

CONFERENCE:
Museum Narratives

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ABSTRACTS

Peter Assmann, OÖ Landesmuseum, Austria

"Case Study Kubin: Museum Work between Fiction and Non-Fiction"

His extensive visual work, his well-received fantastic novel *The Other Side* [*Die andere Seite*] and his sought-after book illustrations – particularly for works of fantastic literature – situate Alfred Kubin's creative oeuvre like no other at the intersection of fantastic texts and visual realms. Kubin was a consistent "stage manager" of his own autobiography in the framework of fantastic tales, so that a consideration of the overall Kubin phenomenon suggests a broad spectrum of potential approaches for contemporary museum work.

His residence and final dwelling place in the municipality of Wernstein represents the artist's consistently designed living environment. This living environment with a network of mementos and art relationships constitutes together with his own library and art collection and the largest collection of his works in the State Gallery of Linz [*Landesgalerie Linz*] the most important parameters on which the museum work done by the Upper Austrian State Museums is based. This museum's long-term commitment consciously follows the fundamental tenets of museum work – "collecting, preserving, researching, educating" – while striving to reflect the diversity of narratives this complex artistic personality communicates through his work even after his death.

Julie Becker, Brussels, Belgium

"Negotiating Narratives: An Epic Tale of Contemporary Exhibition Making"

Over the years, museums have experimented with countless forms of authorship and narratives, from a disembodied, omniscient voice of authority to an increasingly composite, collective, sometimes conflict-ridden polyphony. Exhibition making has become a peculiar form of storytelling, calling upon a dizzying variety of media and harnessing the voices and skills of a staggering number of people. My paper argues that the essence of contemporary exhibition narrative is found in negotiation.

As an exhibition developer, my daily job sits at the heart of these negotiations, facilitating dialogue and arbitrating needs. Drawing on examples from my own practice in science and ethnology museums, I will consider three of the many rounds of negotiation that culminate in the exhibition narrative.

First, the content round, or 'dumbing down' vs. 'jargoning up' joust, commonly taking place between the 'expert' and the 'vulgarization person'. In this round, scientific aspirations for accuracy and exhaustiveness come up against the harsh realities of two

factors in short supply: exhibition space and visitor attention span.

Second, the 'multiple voices' round, putting around the table 'us, the museum' and 'them, society' for arduous compromise building talks. That 'people from the outside world' should contribute to exhibition development is becoming widely accepted, especially when dealing with social or topical 'issues'. However, what share of authority/authorship the museum is willing to relinquish poses both ethical and practical dilemmas. This round sees the exhibition developer performing the difficult balancing act of enabling polyphony whilst avoiding cacophony.

Third, the 'dungeon and dragons' round, in which the exhibition narrative needs to be deployed into physical space to become an experience. This game features well-intentioned designers and museographers more or less subtly trying to channel the path and attention of wonderfully curious and unpredictable visitors stubbornly possessed by a will/narrative of their own.

Having run out of belligerent metaphors, I will suggest that while negotiated exhibition narratives cannot match the storytelling power of a gripping novel, an informative news article or a transporting film, they can combine the magic of a theatre performance, heat of a passionate argument, thrill of a treasure hunt and evocative delights of a surrealist poem.

Andreea Bratu, University of Craiova, Romania

"Museums between Truth and Fiction"

Museums have evolved from mere deposits of art objects and memorabilia to narratives that make use of various means (visual, audio, tactile, olfactory) to create a comprehensive image of the time and personalities they are dedicated to. Sometimes, in order to entice visitors to experience the world of sensations they are striving to create, museums make use of a combination of real and fictional data and exploit the momentary or long-lasting fame of a contemporary figure randomly associated with them.

This paper will explore the relation between fictional and authentic data in the construction of a coherent and attractive story that aims to transport visitors into the atmosphere of the epoch illustrated.

In some cases, very few artefacts and a significant amount of archaeological data represent the starting point of an elaborate and detailed presentation that reconstructs an entire epoch or even the several-centuries-long history of a place, as it is the case with the Jorvik Centre in York, England. Sounds, images, smells and reconstructed scenes of everyday life accompany the visitor in his imaginary reversed journey into the history of the city of York.

In other cases, as in Mozart's Geburtshaus in Salzburg, the original setting and several apparently disconnected objects that belonged to Mozart and to family members are woven into a metaphorical story about the life and achievements of the prodigal composer, by means of modern devices.

In more surprising situations, ancient and modern times come together to almost give visitors the illusion of chance meetings with both real and fictional figures. This is the case with the Jane Austen Centre in Bath, where the Regency atmosphere created in the house is the background of the story of Jane Austen's years spent in the town depicted in two of her famous novels: *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. While displaying dresses,

furniture, objects of the time, as well as letters and books, the museum also makes use of modern interventions such as the letter written by actress Emma Thompson in the guise of Jane Austen, in which she describes the BAFTA awards ceremony, or the photo of actor Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy, rendered famous again by the cinematographic adaptation of *Bridget Jones' Diary*.

Heike Buschmann, University of Paderborn, Germany

"The Museum as Narrative Space: Storytelling in the Museum of Scotland"

There is widespread agreement on the fact that many museums tell stories, but the question how exactly they create these narratives remains largely unanswered. I argue that the spatial environment in which encounters between exhibits and visitors are set plays a crucial role in strategies of museal storytelling because every visitor necessarily interacts with spatial elements. In contrast, media such as text panels or guidebooks may potentially be ignored by visitors so that they take a smaller part in the narrative process.

My paper looks at ways in which the three-dimensional layout and the position of objects in historical museums create narratives and discusses how these can be read by visitors. It analyses museums as 'places' in Michel de Certeau's sense which both support specific objects in telling their stories and combine various exhibits into meaningful groups. In their ability to tell stories these places strongly resemble narrative discourse in Seymour Chatman's terms. Architectural and scenographic choices about the position and size of walls or glass cases and other structural features can thus develop plot patterns, different points of view or temporal structures.

Regarding the reception of exhibitions, curators as writers of museal settings may favour certain readings of the spatial discourse they create by providing strong architectural statements. However – ultimately – they have to hand over the floor to the visitors, who enter the place laid out before them as active readers. In this role they transform museal places into individual 'spaces' and create their own personal narratives by acts of walking and their choice of visual trajectories.

Responding to the multifaceted character of narratives in museums, I follow a three-fold approach, combining a narratological perspective with research from the fields of New Cultural Geography and museology in order to illuminate the writing and reading processes museums involve. I will illustrate how this approach can be applied by presenting findings from a case study analysing storytelling in the Museum of Scotland, a museum which extensively uses spatial markers in creating narratives.

Francesca Cuojati, University of Milan, Italy

"Cage Oddities: Victorian Writing, Zoology and the Museological Imagination"

My paper will explore the encounter between English literature, zoological collecting, and its conservational and exhibitionary practices both in natural history museums (involving taxidermy, painting and illustration) and in the newly founded Regent's Park Zoological Garden (1828). In particular, my research will focus on literary works (by Christina Rossetti, Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, Robert Louis Stevenson and eventually Gerald Durrell) that articulate the reception, illustration and metaphorisation of those

exotic animal species and specimens (the wombat, the dodo, the kangaroo and the platypus...) which for different reasons baffled the traditional Linnean system of classification and taxonomy. Textual analysis will show that by triggering the performance of a new hybrid aesthetic of the grotesque together with the collapse of the semantic function of language, those zoological riddles helped develop and exhibit what can be called "a modern bestiary of nonsense".

Jaime da Costa, University of Minho, Portugal

"Paul Auster's *Moon Palace*: Putting the World into Words"

In the context of cultural modernity the act of contemplating great works of art of the past implies a quest for profundity that demands a full exercise of human faculties.

In *Moon Palace*, Paul Auster introduces us to a young artist's search for a language of his own. It is a search that demands to be placed in a quest for the essentials of life and art. In it, the nomadic life of the artist, Marco Fogg, is brought in contact with the static and transcendental character of art in the geography of a progressive personal movement towards enlightenment.

It is precisely in the *point-of-nowhere* provided by the narrative work of art where Auster questions, from an already postmodern perspective, the value of the languages, of tradition and the possibilities for artistic innovation and for shedding new light into the world of life.

If a museum is the site for the encounter with the course taken by the past, it also sets the limit for what can be known with certainty. It comes as no surprise that Fogg in his quest for language is taken to the borderland of the museum, the oasis where the artist and the contemplator meet reflecting over memory and the yet unsuspected future. For Fogg the question is whether the museum, as a repositorium of tradition and its rituals, provides any room for freedom and self-expression. The answer could well be a definition of the postmodern.

Matteo Fabbris, University of Milan, Italy

"The Impossible Museums of the Dandy: Collecting, (Self-) Exhibiting, Dissipating"

This paper begins with a preliminary recognition of the multifarious intersections between late-Victorian dandiacal spaces and the spaces of the museum or exhibit. Museological discourses and practices must be considered in order to throw light on two crucial thematic nexus: on one side the modalities of public 'exhibition' of the dandy-aesthete (emblematic is Wilde's presence at the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877), on the other the museum rationale and museological suggestions transferred into the private sphere. The core of the discourse will focus on the latter aspect, with the exploration of the dialectics between collecting (as "gathering together") and dissemination, as shown in the paramount *locus* of the late-Victorian dandy's house. In texts by Ouida and Oscar Wilde the material universe epitomized by the collection takes the form of exquisite self-fashioned surroundings, "mausoleum(s)" (Ouida, *Chandos*) created according to idiosyncratic and bulimic modes of acquisition. Besides registering and 'duplicating' the real abundance of objects, furnishing and decorative elements, the

texts arrange them as perfect theatrical setting for the owner to live in, be inspired and ultimately be displayed. Another focal element of analysis is the tension between private consumption (experience) and public display, the latter being possibly a violation but also a powerful affirmation of a superior taste (Lord Wotton). When not fully realized in the plot, as with Dorian, the exhibit is carried out in the text for the reader only (deploying the specific *generative* role of literature, with references to other fictional collections). In the end these dandiacal spaces prove their 'unsustainability', revealing a constitutive inability to be preserved, threatened by financial loss, social scandal or death. A striking and uncanny parallelism is given by the actual dispersion and sale of Oscar Wilde's goods after his trial, re-shuffled and publicly displayed in the famous auction, and then partly absorbed by a half-hidden network of privates and bric-a-brac shops.

Georgina Goodlander, Smithsonian American Art Museum, USA

"Alternate Realities: Using an Art Museum as a Game Platform"

The Smithsonian American Art Museum developed and implemented the world's first museum-based Alternate Reality Game (ARG), "Ghosts of a Chance," in 2008 (<http://www.ghostsofachance.com>). This paper will summarize and evaluate the use of a detailed narrative to engage game players with collection objects and museum spaces, both on-line and on site. I plan to focus on the relationship between the fictional narrative and the 'real-world' elements of the game's design, and discuss the ways in which storytelling and game-playing can inspire people to connect with artworks in new and unexpected ways.

Alternate Reality Games are interactive stories that take place in the real world and in real-time, using primarily the internet but also often including phone, e-mail, and in-person interaction. They encourage community involvement as players work together to solve puzzles and codes, investigate narratives, interact with in-game characters, and coordinate real-life and on-line activities (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternate_reality_game). The nature of ARGs posed some unique challenges for the Museum in terms of its relationship to visitors and traditional role as expert and source of 'truth' and factual information. Ostensibly, "Ghosts of a Chance" invited gamers to create objects and mail them to the museum for an 'exhibition' curated by two game characters posing as employees. But the 'game within the game' was also a challenge to uncover clues to the narrative that connected those objects, and to investigate the way objects could embody histories. Players unlocked chapters of the narrative by completing certain tasks, and the story was revealed in a variety of ways, including videos on YouTube and Facebook, postings on the game's web site, supporting materials (fake press releases, blog posts, and articles), and live events.

Game Archive: <http://www.ghostsofachance.com>

Museum Web site: <http://www.AmericanArt.si.edu>

Final report (game outline & press): http://ghostsofachance.com/GhostsofaChance_Report2.pdf

Joe Grixti, Massey University of Auckland, New Zealand

"Commodifying Museums through Popular Fiction and Films"

The paper considers how habitual perceptions of museums and public art galleries have been modified by the ways in which such spaces are represented in popular culture, fiction and films. In *What Good are the Arts?* John Carey (2006: xi) notes that for many people great public art collections have traditionally been spaces "where the laws of economics seem to be magically suspended, since the treasures on display are beyond the dreams of private avarice." In this view, museums and art galleries are perceived as the custodians of timeless and priceless 'great art', and hence as the antithesis of the ephemeral and commercially popular. Yet in the age of mechanical and digital reproduction, inexpensive replicas of artworks are everywhere sold as souvenirs which become private possessions. Similarly, the hordes of tourists who visit the major art galleries and museums of the world's capitals often appear to be more interested in getting themselves photographed in front of the exhibits than in actually looking at the displays or appreciating their artistry or historic significance. Like bought souvenir replicas, the photograph in front of the artwork becomes a form of appropriation, transforming the exhibits into consumable commodities which can be subsumed within the narrative of the tourist's travels and perceived cultural capital.

Similarly, in popular fiction and films like *Topkapi*, *The Thomas Crown Affair* and *The Pink Panther*, public museums and art galleries have often been represented as the targets of sophisticated burglaries and elaborate heists – often masterminded by daring and debonair gentleman-thieves like Ernest Hornung's Raffles, the late Victorian 'amateur cracksman' for whom burglaries were a form of sport. In more recent popular novels and blockbuster films like *The da Vinci Code*, *Night at the Museum* and *National Treasure*, the museum's heavily guarded chambers and exhibits have become the backdrop for pulp narratives dominated by gruesome murders, thrilling chases or slapstick comedy. In each of these cases, the notion of the museum as austere repository and guardian of high cultural value has been appropriated and subsumed within the orientations of consumer culture, with the result that it has assumed new meanings and functions within the market economy. The paper will explore the impact of these developments on contemporary perceptions of artistic value.

Nina Jürgens, University of Stuttgart, Germany

"The Postmodern Museum: Transforming Spaces in Murray Bail's *Homesickness*"

The role of the museum in literature has only recently begun to gain comprehensive critical attention, especially on the part of literary studies (for example in Margret Westerwinter's study on museum narratives, published in 2008). As a heterotopian, culturally highly semanticized space which visualizes and locates the organization of knowledge, the museum site takes on a vital part in the context of spatial perception and concepts of spatiality. Both literature and the museum are media for cultural self-reflection which actively engage in the construction of collective identities and imagined communities. However, the complementary nature of the latter as being simultaneously present within the museum space on the one hand and their retrospective construction through narration on the other composes a dialectic in which the aspect of dynamic movement through space(s) is featured in a pivotal position.

The works of the Australian writer Murray Bail offer a rich fictional example of this discussion as they are predominantly concerned with questions of collecting, assembling and ordering and the way in which these activities influence constructions of "reality". In his novel *Homesickness* (1980) the process of narration reconfigures the museum as a postmodern space of transformation. A group of Australian tourists on a *tour du monde* follows an elaborate itinerary made up of visits to a vast number of museums – some of them traditional, such as the National Portrait Gallery, London, some rather idiosyncratic, such as the "Museum of the Leg" in Quito. Each visit challenges the characters' different conceptions of identity, their personal and collective positions in a postmodern world in motion where competing and colliding systems of knowledge and order (which formerly held the promise of epistemological stability) actively and dynamically deconstruct each other. I will show how the "mobility" mentioned above interacts with the quest for identity on various levels. Especially the cultural background of 'postcolonial' Australia and the implications this carries in terms of an 'answering back' to the Western world as well as in terms of taking up the dialogue with other former colonies through the medium of the museum offers a basis of interpretation which embeds the topic in a framework of literary (and cultural) studies. The museum in its various forms constitutes a crucial, heterogeneous space for the discussion of fictional renderings of identity and epistemology.

Sylvia Karastathi, University of Cambridge, Great Britain

"Fictions for an Exhibition: 'Art-Writing' in the Era of the Blockbuster Show: The Case of A.S. Byatt"

A.S. Byatt's quartet of novels – *The Virgin in the Garden*, *Still Life*, *Babel Tower* and *Whistling Woman* – ends in 1980 with the characters visiting one of the first blockbuster exhibitions in the UK, the show on 'Post-Impressionism' at the Royal Academy of Arts. The main characters, Frederica and Alexander, muse in front of paintings by Van Gogh, the exhibition being the place to meet friends and share the experience of looking at things closely.

I will begin this talk by surveying the genre of the 'art-gallery novel', defined as the type of novel a visitor would find in an art gallery bookshop, now a common stop in a visitor's experience of the big London galleries, such as the Tate Modern, the National Gallery and the Royal Academy. Practices in new museology approach museums as a space of 'infotainment', and have inspired new kinds of fictions, with novels as a 'by-product' of a successful aggregation of pictures. In the new 'Museum Age' – that follows on from Germain Bazin's seminal study of 1967 – museums are the spaces of visual culture par excellence, spaces where writing is both in demand and under distress.

A.S. Byatt during the 1990s in her capacity as a 'public intellectual' has contributed as an arts' columnist for *The Guardian* and *The Observer*; she has reviewed exhibitions for the art-magazine *Modern Painters*, and written forewords to exhibition catalogues for contemporary art shows (on Patrick Heron, Jack Milroy, Julie Heffernan and Eileen Agar). Her art-writings culminate in one of the most intriguing contributions on the pressures of visual culture on the novel in the 2001 *Portraits in Fiction*. In her novels her modes of writing and thinking about objects resemble very much the ways one approaches artefacts in the museum context. She provides fictional contexts for acts such as the sustained attention, the prolonged, exhaustive gaze, and the sheer pleasure of

just looking. Her descriptions self-consciously mimic ekphrastic modes of writing even when referring to the everyday objects surrounding her characters.

Following Byatt's engagement with the 'Museum Age' in Britain in the late 20th century, my paper aims at identifying and understanding the new types of art-writing that the practises of new museology – as defined by Peter Vergo in his 1989 volume – have enabled. Through Byatt's creative reflections on the cultural work of museums, I hope to reveal the shaping influence of the art-gallery as an institution that nowadays inspires, fosters and ultimately sells a variety of narratives.

Anna Kérchy, University of Szeged, Hungary

"Recycling Waste and Cultural Trauma in the Museum Space"

My paper proposes to argue that exhibitions of contemporary Abject Art that display culturally rejected 'waste' in the traditionally ordered, sterile, symbolically sacred space of the museum exercise a shock-therapeutical effect. Spectators are invited to reevaluate their relation to the past (as the 'present's residue') and in particular to their past traumatic experiences of *exclusion* constitutive of their historical/narrative self-identities, such as the repression/repulsion of preverbal, presymbolic corporeality on an individual and the marginalization/annihilation of scapegoated social other(ed)s on a collective level (ie. socializing taboos and concentration camps governed by an ideology of cleanliness). Re-membering and dis-location gain a special significance as the traumatizing surplus/lack of 'body (as) waste' – the unspeakable (thus compulsively revisited) left-over of private and public (his)stories – invades the museum's high-cultural sphere meant to teach and delight. These abject artworks represent the Unrepresentable that 'civilised' human beings are unwilling to recall yet unable to forget. The very vulnerability of ourselves is staged by the spectators' calculated corporeal gut-reaction of nauseous horror and tremulous excitement sharply opposed to the museum's traditionally strict surveillance of visitors' potentially polluting human bodies (manifested in the prohibition to eat, drink or make noise in the exhibit halls). The museum becomes a locus of 'recycling repressed memories'. Accordingly, the shows I wish to analyse – a 1993 Whitney Museum, NY exhibition entitled *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire* as well as Jake and Dinos Chapman's 2008 exhibitions in London's White Cube entitled *Fucking Hell* and *If Hitler Had Been a Hippy How Happy We Would Be* ('sequels' to their 1993 *Disasters of War* now on permanent exhibit in Tate Gallery) – raise issues of ethical responsibility, truth production, historical significance, mythmaking, misremembering, denial and (faux)nostalgia. Cultural suppression becomes artistic revelation as what has been rejected as *waste* is now valued as inspiration. In a multimedial metamorphosis, the exhibition hall seems to fulfil the function of the psychoanalyst's couch, the courtroom of the subject in process, the anatomical theatre, and the cabinet of curiosities where one conjures up ghosts: artistic recycling shares the effects of a religious confession, a judicial trial, a self-dissection and a spiritist séance. Via an artistic recycling of garbage and waste Gilbert and George picture dirty words and trace an iconography of body-waste to circumscribe an identity for the marginalized 'scum of society' and to question issues of cultural (in)visibility, while the Chapman brothers' 'creative vandalism' revisions historical/aesthetic significance/authority by (1) doodling smiling faces on Hitler's watercolor paintings and thus both ruining the artistically worthless and elevating it into

an institutional museum setting; and on the other hand by (2) staging in Lego-toy-like, miniature installations the Unimaginable itself, Holocaust scenes of bodies reduced to waste, gut-churning episodes from the darkest side of History. These sensationalist (?) anti-aesthetic, non-didactic abject-artworks challenge the very definition of the museum as "a permanent institution conserving and communicating the *tangible and intangible* heritage of humanity and its environment, for the purposes of [education](#), study, and [enjoyment](#)"¹). They also correspond to the way civilized culture has chosen to recover the past through the constitution of institutions (museums) and canons (standards of readability), which attribute the value of high to a ruined, fragmented, disordered or low cultural object simply by virtue of its historicity/age: waste is culturally rejected only to be potentially recuperated with time as a precious, historical remain, memento of a past, apt to assure the (illusory) continuity of (art)history. (Here, I think of museum-exhibits of the type of a broken prehistorical fishhook, a chipped bit of medieval mural painting, a baroque chamber pot, but also mundane memorabilia with a literary historical significance such as 'a famous author's laundry list, or jewellery made from remnants of the World Trade Center.) Archaeological remains, ruins and rubbish are symbolically purified via the meticulous restoration, renovation, recuperation process. In a sort of mise-en-abyme, abject art has the capacity to illuminate the abject side of the museum itself, as the museum perfectly matches Walter Moser's² comment on the symbolical significance of *garbage*: it represents the intrusion of a trace of the past into the present system, and therefore supports the dialectic and drama of remembering and forgetting. The ambiguity of spectatorial reactions result of the historical/social burden to recall responsibly within a meaningful narrative that which we would prefer to forget (ie. that could be summarised by the Chapman-exhibition's title: "The aim of all life is death.")

References:

¹ as defined by the [International Council of Museums](#).

² Walter Moser, "Garbage and Recycling: From Literary Theme to Mode of Production", *Other Voices*, 2007.

Ingrid Kuczynski, University of Duisburg, Germany

"'A Vast Collection of Marbles' – English Tourists of the Eighteenth Century Coping with the Treasures of Art"

The paper proposes to look into the narratives eighteenth-century English tourists wrote and published about their travels in Italy, focusing on their perception of artworks. Conceived as enterprises in cultural instruction and education, the programmes of these travels were very much dedicated to the study of artifacts, from modernity and the renaissance back to the remains and excavations from antiquity. The Italian exhibition sites – ducal palaces, galleries, cabinets, churches and the occasional museum – provided vast and abundant collections of material demonstrating wealth, prestige and power. But it rested with the tourists to give those overwhelming collections meaning and to construct, within the framework of their cultural expectation, their own narratives.

Impatient with the traditional presentation of "catalogues of lumber" (Montagu) or the indiscriminate comprehensive lists of exhibits, travel-writers pursued, around the middle of the century, various new strategies. James Russel's *Letters from a Young Painter Abroad* (1748/50) may be seen as a key text for the paradigmatic change in perception and presentation. The author discussed the problem of satisfying both the

demands of his traditionalist father for a complete list of all the excavated objects of Herculaneum and the much more empathetic interests of his siblings. They preferred a normative aesthetic and intellectual appreciation which presupposed the courage to selectivity and subjective opinion.

The paper will consider further approaches as, for example, Tobias Smollett's patriotic self-affirmation in his idiosyncratic appreciation of works of art, or Hester Lynch Piozzi's efforts in training her eye and mind according to the code of recognized greatness. The stamp of nationality and education on the narratives of the experiences of artworks is closely linked to the stamp of gender. Anna Miller and Mariana Starke, for instance, read artefacts in the context of a material culture which provided continuity and therefore meaning from the past to the present. Mariana Starke finally facilitated orientation and narration for all tourists to come, especially those with little specialist knowledge and less time: In her *Letters from Italy* (1800) she created a narrative of the "essential art experience" by putting three exclamation marks against the objects not to miss by any means. Later, John Murray took over her invention and changed it for all of us into little stars.

Julia Lippert, University of Halle-Wittenberg, Germany

''Imagined King' – George III at the Queen's Gallery: A Cognitive Reading''

'Today, sadly, many people associate George III only with the mental illness that beset his later years, and with the wars that led to the loss of the American colonies. But there was far more to his reign than that, and as you explore this exhibition, where you will be joined by me and my colleagues from The Royal Collection, we hope you will discover how the reign of King George III and Queen Charlotte was in fact a Golden Age of royal patronage in Britain.'

With these words a recording of Hugh Roberts's voice (director of The Royal Collection) welcomes visitors to the exhibition *George III and Queen Charlotte: Patronage, Collecting, and Court Taste* held at the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, from 26 March 2004 to 9 January 2005. From the outset it is apparent that the exhibition intends not only to show rare and precious antiques collected by George III and his consort, but that it aims to provide a particular view on George III – his cultural legacy, reign and personality.

In this paper I shall demonstrate how the exhibition at Queen's Gallery constructs a particular narrative of George III – his life and his person – by means of specific spatial arrangements of objects combined with audio-commentary. I shall do so with the help of a cognitive-narrative-reading-model that allows for the analysis of historiographic biographies across media and genres.

The model is based on Monika Fludernik's 'natural' narratology, which regards narratives as independent from certain discourse types or fabulae. According to 'natural' narratology, narrativity is defined by its function, which consists in portraying past events as viewed through the consciousness of an anthropomorphic being. The perceiving consciousness may be located within a narrator, a character or the recipient. Thus the 'natural'-reading-model makes possible the critical exploration of the way a visitor to a museum or gallery may construct a story from the objects presented.

The analysis will show not only what kind of story the exhibition at the Queen's Gallery conveys through which particular narrative techniques, it will also give insight into *how* the visitor 'reads' the narrative and which factors guide his or her 'reading'.

Caroline Patey, University of Milan, Italy

"From Collection to Narration (and back): Henry James and The Wallace Collection"

Henry James's engagement with museums and collectors was multifaceted and long lasting and is invaluable today for a better understanding of his poetics. His relation with the Wallace Collection in London, however, and with the Hertford family associated to it, has never been investigated in depth, if at all. In a first section, the paper will chart the factual encounters between James and the Wallace Collection: from the American novelist's pioneering review of the Collection in 1873, to the photograph of Hertford House chosen for the frontispiece of volume 10 in the New York edition of James's works (1907), without overlooking the friendly relations between the novelist and the first curator of the Collection, Claude Phillips.

In the second section, I shall assess the role of the Wallace Collection and its history as they are discovered to interact crucially with the modes and forms of James's writing. The Collection works indeed as a container of stories and tales which find their way to James's page, thanks mostly to the pictures he admired warmly, such as Joshua Reynolds's "Nelly O'Brien" or "The Strawberry Girl". The times and life of the complicated Hertford family also contribute to the shaping of James's novels and shed light on their characters and plots alike. Finally, through its association with James's beloved Thackeray, the Wallace collection proves a fertile site of intertextuality.

In the third section of my paper, I wish to approach the aesthetic quality of the James/Wallace Collection intersection and to show how the Rococo art collected by the Hertfords – Watteau, Lancret, Boucher – has been appropriated by James and become seminal in the vision and conception of his own narrative. My conclusion will interrogate the connections between James's 'collected' works (New York Edition) and the display of collections at the Wallace.

Eva Pérez, University of the Balearic Islands, Spain

"From Robert Harris's *Enigma* (1995) to the Bletchley Park Museum: Fictionalisation, *Museumisation* and (Lack of) Funding"

When former Top Secret information on Bletchley Park and the ULTRA code-breaking machine – central to the development and outcome of the Second World War – was made available to the general public, it created a stir in British public opinion. Numerous fictional and biographical accounts of the work done in the Park were written to cater for the sudden curiosity created around the figures of civil servants of all types, from mathematicians and logicians, to telephone operators and even crossword addicts. One of the novels written to fictionalise Bletchley Park is Robert Harris's *Enigma* (1995).

I would like to look at the Bletchley Park experience through a number of means. First, through the official, formerly Top Secret, files that the Ministry of Defence made public

after a long period of secrecy that started in 1940 with the opening of the Park facilities and which enjoined each and every one of the persons on the site to utter not a word of their activities, to friend or relative, for the safety of the country. Second, I would like to contrast the information available on the activities around the Ultra Decrypts during World War II with the account that Robert Harris gives in his novel *Enigma*. In particular, some former civil servants at Bletchley Park have produced their own account, although in non-fictional form, of their jobs, since there is a perception that Harris portrays some of the characters, and even the atmosphere, as less than flatteringly.

Recently, the House of Lords refused to link the Bletchley Park site to the most important World War II museum, the Imperial War Museum, which implies a lesser financial backing for the Enigma home. This brings me to my third and final point, which concentrates on the study of the particular narrative of Bletchley Park Museum. I would like to put the documents – the ministerial files, Harris's novel and the reactions to that novel – in the context of the narrative offered by Bletchley Park itself, recently opened to the public and struggling for financial survival, even when public interest in sites with Second World War connections continues to grow.

Glyn Pursglove, Swansea University, Great Britain

"Museums and the Historical Anthology of English Verse"

This paper will examine some of the illuminating analogies between the evolution of the museum and of the historical anthology of verse. The private collections of objects made during the Renaissance – whether in the form of a 'Cabinet of Curiosities' or a princely *studiolo* – were designed for the private enjoyment of a generally miscellaneous collection, an enjoyment shared only with privileged friends. It was largely the Eighteenth Century (with a few earlier exceptions) that saw the emergence of the public museum – eg. the Uffizi (1737), the Museo Sacro in the Vatican (1756), The British Museum (1759) and the Louvre (1793). With the public museum there also developed the idea (not uniform in its application) that such establishments should, in the best Enlightenment manner, present a systematically organised display, should present a cogent intellectual or historical narrative or, at least, the materials from which the intelligent viewer might construct such a narrative.

The development of the historical anthology of English verse runs parallel with that of the museum. In the sixteenth century many individuals kept commonplace books and in their private nature (not only because they were maintained in manuscript but insofar as the compiler entered in them those literary 'objects' which he perceived as having most value and use for his own intellectual development) they have much in common with the traditions of the 'cabinet' and the *studiolo*. Published anthologies were, almost without exception, gatherings of recent poetry (the word 'new' appearing insistently on title pages). It is in the later years of the Eighteenth Century that historical anthologies begin to appear, in a sequence which runs through such volumes as Elizabeth Cooper(Cowper)'s *The Muses Library* (1737), Percy's *Reliques* (1765) and Headley's *Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry* (1787). Increasingly the sense that such anthologies should correspond to 'national' museums became stronger, leading to multi-volume collections which attempted a degree of comprehensiveness, such as Bell's *The Poets of Great Britain* (1782 onwards), Anderson's *A Complete Edition of the Poets of*

Great Britain (1793 onwards), Park's *The Works of the British Poets* (1808 onwards), Chalmers' *The Works of the English Poets from Chaucer to Cowper* (1810) and Campbell's *Specimens of the British Poets* (1819).

Ingrid von Rosenberg, University of Dresden, Germany

"Guilt, Trauma, Self-Confidence – Narratives of Slavery in British Museums"

Not only the United States, Britain has also been deeply involved in the inhuman practice of slavery, profiting as slave holders in the Caribbean colonies and even more so as slave traders. Between 1662 and 1807 British ships carried more than three million captured Africans across the middle passage.

This chapter of her history has apparently filled the nation with so much unease, that until recently no major museum in Britain dedicated a permanent exhibition or even an extensive show to it. The first to confront the unpleasant legacy was the National Museum in Liverpool, which opened a Transatlantic Slavery Gallery in 1994. In 2007, the bicentenary of the abolition of slavery in Britain and her colonies, the scene changed radically. All big museums, including the V & A and the Tate, launched shows, often inviting black artists to complement the display of artefacts, images, texts and other memorabilia. Two permanent museums were established: the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool and the Sugar and Slavery Museum in the capital. Both these houses have put together impressive exhibitions, telling the narrative of slavery from the 16th century to present day after effects with the help of as many pieces of evidence as could be mastered. The shows are pledged to an ideal of objective historical truth and try to approach it by documenting three points of view complementing each other – that of the victims, the profiteers and the humanist abolitionists.

Yet in other shows launched in the 2000s black artists, following the call for contribution, told the story of slavery from very different perspectives. Using the privilege of creative imagination, they, rather than highlighting the victim status of the transported Africans, chose to stress their resilience, creativity and spirit of resistance with the aim of boosting the self confidence of blacks today.

In my paper I would like to contrast the narratives the historical museums tell – paying due attention to their staging strategies – with some exhibitions curated by well-known politically committed artists such as Godfried Donkor, Keith Piper and Lubaina Himid. In 2007 Piper, for instance, contributed a series of works entitled *Lost Vitrines*, showing feigned pieces of evidence of slave resistance, to an exhibition *Uncomfortable Truths* in the V & A. Lubaina Himid staged an impressive show *Naming the Money* in Newcastle in 2004 (of which part was shown in the V & A in 2007), consisting of 100 colourful life-size wooden cut-out figures representing male and female slaves, all endowed with a personal name, history and a craft. And Godfried Donkor produced several series of images setting off black cultural achievements against the dismal past by arranging popular icons (e.g. slave ships and boxer figures) or re-working 18th century paintings.

Esther Sánchez-Pardo, Complutense University of Madrid, Spain

"Iconographies of Suicide: How did Hart Crane Enter the Museum?"

Hart Crane (1899–1932) remains a special case in the history of American modernism, his reputation has never been quite as secure as that of Eliot, Williams or Stevens.

Critic Langdon Hammer has written that his poetry "Must be repeatedly 'introduced' again, brought in, reclaimed...Crane still does not have a place" (Kirsch 2006, 83). In recent years, however, Crane has been given a place in American letters, a volume of his own in the Library of America: *Hart Crane: Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, edited by Hammer in 2006. The low academic opinion among the ranks of the New Critics contrasts markedly with the near veneration accorded to the poet by the New American poetry in the 1940s (Creeley, Olson, Ginsberg, the Beats).

Hart Crane's suicide entered American iconography as the emblematic gesture of the anguished artist in a materialistic culture. The social script seemed to announce that the visionary had no role in America, the artist had no function and the only escape was death. Crane's life came to exemplify the ordeal of the artist – almost a *topos* in the American imaginary – by poets who themselves were transformed from former adversarial artists into icons. Robert Lowell, in his elegy, "Words for Hart Crane" called him "the Shelley of his age," and Allen Ginsberg, in "Death to Van Gogh's Ear!" linked him with other artists martyred by a dehumanizing society.

Beyond poetry, Crane's suicide inspired several works of art by painters, e.g. Marsden Hartley (1877–1943) "Eight Bells' Folly, Memorial for Hart Crane." (1933) and Jasper Johns (1930–) "Periscope" (1963) and "Diver" (1962–63). Throughout this paper we will engage in a dialogue with each of these artworks in order to examine how Crane's legacy has been received, interpreted and (re)fashioned across different media.

This paper further explores why Crane, his life and poetry, has come to occupy a place in the museum – what this means collectively and how it addresses American society at large and the ideals and values of America in the 1920s. The transformation of Hart Crane's life and work into Hart Crane's legend is the story of the transformation of personal distress into public purpose and of the ways iconography both works through and distorts.

References: Kirsch, Adam. 2006. "The Mystic Word", *New Yorker*, 82 (32), pp. 82–86.

Joachim Schwend, University of Leipzig, Germany

"Remembering the Diaspora: Irish Migrations and their Representations in Museums"

The paper will concentrate on the presentation of museums dealing with emigration from Ireland. Concrete examples will be the emigration museum in Cobh and a museum in Galway as well as the "Deutsches Auswandererhaus" in Bremerhaven.

Starting from the concept of the "imagined communities" (Benedict Anderson) and "imagined spaces" (Edward Soja) the paper will discuss the different forms of representing the diaspora and the fates of those who left their home country (in this case mainly the Irish, but also reference to the Germans who left from Bremerhaven) as case studies exploring particular spatial or medial strategies of presentation. The objects displayed in museums cease to be simply objects or exhibits to be looked at but become actors in a dialogic process (Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Stuart Hall) telling

meaningful narratives, histories become stories in which the viewer/reader or recipient plays an active part.

Another central aspect will be political tendencies inherent in the depiction of emigration. In the case of the Irish the concepts of exile and forced emigration are central in the mentality of the 19th century – the "American Wake". In the course of the first half of the 20th century this attitude changed into the search for a better life abroad, both in England and in North America.

It is thus a question of who is talking and how a collective memory is being constructed. The concept of history will be discussed using the approaches taken by Fredric Jameson and both Aleida and Jan Assmann towards the writing and construction of history.

Which narratives are told in the museums and who is talking? Making sense of the data and the objects shown must be done in a discursive investigation of time and circumstances and analysis of whose stories are being told by whom. The emigration museums in Cobh and Galway are telling an Irish narrative from an Irish point of view. The emphasis is clearly on the misery of emigration and not on the joyful expectations for those who leave. The way of presentation is mostly realistic with a tendency to naturalism. The medium is still in a way the message (Marshall McLuhan).

Laura Scuriatti, European College of Liberal Arts, Berlin, Germany

"The Baroque as Discovery: The Baroque, British Modernism and Denis Mahon's Collection"

In my paper I want to examine the development and impact of Denis Mahon's collection of Baroque Italian art on culture and aesthetics in Britain during and after World War II. Introduced to Baroque art by art historian Nikolaus Pevsner at the Courtauld Institute of Art, Mahon started collecting Italian Baroque paintings and writing about Baroque art in the early 1930s, eventually gathering a collection which was later donated to British and Italian museums. Mahon's work was pioneering in the process of the redefinition and rediscovery of Baroque and Mannerism which characterised European art theory since the turn of the century. The paper will explore the relationship between Mahon's reading of the Italian Baroque and the writings on Baroque by contemporary British authors such as Roger Fry and Sacheverell Sitwell, and the way in which the collection was received by the learned public opinion.

Christopher Smith, Norwich, Great Britain

"A Fake in a Gilt Frame. Alan Bennett's *A Question of Attribution*"

Displaying an object in an art gallery or museum places it on a figurative pedestal, holding it up for admiration. But can we always be sure it is genuine? Is it phoney? Just a suggestion of doubt is always enough to arouse interest that grows in intensity with prestige of the object itself and of the exhibition in which it figures.

Alan Bennett explores these issues in *A Question of Attribution*. In a play that treats history as no more than a starting point, Sir Anthony Blunt, one of the Cambridge spies whose careers fascinated the British public in the third quarter of the twentieth century, appears as a man who has not been what he was taken to be and whose position, at the end of what many supposed was a successful career as Director of the Courtauld

Institute and Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures, remains deeply ambiguous. His self-doubts are mirrored in the different ways in which he is seen by others. As an eminent art historian he is revered, though his Achilles heel is revealed; to the Intelligence Services his guilt is clear, but investigators suspect he has kept back information. Most strikingly of all, in the art gallery of Buckingham Palace, we see Blunt and none other than the Queen discussing art and in particular the nature of fakes. As the Queen probes, making comments that hint that she knows far more than she chooses to admit, we come to understand that Blunt is himself on display here, all the more painfully so because he cannot be quite sure whether his cover has been blown. Another layer of ironic comment comes from Blunt's investigations into a Renaissance portrait, of questionable provenance which it transpires has been over-painted and altered to hide, neatly enough for this play, the face of a third figure. Not greatly concerned with espionage and treachery, Bennett uses the questions of attribution and authenticity that so concern art historians and the exhibition-going public as his prime metaphor in a witty, yet disturbing exploration of a personality that is conscious of being always on display like an object in the galleries he frequents with professional expertise.

A Question of Attribution was first performed at the National Theatre in 1980. It is, however, more satisfactory to base any study of the play on the rather fuller version, with largely the same cast, that was presented on television a little later.

Gerd Stratmann, University of Bochum, Germany

"Night at the Museum – Subversive Cultural and Literary Metaphorisations"

The two *Night at the Museum* films (2006 and 2009) are the most recent examples of the creativity with which popular and literary culture has transformed that venerable institution of tradition and refinement, the museum, into a metaphor for extremely unrefined nightmares and desires. Here not only the many movies come to mind which use the museum as a setting for horror effects, but also narrative texts like *The Tin Drum* (Grass), *The British Museum is Falling Down* (Lodge), "Museums and Women" (Updike) etc. In all these works, the collective memories, stored away and neatly arranged in their respective museums, suddenly seem to defy such domestication and develop a night-life of their own, becoming menacing or erotically seductive, generating obsessions or chaos. This phenomenon may, of course, be read as yet another expression of that well-known modern/postmodern passion for parody and debunking – i.e. as the attempt to create grotesque counter-images of a most conventional concept of culture and thereby deconstruct it. But as my paper will try to argue, there is more to it. Collective memories are, as all of us keep repeating, a most important medium of identity formation; but as they are steeped in nostalgic desires and guilty feelings, they can also ride our dreams and pose a threat to our daylight self-assurance.

Maria-Ana Tupan, University of Bucharest, Romania

"Postmodernist Energetics and Peter Ackroyd's Museum Space"

Drawing on postwar pictures of space, such as those informed of Heisenberg's theory of multiple worlds, Deleuzian rhizomatic energetics, and Borges's aesthetics of the world as a textual labyrinth, this paper examines Peter Ackroyd's ontological transgressions

which allow the museum topos to emerge as a paraxial realm crossed in both directions: from reality into a semiotic utopia of heterogeneous cultural matters (art, music, philosophy, science), and from constructed, artificial worlds into spaces traditionally conceived of as real.

The Ackroyd case, which is a paradigmatic instance of postmodernist cognitive mapping, is discussed in a revealing comparison with nineteenth-century representations of museum-space as polarised around the nature-culture binary. Concomitantly with the passage from history to historicism – i.e. the past retrieved from a present perspective as a sequence of life-styles –, the museum figure was employed to serve discourses as heterogeneous as those of geology (reading the past story of the earth from the layers of its fossils, both in theories of catastrophism and uniformitarianism), astronomy (deriving the nebula hypothesis from the present structure and dynamics of the planetary system), physics (the theory of the closed, entropic universe, preserving within it all past forms of energy). The nineteenth-century typology of museum-like displays of history as a collection of life forms removed from actual time and redeployed within a spatial structure of a timeless value was employed by writers of the eighties and nineties as an object lesson for Schopenhauer's distinction between Will and Idea, the unintelligible physical universe on the one hand and the sphere of cultural artifacts on the other, linking up with each other through time, instead of holding up a mirror to nature or to contemporary society. In Hardy, the prison of the entropic universe, where the spent light or wasted energy of past forms of existence are preserved but out of touch (alluded to in his poems, such as *In a Museum, A Kiss*, or *The Occultation*), is set over and against the science and art of Stonehenge or of Christminster cathedrals, which are still talking to the intellect in a familiar language. Contrariwise, in the fictional spaces of Peter Ackroyd, the narratives centred on the museum topos are playing on the Deleuzian rhizomatic figure of artefacts as territorializations of the flux of life, born of ontologically heterogeneous matters and deterritorializing into the physical and historical world, from whose touch it is no longer secured by any safety valve.

Silke Walther, Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design, Germany

''Discontinuous Episodes' and 'Visual Encounters': The Legacy of André Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire*''

It is an alluring hypothesis that in museums, like in art books, we find individual works of art embedded in a narrative. Art historians of the early 20th century like Wilhelm Waetzoldt believed the Art Museum's Wall to be "the blank page on which the museum professional presents his art historical narrative"["Die Museumswand ist die Manuskriptseite, auf die der Museumsman sein Kunstgeschichte schreibt"]. Some curators still cling to this, but throughout the 20th century apparent continuous 'stories of art' and normative canons of art historical 'pedigrees' have been criticized by artists and writers. Picasso's discomfort with the so-called 'Museum Narrative' (David Carrier) is clear from his remark that Museum exhibitions are "a lot of lies", "tied up to a fiction and a heap of other things." Museum exhibits can resemble narrative structures but in the end the suggestive power of hanging schemes and displays relies on showing, framing, grouping and juxtapositions: Alfred H. Barr selected the solitary masterpieces of a Modernist tradition for his influential exhibition of Modern Art at the MoMA (New

York), the then representational hanging schemes often aimed at weaving the exhibited art objects into meaningful narratives which were in turn relating to modernist's discourses on art. Taking up Picasso's critique of a misleading construction in which the single work is embedded in and juxtaposed with a sequence of other art objects, my talk focuses on three case studies to discuss modernism's turning away from a linear development-plot towards juxtaposition, collage, and montage in the manner of André Malraux's "Musée Imaginaire"-concept. My aim is to stress the ruptures and anti-narrative characteristics of modernist displays and their changing function in relation to a definition what "modern art" might be and how it can be integrated into a larger "Museum Narrative" in the discussed public and private art museums.

Andrea Zittlau, University of Rostock, Germany

"The Master of Illusion: P.T. Barnum's *American Museum* as an Archive of Popular Stories"

In 1841 Phineas Taylor Barnum opened the *American Museum* located at the corner of Broadway and Ann Street in Lower Manhattan, New York City, where he combined sensational entertainment with higher education in the tradition of the Renaissance *Wunderkammer*. Next to displaying artefacts connected to natural history such as minerals and stuffed animals, he amassed panoramas, paintings, wax figures and all sorts of curiosities. Perhaps his most well-known attraction was the "Feejee Mermaid" an "ugly dried-up, block-looking, and diminutive specimen about three feet long. Its mouth was open, its tail turned over, and its arms thrown up, giving it the appearance of having died in great agony" that stimulated heated discussions about deception.

In the short story "The Barnum Museum" (1990) Steven Millhauser develops a postmodern dialogue with P. T. Barnum's *American Museum*. He describes a mythical labyrinth of light and darkness in which hybrid creatures such as the Griffith and the mermaid found a home. Its inhabitants, crowds of jugglers, beggars and eremites believe the outside world to be an illusion they do not dare to visit. And indeed, Barnum was no doubt one of the most influential figures of the late 19th century and a master of illusion. Thus he played a crucial role in the development of mass culture – and in the museum world.

This paper meditates on the narrative strategies Barnum uses in and around his museum to create illusion. Each object tells a separate story, as did the artefacts in the Renaissance cabinets of curiosities. But the objects do not speak for themselves. Instead they represent popular myths and stories, as the mermaid does, which Barnum used to promote the museum. In this sense the cabinets of curiosities as well as Barnum's display is nothing more and nothing less than a great collection of popular (oral) narratives – a strategy of storytelling that is rare today. I will use the example of the mermaid to show how the story was told in the museum, in today's narrations of the museum (Millhauser) and where it can still be found.