhibits but also formative patterns of perception and consumption as well as tensions between inclusion and exclusion of the spectator which are still valid today. The paper will concentrate on places which first converted to accessibility, such as palaces, stately homes and gardens as well as private collections of art and science, and will look at the way the spatial experience is presented in British travelogues in the early times of tourism.

### **Parvin Loloï, Swansea (Great Britain)**

#### **"Re-Presenting Iran in the British Museum"**

In recent years the Western image of Iran – fuelled by politicians and media – has been largely negative. Such attitudes are not entirely new, nor wholly bound up with attitudes towards Islam. Over the centuries, alongside a certain tendency to romanticise Iran (or Persia, to use the name so long employed in the West) as the exotic 'other', there has also been an essentially denigratory tradition stemming from the accounts and attitudes of the ancient Greek historians.

In the last few years the British Museum has hosted two very successful exhibitions which have sought to redress some of this reductive stereotyping of Iran. The first, *The Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia* was run from September 2005 to January 2006. Focussed on the Achaemenid rulers of Iran, such as Cyrus, Darius and Xerxes, the exhibition displayed achievements of a great empire and in doing so demonstrated how it was (to quote from the catalogue) "a great influence on those civilizations from which we have directly drawn our own identity and culture".

The second exhibition, *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* ran from February to June 2009. Shah 'Abbas, who ruled Iran from 1587 to 1629, established a strong kingdom out of a fragmented, war torn country. A devout man, he strengthened the rule of Shi'ism in Iran, as well as respecting minority religions, particularly that of Armenians. He established diplomatic and trading relations with Europe. He was one of history's great patrons of the arts – we might call him a true 'Renaissance' prince if we want to see him in Western terms. He established Isfahan (a museum city in its own right, and under the protection of UNESCO) as his capital in 1598 and embarked on ambitious building projects of enduring beauty.

Both exhibitions were supported financially by Iran Heritage Foundation (a charitable organisation set up by wealthy Iranian expatriates in Europe) and others. The exhibits were from many European countries as well as from Iran. These exhibitions have served as a political bridge between Iran and the West as well as having an obvious educational and 'corrective' purpose vis-à-vis the prevailing negativity towards Iran. These exhibitions sought to remind those who saw them "of the common human experience and heritage which we all share" (from *The Forgotten Empire*).

This paper will consider both the logistics of arranging such difficult and complicated exhibitions and also their political, cultural and irenic dimensions, as well as some of the hybrid events attached to them.

### **Elisavet Menteti, Coventry School of Art and Design (Great Britain)**

#### **"Digital Culture in the Museum: Communication or Parallax of its Role?"**

The word "parallax" (παράλλαξις) is a combined term which etymologically derives from the Greek words «παρόμοιος» and «αλλαγή», meaning 'similar' and 'change' respectively, so parallax is the action of slightly changing. In topography parallax means the shifting of an object to a phenomenal placement owing to the change of observer's placement. In astronomy, parallax is the difference of a star's or a celestial object's direction as it appears from two different points of view (Gate for Greek Language, 2008). In this study the word parallax will be used both etymologically and theoretically: it will be examined whether the applications of digital culture have slightly changed the meaning of museum, and this investigation will be conducted within the astronomic theory of parallax identifying the museum with the star trying to approach its notion from two different points of observation.

The overall aim of this paper is to present the existence of digital culture in museums from two different points of view, trying to reject or accept both the technological determinist and the postmodernist-digital-culture view. It will not ask whether the museum has to serve the past or to follow society since, undoubtedly, it has to do both, but it will motivate the reader to re-examine the combination of museum and future inspiring him to think of a possible way to achieve it.

### **Caroline Patey, University of Milan (Italy)**

#### **"Museum, Monument, Document: Into the Shapes of Memory"**

This paper wishes to investigate some of the various and often paradoxical forms through which memory – social, individual, political – is staged on the arena of contemporary museology and in today's monumental culture. Choosing London as the scene of fieldwork, and treating public art and display as a language, I shall briefly survey the cultural grammar of global art and its hyperbolic syntax – as it unfolds at the two Tates, V&A, Saatchi and



Gagosian galleries or fourth pediment among others, in order to contrast them with the idiom, or rather the idioms of Sir John Soane's Museum, a place that has been defined as a time capsule, where museum, monument and document are re-united under the same roof. I wish to argue, focusing on the architecture of the house, its collections and the descriptions left by Soane himself, that, beyond the loud rhetoric of heritage and the glittering tale of global display, multiple and complex forms of memory are being enacted at Lincoln's Inn Field: they disrupt the abused couple museum/mausoleum, follow paths – possibly tortuous ones – connecting past, present and future; they offer an image of the house as palimpsest and archive and constitute an antidote to simplistic and authoritarian museal forms.

**Glyn Pursglove, University of Swansea (Great Britain)**

### **"The Museum and the Poet"**

There is a long and distinguished tradition of poets writing individual poems, more or less in the tradition of *ekphrasis*, in response to an object/painting seen in a museum/gallery. Familiar examples include Keats's "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" and Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts"; there are many thousands of such poems. A later development included poems which more broadly address the experience of visiting a museum (such as Richard Wilbur's "Museum Piece") or the character of an entire museum (such as James Fenton's "The *Pitt-Rivers* Museum, Oxford"), rather than having a single work as their focus. In poems such as those mentioned so far, the museum remains essentially a largely passive partner in the process of poetic creation; it was, as it were, the institution which, by possessing and displaying a particular item, happened to provide the occasion for the poet's 'inspiration'. That passivity remained largely the case of anthologies such as Dannie and Joan Abse's *Voices in the Gallery* (1987), an anthology of poems on works in the Tate Gallery in London. Interestingly, however, it should be noted, the book was actually published by the Tate itself, which suggests a different kind of involvement on the part of the institution.

In recent decades, the nature of the relationship between the museum and the poet has undergone a striking shift. Museums (and galleries) have regularly chosen to become far more active participants in the poetic process, most notably in the widespread practice of appointing poets-in-residence. Such appointments have seen poets serve as agents for the interpretation of a particular museum's social purpose and collections, interpretations variously relevant both to the museum itself and to the wider public.

This paper will trace the changing relationship between the museum and the poet; the experiences and achievements of particular poets-in-residence, including Mario Petrucci at the Imperial War Museum and Maureen Almond at The Museum of Antiquities at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne will be examined.

**Esther Sánchez-Pardo, University of Madrid (Spain)**

### **"Performance Art and the Museum"**

This paper will consider the question of performance art in the museum. As markets, both global and local, falter with a world in crisis on the horizon, the question of the aesthetics of performance in the new setting of the museum becomes more relevant. How do aesthetic practices reflect and comment upon moments of crisis? More specifically, how does performance as a practice comment on the very nature of crisis? If performance is a kind of doing, what can we say about performance's other – a kind of non-doing? These are some of

the opening questions that will orient my paper.

The theorization about the performative agency of artworks is of central interest in this paper; for if it has been argued that art can think, I would like to move along the line of art performing and of art and performance, by virtue of which what is shown to the audience or the spectator traverses the social sphere and is thus politicized in its capacity to represent social, cultural and political histories around the construction of the nation (in the context of the nation and its Others), and of oppositional consciousness and aesthetic contestation.

In this paper I will be ascribing to the work of art a sense not so much of subjectivity as agency; like performance theory scholars, I propose a performative reading of works of art such that without necessarily taking the place of human subjects or being thought to be "like" the human psyche, they can be understood as being able to act, to enact a process of critique and to bring about a response in the viewer. The works I will be focusing on are taken specifically from the career of two renowned artists, Esther Ferrer (1937) and Albert Porta (1946). Their deliberate performances function as denouncements of norms and their experiments constitute alternatives to the rigid codes of mastery that rule the world of art. Part of their work appears to conform to certain given parameters of installation art, yet it contests or stretches the boundaries of this category too.

My paper will present a background of ideas for discussion and will attempt to show some hybrid genres of performance and exposition that take place within the space of the museum as a temporary, featured event. The thematics of art in the context of crisis will always be squarely in focus in a wide discussion by performance artists and experts – E. van Alphen, H. Damisch, P. Phelan. The subjects under discussion aim at initiating a lively exchange about the politics and poetics of making and presenting art in a museum open both to reflect and interact with the difficult times we live in.

**Siegrid Schmidt, University of Salzburg (Austria)**

**"The Development of Personal Presentation in Museums:  
From Guided Tours to Creative Workshops"**

In the first two centuries of modern museums their topics were presented by the exhibited objects and by explanations from very different people in guided tours. In single cases these explanations were highly scientific for special guests but most of the time the guided tours addressed tourists.

In the last 30 to 40 years the form and methods of presenting the topics of the museums and teaching or mediating them to different groups of visitors have changed essentially. This turn was on the one hand connected with the educational movement of the 1970s and with the different evolving forms of museums and exhibitions themselves. Teaching in the museum should now be a dialogue between the teaching person and the guests; it should become an interactive and creative process. From a political point of view one can argue that museums became more democratic institutions by using these new methods. – My paper will discuss all these steps of educational and today also entertaining turns.

In order to illustrate the methods and the whole development my paper will give some examples of actual museum teaching projects from Salzburg and from renowned Museums such as the Tate Gallery/London or the Metropolitan Museum/New York. These examples are connected with different topics, with different target groups and, of course, with different methods.

At last I will point out that there are also a lot of problems with these new forms of teaching in a museum. They are connected with the space of the museum, with the political

ideological position of the leading persons and with the economic situation of the institution and of society. But there are ideas and real examples how to solve these problems.

**Gerd Stratmann, University of Bochum, Germany**

**"Musealization Goes to Town:**

**The Great Debate around the Reconstruction of Vanished Buildings"**

This paper deals with a very specific type of architectural musealization, i.e. with the reconstruction of remarkable and central buildings no longer existent. To be more precise: it deals with the wide field of discourse inspired by such reconstructions. Recent examples include the Frauenkirche and the Neumarkt square in Dresden and, of course, the Stadtschloss (City Castle) in Berlin. In all these cases the clash of opinions was amazingly dramatic, generating most pungent questions and most passionate debates. Such replicas of destroyed buildings constitute, the critics maintained, a Disneyland kind of fake culture, a regressive (or even reactionary) resurrection of dead identities – "the palace of the undead", as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* characterized the prize-winning model of the Berlin Stadtschloss. On the other side of the demarcation line, the proponents (mainly the representatives of well organised groups like the "Gesellschaft Historischer Neumarkt Dresden" and the "Förderverein Berliner Schloss") see the restored centre as the re-instatement (or the "reassertion", the "reconquest" or even the "renaissance" – the word-field seems to be endless) of the historic importance and visual harmony of the respective cities. The debate is so fascinating, because it radicalizes some of the central questions of Cultural Studies, e.g. whether the museal – when it leaves Foucault's "heterotopia of time" and enters, as it were, the market-place of everyday life – regains some of its hegemonial potential; whether the visual representation (of identity) can, without punishment, completely separate itself from contemporary functionality (for the concrete buildings behind the facades of the Neumarkt Square and of the Stadtschloss will contain extremely modern infrastructures); and whether the "meanings" incorporated in the original buildings will, precariously or perhaps productively, collide with the democratic consensus of today's society.

**Gulshan Taneja, University of Delhi (India)**

**"Culture, Memory and Desire: Barthes's Museal Digressions"**

Barthes's *Camera Lucida* has been called an elegy, a book of mourning, a set of musings and reflections. It abounds with sharp and perceptive comments and views as well as opinionated propositions. More often than not, it has been examined and found to establish new means of observing and, in effect, has revealed the possibility of generating a new human consciousness through photography.

What, in my opinion, has been completely neglected is Barthes's attempt to lend photography museal attributes, as it offers a sharper and more meaningful definition of the museal impulse. A photograph, just as a museum, has an identity derived from its content alone. We never look at a photograph – we look at what it contains. A museal gaze can look only at itself. If a photograph is a signifier, it signifies nothing but itself. A museum like a photograph is testimony to death's inevitable finality. Both assure us of the pastness of their content. Both are emblems of *memento mori*. Both mingle past and present and remind the future of its inescapable obligation to reflect the past and indict it of its inevitable failure. Both exist to establish beyond doubt the irretrievable absence of what they seek to

immortalize.

The museal preoccupations in the age of post-modernism have saddled the "house of curiosities" with more dimensions than are generally considered conventional. The museal vision of a photograph is a mobius strip that flows in every which way redefining conventional space and time. A museum's stability, despite the possible mobility of its exhibits, is reminiscent of a photograph's realism, which is nothing but an illusion.

Despite Barthes' avowed objective in responding to the Winter Garden Photograph (a picture of his mother when she was a child) in *Camera Lucida*, he quickly turns away to examine the nature and socio-political significance of photography in the context of larger cultural issues. For example, for him, "the use of electoral photography presupposes a kind of complicity: a photograph is a mirror, [...] the voter is invited to elect himself." He, in fact, makes far-reaching observations on various aspects of photography. He points out how "whatever the origin and the destination of the message, the photograph is not only a product or channel, it is also an object, endowed with a structural autonomy." And: "It appears that the linguistic message is indeed present in every image as title, caption, accompanying press article, film dialogue, comic strip balloon." He goes on to point out how "photography is an *uncertain* art, as would be [...] a science of desirable or detestable bodies." A photograph's absence of ambiguity disturbs him: "The photograph is unary when it emphatically transforms 'reality' without doubling it, without making it vacillate [...]: no duality, no indirection, no disturbance".

He could be describing a museum. A museum, like a photograph, has a formation of its own. A museum constitutes complicity between memory and desire. In a museum, too, as Barthes remarks above of a photograph, "the linguistic message is indeed present in every [exhibit] as title, caption, accompanying press article, film dialogue, comic strip balloon." Practically every object in a museum has significance that it derives from an object's 'personal' context that museum attempts but fails to replicate. A museum, like a photograph, testifies to a geographic dislocation, but offers nothing in return.

Barthes's critique in *Camera Lucida* offers much to help us gain a subtler appreciation of the museal space today. If the museum has become "a vibrant metaphor in contemporary culture," Barthes's examination of photography in *Camera Lucida* offers a remarkable insight into an exploration of this "museal turn" in terms of its "reverberations" in both the humanities and the arts and its larger implications in socio-political cultural practices.

**Ingrid von Rosenberg, TU Dresden (Germany)**

### **"The Musealization of Every Day Life: Cultural and Political Implications"**

As is well known, after World War II the museum landscape underwent dramatic changes: the number of museums increased enormously and a whole new range of topics was suddenly discovered as being worth musealization beside the traditionally collected objects of high culture (a development which, of course, has to do with the general widening and democratization of perspectives in cultural studies). One of the greatest new fields of interest thus ennobled has been the everyday life of ordinary people, peasants as well as city dwellers, especially from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Theme parks, smaller and bigger museums collecting and displaying objects and costumes as well as reconstructing spaces from single rooms to streets, villages, small towns and work places have sprung up in the US and many European countries. In my paper I would like to explore the significance of these exhibitions for the identity formation of the communities concerned as well as their fascination for visitors from other backgrounds. The principles behind the collections and the techniques of display will also be investigated. Out of the innumerable examples I will

concentrate on two museum types in two different cultural contexts: British museums representing working-class life from the eighteenth to the twentieth century and German museums of everyday life in the GDR. Of the many British museums (including the People's Palace in Glasgow, York Castle Museum focusing on Victorian life, Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, etc.) the open-air museum Beamish in County Durham will be given special attention as it has become the object of a representative controversy among museums experts. The much younger GDR museums – apart from their meaning to other visitors – seem of current political importance as former GDR citizens appreciate them as places of identity confirmation. The DDR Museum in Berlin will be the prime example but references to exhibitions in Eisenhüttenstadt, Greiz and other towns will be included.

**Silke Walther, HfG Karlsruhe (Germany)**

### **"The Rhetoric of 'New Art' and the (Capitalist) Logic of 'New Art Museums' since the Nineties"**

Contemporary museum culture has become a site of experimentation over the last decades. Since the "postmodern crisis" a range of new museum types has emerged and changed our ideas of the main function and social role of museums completely. The Bilbao-Effect indicates that museums today are not only seen as places for education, contemplation, entertainment, or public culture. They are acknowledged as "growth industry", sites to be visited by a global-local public, but also as catalysts bringing life and wealth to peripheral areas. Without doubt, the wide range of museum types proves that museums address diverse publics today, fulfilling several functions beyond the traditional ones. Rosalind Krauss and Hans Haacke have reflected the intersections of the 1980s museum culture with the logic of "late capitalism". However, since the last two decades we have experienced a second transformation of museums under the pressures of exhibitions: the influence of new (corporate) resources or hybrid financing structures, the success of contemporary art outside the museum's walls, at biennals and triennals, and electronic/media art festivals. Although aesthetic experience is made possible and easily accessible through electronic devices, especially the Internet, the call for special museums showing "new/contemporary/media art" has motivated and still motivates cities, communities, private investors to found "new museums" for "new art". The "new", I argue, seems to be the most precious fetish now. My paper focuses on the rhetoric discourse on and the logic of "new art museums" and their efforts to grasp and present the evanescent artistic practice called "contemporary". As the rhetoric of the new art museums founded since the 1990s is often oscillating between marketing phrases and idealized conceptions of "the public", I also draw from relevant empirical and critical sources in the field of cultural analysis and cultural economics to examine the function and role of "new museums" with reference to specialisation, hybridization, and commodification. My analysis is based on a range of special museums from various countries, the MOCAs (Museum of Contemporary Art), Tate Modern and "Museum für Neue Kunst" and on my own recent investigation into the conflict of and debate around public and private (corporate) interests to be negotiated in the museum arena.

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## **Margit Zuckriegl, Rupertinum Salzburg (Austria)**

### **"The Crisis of Collecting: A Statement on a Precarious Task of Museums"**

Museums are conceived as "treasuries" – from the historical initial idea to the present role of the museum as a facet of national, regional or local identity. There is a wide range of ambitions connected to the concepts of gathering and forming this "treasure", which can be termed "collecting" and which involves the idea of shaping national heritage, the aspects of education and development as well as the impetus of research and discovery.

Nevertheless, we are confronted with a crisis of collecting, which manifests itself in

1. Presentation
2. Valuation
3. Complications

Ad 1. Presentation: only a handful of renowned museums (of historical art or natural history) can live for and by presenting their own collections. Museums in general suffer from notoriously few visitors in their spaces of the permanent collection and therefore avoid/limit these presentations ("The Museum as Kunsthalle").

Ad 2. Valuation: the funds for museum collections and/or acquisitions are continuously declining or are cut down. Museum directors, politicians and boards tend to undervalue the benefits of ongoing collecting activities and succumb to individualized momentary eventualisation.

Ad 3. Complications: working for and with a museum's collection is (personally and financially) marginalized by a hyper-energetic "temporary exhibition circus", by a loan circuit in which art works become hostages, by private collectors' often clearly commercial and/or social ambitions.

The "Crisis of Collecting" can be conceived as a potential for fruitful discourse, for the creation of new aims and tasks for museums that should make them fit for future generations so that museums are not just event-locations or business-orientated units in the cultural industries.