Introduction

Museums and the Educational Turn: History, Memory, Inclusivity

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Responding to feminist, postcolonial, and memorialistic critiques, museums have over the past decades radically revised their protocols of collection and display, aiming to register in their own curatorial and pedagogical practice the open and contested nature of the historical and ethnographic narratives on which their object lessons had traditionally conferred the status of hard evidence. In this new emphasis on the “museum encounter” as a performative and intersubjective “event”—sometimes referred to as the “educational turn”¹ in museum curatorship—a new type of “inclusive museum”² has emerged in diverse geographical and political settings. The inclusive museum seeks to recover the museum’s social role as a purveyor of shared, collective meanings precisely in departing from its high-modern predecessor and in forging “open representations” that acknowledge the diversity of the interpretative community thus interpolated. Inclusive museums, in short, aim to offer a new, contemporary stage for negotiating and performing cultural citizenship. Just as other audiovisual media in the age of Web 2.0, museums are looking for ways of departing from a vertical “broadcasting model” of communication and moving toward a horizontal “peer-to-peer” structure, in which visitors morph into “users” invited to “complete” the meanings of the object-technology interface through their own emotional and experience-based responses (see Rifkin³ and Sibilia⁴ for a discussion of the relations between technological change and “technologies of the subject,” and Parry⁵ for their specific implications for the museum and its curatorial practices). The stated aim of many of these new museums, then, is to invite reflection on the representational and mediated quality of histories and geographies, and on memory as a complex aesthetic and rhetorical

artifice. By granting a voice to what has been left out of the dominant discourses of history, diversified and sometimes even incompatible narratives have supposedly been granted a locus in a museal space that no longer seems to aspire to any totalizing synthesis. In Janet Marstine's words, the new museology is built on

the transformation of the museum from a site of worship and awe to one of discourse and critical reflection that is committed to examining unsettling histories with sensitivity to all parties, [looking toward] a museum that is transparent in its decision-making and willing to share power. New museum theory is about decolonizing, giving those represented control of their cultural heritage.⁶

Many new museums thus redefine their functions in and for communities as spaces of memory, exemplifying the postmodern shift from authoritative master discourses to the horizontal, practice-related notions of memory, place, and community. "The long-established habit of imagining memory as a storehouse has been transmuted into the reverse suggestion that storage systems [such as the museum] might be understood as forms of memory."⁷ In these spaces individual life stories are attributed significance beyond the purely private: autobiographical story telling is part of the museum's newly perceived function of giving voice to the individual fate and transforming bystanders and later generations into "secondary witnesses." In order to do so, the museum cannot simply rely on the aura of the authentic object as a window onto the past, but must deploy multimedial technologies and performance as narrative strategies associated with art forms such as literature or film. The stated aim is to facilitate experiential learning, to invite emotional responses from visitors, and to make them empathize and identify with people from the past or with their living contemporaries inhabiting alternative modernities in distant places, as if "reliving" their experience, in order to thus develop more personal and immediate forms of affective engagement and imaginative investment.

Paul Williams, in his book on *Memorial Museums*, claims that during the last twenty years an increasing number of museums commemorating violent histories, mass suffering, and genocides defy the distinction between a museum and a memorial, by focusing attention on the suffering of the victims of those events.⁸ Museums that document trauma and conflict have proliferated over the last twenty years across the globe, so much so that in 2001 the International Council of Museums established IC-MEMO, the International Committee of Memorial Museums in Remembrance of the Victims of Public Crimes. These museums form part of an international debate about human rights, restitution, and justice. However, the popularity of so-called dark tourism means that countries can actually turn the sites of their bloody and unsavory history into

money-spinning enterprises or at least into attractions for international tourists: “[E]vidence suggests that contemporary tourists are increasingly travelling to destinations associated with death and suffering.”⁹ On another level, these shifts in modes of display and in the remit of materials and areas of collecting ensuing not just from large-scale ventures but also from the exponential spread of local, “communitarian,” and “memorial” museums and “heritage sites,” as well as of immaterial forms of collecting and display over the Internet, also lends weight to Andreas Huyssen’s claim that the centrality of the museum in cultural debates, activity, and capital investment represents an anxiety peculiar to our own time: “The popularity of the museum is ... a major cultural symptom of the crisis of the Western faith in modernization as panacea.”¹⁰

Museums, however, have always been affiliated in contradictory ways with both universalist and particularist agendas. On the one hand, as physical and visual arenas where the public sphere is performatively embodied in the regulated interchange of perspectives, museums have traditionally been entrusted with taking the local and particular into the space of the public and the collective. Yet at the same time, an inclination toward recomposing and reinscribing notions of singularity, origin, and identity may also be hardwired into the museum form, regardless of the extent to which curatorial rhetorics now draw on figures of the contingent, the fragmentary, or the polysemic. As Joachim Baur¹¹ has argued in his discussion of immigration museums in Australia, Canada, and the United States, for instance, the introduction into the curator’s arsenal of modernist techniques of montage, collage, and shock may ultimately even enhance the power of the overarching—and recomforting—narrative into which objects are being reconducted through museal framing. Reinforcing a hegemonic national “reinvention of community” under the sign of multiculturalism, Baur argues, immigration museums deploy empathetic techniques toward immigrants’ experiences of displacement and hardship—invoked through the auritized object—only to then reconduct these sensations of unsettlement into the shared frame of the nation-as-family, represented by the museal “container” itself. There is, as Kylie Message has argued, an ongoing thread linking the self-proclaimed “new museums” to “the teleological desire for a continual newness” associated with the high modernism these museums purport to have left behind. Yet at the same time, these museums also introduce a different, “post-modern” idea of the new as self-conscious posteriority—*Nachträglichkeit*—“questioning the very possibility of newness itself, which is more likely to be presented as a form of mimicry or pastiche.”¹²

From the viewpoint of Foucaultian and Marxist cultural theory, the democratizing and community-empowering claims of postmodern museology have also at times been met with less-than-enthusiastic assessments. Among the former, art historians and theorists such as Douglas Crimp,

Donald Preziosi, and Carol Duncan have asked whether, in shedding their inherited, high-modernist “technologies of the subject,” the postmodern museum may not be catering all the more efficiently to a late-capitalist society founded on affective labor and the blurring of boundaries between work and leisure, discipline and freedom. As Matthew Jackson puts it, “[F]lexible structures’ and ‘de-institutionalized institutions’ make not only for accessible, commercialized art spaces but ... for smoothly operating workspaces as well.”¹³ Indeed, these critics suggest, what has changed since the late nineteenth-century’s museum rituals of public self-fashioning in the image of bourgeois cultivation and sobriety might be not so much the museum’s status as an ideological apparatus reproducing hegemonic social and cultural norms but the very content of these norms, which are no longer the ones of disciplinary society but one that has fused the idea of (cultural) citizenship with consumers’ activity in the marketplace. The much-lauded opening up of modernism’s temples of highbrow culture to mass audiences through the incorporation of shops, restaurants, and cafés in order to provide comprehensive experiences of leisure could then be seen less as a “democratization of culture” and more as an extension into previously untapped markets.¹⁴ Rather than unfastening established notions of aesthetic value and critical authority and facilitating horizontal and dialogical spaces for the controversial exchange of ideas, Marxist critics insist, the postmuseum has merely accommodated its curatorial idiom to the discourse of diversity and community as the hegemonic idiom of societies simultaneously caught in neoliberal or neo-conservative political conjunctures.¹⁵

The contributions collected in this issue aim to probe the claims of the new, purportedly inclusive and horizontal museologies, of catering for inclusive cultural citizenries and of empowering difference and encouraging empathy, in a variety of geographical and disciplinary settings. They do so by engaging with two of the main areas of current curatorial and critical attention: on the one hand, the shifts in collecting and exhibiting practices associated with the transformation of traditional history museums into “spaces of memory”; and on the other, the reconfiguration of ethnographic, archaeological, and even scientific museologies under the umbrella of the “community museum.” The scope of museum genres surveyed here ranges from new approaches to local, hemispheric, and global history to the difficulties of commemorating experiences of violence and atrocity, to the problem of accommodating the idiom of diversity and tolerance, to fields located outside the humanities but nonetheless underwritten by “cultural” values and narratives. In the opening article, Wolfram Kaiser looks at the way in which, in national history as well as regional and municipal museums across Europe, performative and participatory rhetorics of display are being deployed as a means of forging a transnational, European narrative of shared cosmopolitan and democratic

values, aimed in particular at adolescent visitors in the context of school trips and student exchanges. Yet those novel museum environments, in drawing on fairly traditional narrative devices such as the biography of “great men” and the epic of “great achievements,” beg the question of whether the move beyond the frame of the nation-state actually perpetuates rather than transforms the latter’s politics of identity and its symbolic reproduction through museal spectacle.

Developing particular aspects of Kaiser’s panoramic overview, the following articles take these and other questions into the context of concrete museal spaces, both within Europe and beyond, many of which have not yet received substantial critical attention. Silke Arnold-de Simine’s contribution focuses on Liverpool’s International Slavery Museum, inaugurated in 2007 ahead of the former slave port’s spell as European City of Culture the year after. Arnold-de Simine takes the museum as symptomatic for a new mode of intermediality, which—in a kind of chiliastic gesture—juxtaposes the museum’s “organized walking through ... time,”¹⁶ where a moving body’s itinerary serializes and, thus, temporalizes static objects, with cinema and video’s moving image. This combination of media, she argues, can heighten the spectacle character of the exhibition in an illusion of lifelikeness, but it can also produce a clash or disjointing of temporalities more akin to the fragmentary and discontinuous character of memory than to historical chronology. It is in such a disjointed, traumatized spatiotemporality that the International Slavery Museum attempts to situate the Middle Passage of trans-Atlantic slave traffic by way of the use of video installations. Patrizia Violi, in the following article, surveys the Memorial Hall for the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre committed in 1937 by the invading Japanese. Contesting the prevalent reading of the site—by Williams and others—as an example of posttraumatic memorialization, Violi shows in a close narratological, iconographic, and semiotic reading how the Nanjing Memorial actually refashions the site of atrocity into a pedagogical space for communal identification and foundation of modern Chineseness in and for a global context.

Jens Andermann’s and Susana Draper’s articles compare recent processes of memorialization in South America. Andermann focuses on the recently created memorial museums at Santiago, Chile, and Rosario, Argentina, comparing a “national” with a “municipal” space of remembrance and mourning. In their very different display strategies, more akin to an archive in the case of the Santiago museum and more to a memorial monument in that of its Rosario peer, Andermann argues, different politics and poetics of commemorations are being played out, which cannot be read independently from the temporalities of postdictatorial justice and state acknowledgement of crimes in Chile and Argentina. The museum, as Andermann shows, is very much an actor in these processes and not merely an arbiter or “cultural” bystander, and thus its critical

appraisal cannot simply refer to immanent or universal formal standards and vocabularies. Susana Draper's study of the Museo de la Memoria in Montevideo, Uruguay, pays special attention to a particular exhibition wing entitled *The Prisons* and to a temporary art installation by Daniel Jorysz, entitled *Ver ... dad*. She asks how we can rethink the relation between prison and museum, confinement and ostentation—a question already posed by Tony Bennett in his seminal *The Birth of the Museum*,¹⁷ still a key reference for contemporary museum studies—at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Drawing on Uruguayan visual artist Daniel Jorysz's installation *Ver ... dad*, which problematizes the disciplinary relation between visual order, enframing, and classification the museum shares with juridical forms of surveillance, Draper questions the former's suitability for a radical critique of state violence. Instead, she suggests, Jorysz's art points to the border or frame separating museal and urban or social space as the site of intervention for critical practices.

In the final article, Didier Maleuvre—author of *Museum Memories*,¹⁸ another landmark contribution to the field—challenges the hegemonic consensus of “postmuseal” horizontality and power sharing in an incisive and polemical critique of the “inclusive museum.” The particularist rhetoric of community and cultural identity, Maleuvre warns, is in danger of backfiring against the enlightened project of a diverse and multicentric civil society into whose service it is allegedly pressed. Instead, the customization of museum displays to preassigned social personae in the name of religious, race, or gender diversity effectively privatizes social life and replicates the late-capitalist transformation of citizens into profiled niche consumers. Maleuvre argues his case by discussing the recently opened Creation Museum in the state of Kentucky: ticking all the boxes of visitor involvement, “open representations,” and “community enhancement,” he suggests, this hard-right, Christian fundamentalist showpiece is but the (monstrous) logical consequence of a self-defeating liberal particularism.

As a whole, then, this issue does not aim to reach a consensus on the achievements and shortcomings of the museum environments and their conceptual underpinnings it surveys. Rather, it aims to take the question of the museum as civic educator beyond the Manichaeism of, on the one hand, self-congratulatory celebrations of “diversity” and “inclusivity” and, on the other, no less ideological demonizations of the museum as always already in thrall to the powers that be. As a form often accused of fossilizing culture, museums have proved to be remarkably adept at accommodating cultural change: if anything, this should alert us to the need for attending critically to their historical and geographical variability and (perhaps) of moving beyond the great critical narratives of the death and/or rebirth of the museum as such.

Notes

1. Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, eds., *Curating and the Educational Turn* (New York: Artbook/D.A.P., 2010).
2. Ann Rayner, *Access in Mind: Towards the Inclusive Museum* (Edinburgh: INTACT, 1998).
3. Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to a Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).
4. Paula Sibilia, *La intimidación como espectáculo* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008).
5. Ross Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Technology and the Technologies of Change* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
6. Janet Marstine, "Introduction," in *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, ed. Janet Marstine (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 5.
7. Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 8.
8. Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).
9. Richard Sharples, "Shedding Light on Dark Tourism: An Introduction," in *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, ed. Richard Sharples and Philip R. Stone (Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications, 2009), 5–6.
10. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London: Routledge, 1995), 34.
11. Joachim Baur, *Die Musealisierung der Migration: Einwanderungsmuseen und die Inszenierung der multikulturellen Nation* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript, 2009).
12. Kylie Message, *New Museums and the Making of Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 65.
13. Matthew Jesse Jackson, "Managing the Avant-Garde," *New Left Review* 32 (2005): 115.
14. Néstor García Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*, trans. George Yúdice (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 15–36.
15. Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago, "Introduction: Building Shared Imaginaries/Effacing Otherness," in *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, ed. Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004).
16. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 186.
17. Ibid.
18. Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).