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Must Museums Be Inclusive?

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Abstract • This article reflects on the project of creating multicultural inclusive museums. By definition, an inclusive museum honors the cultural constituencies it is paid to serve. Yet in reality, cultural sensitivity is one thing and education another. Blurring the distinction risks sacrificing education, a moral mandate, to the ideal of equality. My article points to examples where, for fear of offending, a museum betrays its educational mission. I trace the affinity between inclusive museum politics and consumerist culture and consider the case of the Creation Museum—a museum that, as per the multicultural ideal, tailors science to the sensibility of its customer base, in this instance the sensibility of American biblical literalists.

Keywords • creationism, creation museum, cultural relativism, multiculturalism, museums

In broad terms, the practice of social inclusion in museums can be described as that of consulting with diverse social groups on the shape and contents of museum exhibits. In a basic sense, the inclusive museum carries the democratic project into the realm of culture where, it is felt, institutions of learning need be answerable and responsive to their public. This new orientation acts on the judgment that, either by design or negligence, museums have traditionally tended to misrepresent minority groups, sometimes to injurious effect.1 The mission of inclusiveness is professed in the name of science (to salvage overlooked knowledge), and in the name of equality (to dignify the contribution of underrepresented social groups).2

In the following I would like reflect on whether the inclusive museum blurs the distinction between inclusion as a social objective and education as a moral mandate. The purpose of education is to pass on accurate facts. What ministers to social inclusion does not necessarily serve the paramount goal of education, that is, the presentation of true, fair, and—as much as such a thing can be found—impartial knowledge. Social fairness and sensitivity is one thing; knowledge is another. Confusing the two endangers the moral mission of a museum. To illustrate this claim, I will invite the reader on a virtual tour of the Creation Museum recently opened in the American state of Kentucky—a museum that, like others
of its ilk, tailors science to the Christian Evangelical sensibility of its customer base.

The idea of an inclusive museum has tagged museums since basically the day of their invention. A product of the nation-state, the museum was born under the mandate of being interesting and relevant to the citizenry. If by “inclusive” we mean “of interest to the enlightened public,” then the first museums were inclusive simply by virtue of being public. This inclusiveness, however, has grown in scope and ambition with the growth of a more widely educated public in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and more recently with the appearance of a more fragmented cultural polity. As the *International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* describes the current situation, “In an era of globalization, real cultures are diverging,” and, therefore, museum “visitors of today are recognizably diverse.” Whether visitors are recognizably more diverse than formerly is open to debate; let us say that ethnicities, religions, and customs that formerly never crossed paths now live cheek by jowl in the global megalopolis. Diversity nowadays wears sharp edges; but to say that it has acquired depth is another thing altogether.

Democratic inclusion in the early age of museums was synonymous with establishing a common ground of understanding in which the social strata could agreeably be addressed in a shared idiom. Thus, for instance, spoke the first director of the United States National Museum, George Brown Goode, in 1889:

> The museums of the future in this democratic land should be adapted to the needs of the mechanic, the factory operator, the day laborer, the salesman, and the clerk, as much as to those of the professional man and the man of leisure. … In short, the public museum is, first of all, for the benefit of the public.4

The public comprises the initiated and the neophyte. It therefore behooves a democratic institution like the museum to bridge the social gaps and tighten the demographic checkerboard: When it comes to choosing between the elect and the populace, democratic conviction urges a curator to cast a wide net and speak the idiom of the multitude. Whether there exists a language common to the factory worker, the salesman, the clerk, and the man of leisure is not of concern. The curator must act as if there is, and create one if need be. The job of the educator is to establish a common level; it must, in other words, homogenize.

The second stage of democratic cultural politics arose in repudiation of this crucible. What kind of democratic society is it that sacrifices diversity and forces everybody (from migrant worker to trust fund idler) into a one-size-fits-all cultural straightjacket? If democracy is based on individual rights, then surely recognizing what makes a factory hand different from a lawyer, or a man from a woman, or a Muslim from a Christian, should be
addressed somehow. Inclusiveness will logically break down homogeneity. This, *in fine*, was the belief entertained by institutions of learning and cultural consumption in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Riding the wave of structural anthropology, this readjustment reshaped the museum in ways that dignified, rather than papered over, the motley of cultures. In the exact measure that highbrow officialdom had once been lofty and universalist, it is now humble and particularist, shuns cinder-gray uniformity, and exalts local color.

The third stage, which we are now living through, heralds democracy’s age of self-reflective lassitude. The new generation of cultural historians have assimilated the anthropological defense of the local and the particular; but they disagree that there is any objective way to rank, evaluate, and compare between high and low, sophisticated and crude, profound and shallow. Which society can claim to own the yardstick to establish the comparative worth of diverse cultures? In the end, it is said, the distinction between trivial and nontrivial is relative, always partisan, a matter of taste, and therefore nonbinding. An influential advocate of the particularist ethos, Clifford Geertz, argues:

> The image of a general orientation or perspective … growing out of the humanistic studies (or for that matter, out of scientific ones) and shaping the direction of a culture is a chimera … The concept of … forging some general “the best that is being thought and said” ideology and working it into the curriculum, [is] not merely implausible but utopian altogether. Possibly, indeed, a bit worrisome.

No cultural artifact or tradition can be decisively shown to outrank any other. To choose, to elevate, to exercise discernment is wrongheaded and politically ominous.

Here, in very bold strokes, is the intellectual genealogy of the inclusive ethos: first to include all citizens; then to let every citizen be a different citizen; then deny that any citizen has to right to impose his worldview on any other. Distrusting its own credentials, the museum faces a crisis of confidence. What, asks the curator, gives me the authority to tell others what they should know, favor, or praise? This is the honest self-doubt that has led museum institutions to rationalize and ratify their reliance on the public for authority and guidance in matters of museum administration. This turn to the museum-going public as the ultimate source of authority now underpins the new, postmodern incarnation of inclusiveness. As a manifest of the new museum ethics puts it:

> How can the institution of the museum become more inclusive? … We need to anticipate the particularities of visitors [in terms of] class, locale, age, race, sex, sexuality, mental and physical characteristics, culture, language, gender, family, affinity and persona.
This kind of rhetoric is sufficiently widespread to warrant analyzing its principal assumptions—which, though they stem from a noble purpose, are not altogether coherent. Of course, the categories above do stand for real human differences that public policy need acknowledge. But to concede this is not to say that such an acknowledgment, which fits under the chapter of constituency building, need shape the production and presentation of knowledge.

The first problem with piecemeal cultural inclusiveness is practical: How to implement concrete policies on the basis of such amorphous categories as, for instance, “mental and physical characteristics” or “affinity and persona”? On what basis does the curator differentiate a socially meaningful persona from one that is trivial or contemptible? How to decide where the gerrymandering stops? What sense is there in jumbling those features I have by necessity (like age or sex) with those I have by reflective action (like social affiliations or beliefs)? On principle, inclusiveness is a worthwhile desideratum; but to be altogether useful, its proponents would have to define the rule that guides the dividing-up of identities—a rule expressive of what ultimately matters and what does not, for it cannot be the case that human differences are being drawn for difference’s sake.

Problematically, however, the pigeonholing of public life imperils the idea of the common good. In defining the common “public good,” Jeremy Bentham wisely distinguished it from universality. A public good, he said, doesn’t necessarily benefit all members of society; rather, it benefits people without singling them out. All can profit, but not all will profit (this is the case of roads, schools, public utilities and transportation, courts of law, etc.) Importantly, we must not say which person or group will profit exclusive of others. Unlike the private business concern, which profiles its potential customers into factions, the public good minimizes profiling: it includes all persons likely to inhabit a common place. Of course, a museum cannot run on the same idea of the public good that governs, for instance, a water utility company. All people have a like interest in clean, available water; the same commonality does not apply to cultural goods. But this concession should not be understood as saying that no commonality whatsoever exists in culture. Culture is a way for people to identify collectively what matters in a given social orbit. Implicit in culture, therefore, is a notion of public intelligibility, a sense of a common language. From this two things follow: a subculture is logically bound to make itself relevant and intelligible to the common culture; and the common culture needs to heed the subaltern cultures. This commonality is just what the museum is designed to provide. It is, one might say, its public utility. Just as it would be delinquent for a water utility company to cater to the special water-tastes of selected constituencies at the cost of providing drinkable water for all, so a museum is remiss if, in ministering to the special
interests of diverse constituencies, it fails to embed those diversities in the common democratic culture that legally shelters their existence.

Now, the multicultural ethos disputes the existence of a common language or, failing that, its moral desirability. To the multiculturalist, cultural commonality has always been a ploy of indoctrination of the weak by the powerful. Commonality is synonymous with power, and power with sinister motives. It behooves a reformed decent society to reflect on how words mean different things to different people, how language breaks down around values, tastes, lifestyles, and beliefs, often irremediably. The idea of a general public is a myth that shoehorns people into one mold. It is to stop this shoehorn that the inclusive museum was invented, “to anticipate the particularities of visitors.” Instead of there being one gateway into the museum, there should be as many entrances as there are visitors. No one is asked to surrender his or her homegrown identity at the door. Identity is championed, vindicated, “celebrated.”

But can we be satisfied that the defeated bogey of homogeneity and the special pleading for “identities” serves the public well? By sanctifying the peculiarities of one’s contingent identity, the inclusive museum invited the visitor to take in the exhibit in terms of this identity. One enters the public sphere less to encounter others than to reaffirm the plaster-cast identity one is asked to don at the door by social engineers. A person now perceives through the keyhole of his or her social persona. The dual effect is to restrict both one’s experience and the public sphere: one’s experience, because it is indexed to ready-made sociological or ethnic or religious criteria; the public sphere, because it is customized to suit one’s cultural prejudices—in effect, public life is severally privatized. Like the commercial outlet, the museum is now in the business of customizing people to fit compartmentalized constructs, people who step into the public sphere without surrendering their custom-sized myriad group identifications, in sum, people who behave not as citizens but as self-entitled customers.

This, for the museum visitor, raises the question: Why should I want my social and cultural affinities to be a shibboleth to science, art, and knowledge? Why this assumption that, unless the exhibit presents something directly germane to my local circumstances, it will be of no interest to me? Why assume that to remove me from my natural ambit, my social comfort zone, is necessarily to turn me off? The answer lies in the commercial underpinning of cultural institutions in the market-driven society of which, far from being its conscience objector, multiculturalism is an agreeable partner. Multiculturalism speaks the language of customer service and public relations that, in the main, is the language of flattery and its social context, the culture of administered narcissism. Psychologically, the customer’s default position is self-interest. Always a potential buyer, he approaches objects primarily as sources of gratification. His attention
is not really with the object per se but with maximizing personal well-being. As the word suggests, consuming converts, absorbs, burns up what is other. To the customer, reality exists mostly for the taking and to serve personal validation.

Now, as museums embrace the commercial model of administration and as financial profitability conditions cultural exhibitions, so the model of “visitor as consumer in an open market” is superseding the “visitor as citizen of a common society.” Museum publications not uncommonly refer to museumgoers, with not one jot of irony, as “consumers of knowledge.” This is a portentous shift. To be a citizen assumes possessing an adult, other-directed personality; a customer by contrast plies the narrow psychological range between want and gratification. What a customer craves is service, comfort, certainty, distraction, and pleasure. A customer wants to be told he is of paramount importance—else he goes to your competitor. This imposes on the museum the necessity of convincing its client, as one does a child, that nothing in the museum is of more supreme interest than the client himself—he and his baggage of lore, opinions, personas, and affinities.

Practical curatorial measures have adjusted to this customizing trend. First, with respect to psychological comfort. The museum technician increasingly regards his task not as educator, but as facilitator who solicitously takes the edge off the strain and difficulty of disciplined apprenticeship. “The public,” a professional publication says, “does indeed seek safe environments to explore race, ethnicity and diversity.” It is unclear what a “safe environment” of learning means: Was the old-fashioned museum unsafe and threatening? If so, what did it threaten us with? Did it challenge and upset our mental comfort zone? One would think this is rather the purpose of education. In reality there is nothing safe about learning: in order to learn, one first admits one’s ignorance (a step not palatable to the customer); and second, one agrees to submit one’s dearly held beliefs to criticism. To learn means to offer the nutshell of one’s identity to the hammer. But this humbling trial is out of favor in the customer service society. As the British Department of Culture, Media and Sport recommends, a museum should create “a space where difficult contemporary issues can be explored in safety”—a safety that, the government brief explains, clearly has to do with preserving the customer’s positive intellectual self-image. “We need to move beyond the divisions of high as opposed to popular culture” and create a museum “where the text is open, where every visitor is allowed the space to create their own meanings, where no visitor is left out.” “To create one’s own meanings” sounds nice; but since making sense of the world is what we human beings do as soon as we wake up, the import of this sentence lies in the intensifier “own” in one’s own meanings—in the invitation to let the visitor indulge his “meanings” unconstrained by the requisites of articulacy and
informed self-examination. The visitor comes to the museum less to alter his views than to have them confirmed; and if not his views, at least his birth-given right to make of the exhibit what he pleases and to believe that, in the court of knowledge, his opinions always have the final word. After all, the customer is always right. This is the inborn rightness that really underwrites this public relations jargon about identities. What better way to please the customer than to anticipate, personalize, and validate his or her experience?

This curatorial attention to the self-regard of visitors is clad in the mantle of a noble cause that, as expressed in the critical literature, seeks to battle the ideology of the “universal individual citizen.” There is no such thing as an average visitor, the sensitive museum technician claims; everyone is someone in particular, and whitewashing these particularities runs counter to the representative spirit of democracy. But is the malignancy of this “universal individual citizen” a proven case? Of course, the one-size-fits-all individual was dowdy, awkward, and often sanctimonious. On the other hand, fitting no one in particular it allowed everyone the oppositional room to find oneself. To this extent, this may have sharpened one’s critical faculty. This may not be the case with the custom-profiled visitor who, reassured and validated in who he is, seldom feels the urge to rebel. There is nothing like a procrustean bed to make one feel the oddities and originalities of one’s own shape. A custom-made bed, by contrast, pads away the sharp edges, and puts the critical faculties to sleep. The customized visitor, being confirmed in who she is, no longer feels the absence of fit between her self and her social persona, between the inner and the outer. A transformative, critical experience is turned into a tranquilizing, affirmative one.

This is how one now comes to the museum to be mentally comforted. To quote the literature: “More than simply ‘interaction,’ visitors need to place themselves in the exhibition, to belong in the space … in a new communicative frame of reference.”¹⁵ This embrace of communicative strategies correlates with the focal shift from artifacts to consumption. A museum will, for instance, place “talkback boards” around the exhibit, where visitors can pencil in their opinions; or it will videotape a visitor’s on-the-spot feedback and include it as part of the exhibit.¹⁶ Fascination with the act of consuming absorbs the consumed good. We admire ourselves monopolizing the show, and the loop of officially sanctioned narcissism is complete. Science and learning take a backseat to self-praise, to rituals of exalting one’s subjectivity, one’s autochthonous intelligence. In the main the museum loses sight of its basic mission, which is, when all is told, to honor the past, that is, to enlarge our lives by directing our attention away from our everyday selves. How indeed can the museum instill respect for the otherness of former ages, for artworks that existed before us and will survive us, for artifacts foreign to our modern gaze, when in
the end all are deemed of lesser consequence than how we, the paymasters, feel about them?

An example will illustrate this dangerous drift toward the self-serving cultural outlet. On the fiftieth anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing, the Smithsonian Museum in Washington organized an exhibit to document the event. But before the exhibit opened, the museum came under the pressure of a concerned community of patriots who protested what seemed to them a downbeat depiction of nuclear mass murder. The museum-going American, one could say, was exercising his right to feel safe. The exhibit was temporarily shut down, meetings were held, sensibilities were addressed, and finally the Smithsonian disgraced itself by displaying the Enola Gay bomber with garlands of logistical facts but no reference whatsoever to the human bonfire below. When in conflict over the “what” of history, we can always take cover in the bland safety of the “how”—and come away with the notion that, when all told, the Enola Gay mission ran like clockwork. Newt Gingrich, then Speaker of the House, greeted the cancellation as a great example of the people “taking power back from the elites.” Perhaps. Though it seems to me it was also an example of the people taking power back from historical fact. The point is: the elite had assumed its job was to serve history, rather than massage the customer’s self-esteem, and it was punished for it. Maybe a museum less in touch with the sensibilities of its customer base would have set off a battle; but at least it would have served history, and in history Enola Gay did have something to do with incinerating a one hundred thousand civilians.

To further exemplify the dangers of custom-fitting the museum, I will take up the quaintly horrifying case of the Creation Museum. The Creation Museum is the grand, twenty-seven-million-dollar brainchild of a Christian ministry calling itself Answers in Genesis. Like sixteen other such “creation centers and museums” (according to the 2009 Official Museum Directory), it promulgates science—science, that is, customized to the feelings and cultural sensibilities of its user demographics in the American Bible Belt. At first glance, little distinguishes the Creation Museum from any other state-of-the-art museum of natural history. It features dioramas, reconstructions, a planetarium, theaters, a gift shop, and animatronic dinosaurs. Everything looks normal until one notices the velociraptors cavorting around Adam and Eve, instead of grazing at the distance of sixty-five million years. But this is no curatorial howler. It is just that, in the worldview of its visitors, the universe is short and small, extends only six thousand years into the past, centers on the earth, and coincides with the beginnings of human life. As we find out, dinosaurs before Original Sin were larky vegetarian pets. We also learn that, with a bit of logistical planning, an aircraft-carrier-sized ark took care of
all animal life on the planet (an easier job than it seems given that, as we learn, Adam had only two hundred species of animals to name, and dispatched the job in “only a few hours, at most”). We also learn that the Grand Canyon was the quick spadework of Noah’s flood; that Cain married his sister but that we should not be judgmental about primeval incest. There is no shortage of this and other pearls of science on hand, all supported by abundant technical charts, animations, and displays that further the impression of visiting a museum of science or, more exactly, a museum of how science looks to a particular community. And if you are of the relativist-particularist view that science is not an objective-minded unitary endeavor, but the interpretative strategies of local collectivities of language, ethnicity, religion, and culture, then the Creation Museum is as good a science museum as any. Which, one should think, is alarming.

The Creation Museum is rather clever at putting the hesitancies of relativism to its advantage. The organizing tone is that of aggrieved community feeling and antielitism. As its director puts it, the Creation Museum is on the mission to “take the dinosaurs back”—back from Greek rationality, the Enlightenment, the infidel Voltaire, hubristic Darwin, and the scientific intelligentsia that would tell the community of Christians what to think. It is no use wondering why Biblical literalists would wish to take “back” dinosaurs that are nowhere mentioned in the Bible; their appeal is not to reason but to injured communal pride. The museum runs on the conviction that, no matter how compelling the scientific consensus may be, it is second to the community’s healthy self-image. “At the Creation Museum,” its director claims, “a lot of people won’t feel as intimidated.” But what does “being intimidated” mean? Is it to have our beliefs challenged? To have our prejudices and false ideas taken apart and examined? If indeed it is the purpose of education to do both, then the museum is no longer in the business of educating.

But no matter: the emotional payoff of membership in a same-minded community overrides the duty of fact finding and self-correcting inquiry. The Creation Museum, one could say, gives Christians plenty of space to entertain their “own meaning.” “Prepare to believe!” blares one advertising banner whose message underscores the kinship between belief and consumer psychology. Belief is to reason what consumption is to production. The first set (belief, consumption) is passive, the second (reason, production) active. Belief is cozy, reason challenging. While reasoned inquiry treads the tightrope of doubt, requires discipline and self-correction, belief is effortless. It brings the warm glow of certainty. Reason also leads a person into solitary transaction with his own thought; belief, by contrast, is effusive, expansive, and gregarious. Reason is incurably unsure, while belief creates ease. Unsurprisingly, the cognitive mode of the consumer mentality leans heavily on belief. A consumer who practices cold disputation is a difficult, wary buyer; he is also a fractious member of...
society. A culture, one might say, is not in the business of creating opinionated dissenters, but groupish members. Culture survives by increasing its ranks, and shared emotion has been more effective at creating followers than reason and knowledge, at least traditionally.

Now, a community of emotion is just what cultural institutes like the Creation Museum seek to establish. Insofar as this aim goes, it does enjoy the right to be left alone. And this right would be inexpugnable if the Creation Museum were content with leaving science alone, if it transcended or looked beyond it rather than, as is the case here, wanting to possess also the scientific truth. The Creation Museum borrows the language of enlightenment education—starting with the business of calling itself a “museum” instead of, more correctly, a “community center”—but does so at the cost of undermining the standards of scientific knowledge. This is where the problem lies: the creationist in-group does not go about its group-forming activity harmlessly. It also wants to absorb the out-group constituted by science. This is where it loses the right to be left alone.

To be fair, the reason-based community shares some of the blame. For it has been damnably remiss in maintaining its own defenses. In fact, postmodern skepticism itself makes sure to leave large breaches open to invasion. For it is, after all, postmodernist rationality that has been trumpeting about the debility of reason—calling it the servant of power, the spawn of ideology and of political expediency. It is postmodernist thought itself that has cast a pall of doubt on the independence and accuracy of science, now rumored to be no more objective than, say, a tribal rain dance or the Gregorian calendar. The Creation Museum detects the current weakness in the house of knowledge and turns it to its advantage.

Exploiting the malaise of reason, the Creation Museum makes relativism work for its purpose. There is a “they say, we say” order to the presentations that works smoothly on the relativist sensibility. “Same Facts, but Different Views!” a sign chirps at the gate of an exhibit. The museum wishes his visitor to know, as if he or she did not already, that scientific fact is subject to points of view—the collective mood swings known as “paradigm shifts.” Postmodernist in spite of itself, the Creation Museum does its share of eroding confidence in the “metanarrative,” the “hegemony of science,” the “totalizing ideology” of, in this instance, Darwinist fundamentalism. It democratically adjusts science to the needs of social identities, in a way echoing the cultural relativists who, like Andrew Ross, question the scientist’s right to challenge folk-based wisdom and dearly held religious beliefs: “How can metaphysical life theories and explanations taken seriously by millions be ignored or excluded by a small group of powerful people called ‘scientists’?” asks Ross. What indeed gives scientists permission to simply rule out Adam and Eve? This is an odd partnership, but there it is: postmodern relativism may yet help Evangelicals lay claim on the dinosaurs.
“Bring a skeptical friend,” the museum booklet suggests. Of course, the Creation Museum is not interested in the constructive inquests of genuine skepticism. The skeptical friend it invites you to bring serves only to exacerbate the sense of fragmented plurality, to turn up the noise of Babel, and highlight the impotence of reason. The more indiscriminate skepticism is, the better. For once it is accepted that science is only one narrative among many, and when one doubts anything and everything, what else indeed is there to fall back on other than homespun beliefs? To those for whom postmodern relativism offers no coherent worldview, prerational communal belief extends the lifeline of group safety. How comforting it is to leave the lonely path of ironic skepticism in favor of warm fellowship.

One would like to dismiss the Creation Museum as a clownish oddity; in actuality, it is one piece of an alarming trend. Popular surveys suggest that the attack on reason has been prosecuted quite successfully if, for instance, we consider that a clear majority of Americans now support teaching science in a multicultural framework—as per a 2004 poll that shows that 60 percent of adults believe that creationism should be taught alongside hard-science biology and cosmology. Since 45 percent of adults polled in the same year espouse creationism, we need conclude that roughly 15 percent of the US population (in Britain, it is 22 percent) subscribes to the relaxed principle that people are basically entitled to their superstitions, that students should be fed this diet of fairy dust and allowed to make up their own mind on the basis of information that their parents believe to be false. In the land where knowledge is culture-specific, the public agrees that every customer is entitled to the version of reality that tickles his cultural taste buds. Museums, we are told by the professional class, “must accord equal value to the varied cultures they put on show, and ... exhibitions should be informed by the distinctive perspectives and knowledges [sic] of the particular social groups in question.” How long, given such dispensations, before Noah’s ark shows up at the National Museum of Natural History? How can we subscribe to this theory of group-based knowledge without conceding that only invidious prejudice keeps Adam and Eve from the Smithsonian or the British Museum?

In February 2009, the Ulster Museum in Belfast was served legal notice that it should stage a concurrent creationist exhibit to offset its bicentennial series on Charles Darwin. Nagging as they are, legal challenges brought by religious dogma would not be so worrisome if we knew the public trustees of science and education to be armed with solid principles of defense. But where science is represented in the popular imagination as a marketplace of theories, and where theories are deemed to be mere strategic moves on the historical checkerboard, then nothing avails the guardian of education to stand for sound knowledge or indeed to turn
into a fifth column for unreason. As the chairman of the education com-
mittee at the Northern Ireland Assembly said: “I am not against the mu-
seum or anywhere else promoting Darwin’s theory, but I think it would
be in the public’s interest to give them an alternative theory as well …
there are others in the scientific world who question that thesis and their
voices should be heard in publicly funded institutions like the museum.”
Public funding means not entrusting one’s tax contribution to the polity,
but earmarking it for one’s personal use. Because there is no such thing as
objective fact, and because a scientific theory is merely the practical advan-
tage (psychological, spiritual, or political) that a community derives from
it, then indeed it would be scandalous for a new-earth Christian to pay for
scientific programs that offend his self-image. The museum is no longer
under the mandate of presenting knowledge, but to preserve the inalien-
able right of public constituencies to buffer their cultural chiefdoms.

Museums, theorists maintain, must present an approach to learning
that “requires that the conclusions reached by the learner are not validated
by whether or not they conform to some external standard of truth, but
whether they ‘make sense’ within the constructed reality of the learner.”
On this head, the only argument the Creation Museum needs to defend
the six-thousand-year-old universe is that the idea “makes sense” to the
target audience—external standard of truth be damned. The Creation Mu-
seum gives us a picture of what a postmodern science institute looks like,
in every way meeting the demand for “a scientific culture … that can
transform notions like progress and objectivity in order to address [cul-
tural] differences and the social inequalities created in their name.” Less
objectivity, less progress, and more cultural sensibility: if you want to know
what that looks like, the Creation Museum has it on display.

To summarize, the Creation Museum is a museum in every formal
aspect recommended by the inclusive persuasion: it empowers a commu-
nity’s tradition; it eases the visitor into a safe, communicative space; and
it challenges the hegemony of one master narrative in defense of group
pride and regional lore. These credentials explain why the response com-
ing so far from the museum profession has been so bizarrely nonjudg-
mental on the subject of a museum that so patently retails in untruths
under the cloak of tolerance, swindles the gullible in the name of com-
munal feelings, and harms the open society in the way we injure people
when we tell them lies. Writing in the established journal Museum News,
Leah Arroyo is moved to this shamefully spineless reflection: “As the Cre-
ation Museum pushes its visitors to reconsider what they believe, it may
also push the museum field to redefine what a museum is and what it can
do.” It is, I think, a matter of some concern when, faced with a museum
intent on destroying science, the profession feels that it meekly “may,”
rather than robustly must, revise some of its assumptions about what con-
stitutes a museum.
One such assumption is the unqualified commitment to public identities. Museums simply should not be in the business of anticipating what will please or comfort a community: they are in the business of conveying true information. A curator is expected to be, not sensitive, but well informed: sensitivity without correct knowledge is another word for prejudice. In any case, there must be a benchmark that determines at what point honoring the idiosyncratic beliefs of a community becomes foolish and deleterious. Being sensitive to cultural diversity does not commit us to maintain that all cultures are equally in touch with reality. To say that a given culture holds valid lessons to humankind does not mean it cannot be mistaken in its views, or that its views are immune to critical analysis. No museum should shelter its visitors from this basic truth.

On this ground, the charter of museum ethics needs to set substantive conditions on what it calls “commitment of service to the public.” Chief among public goods is that of acting on the basis of sound, accurate information. Since the museum essentially relays knowledge, it is crucial this knowledge be conveyed out of respect for its object, not for the proximate feelings and interests of the consumer. Holding fast to this principle forces us to recommend that the contract between curator and visitor center on intellectual guidance. It is no use disguising the asymmetry between teacher and student. Though our democratic sensibility balks at it, no learning occurs without it, and no civilization endures. On this head, it is time we stopped capitulating to the charge of elitism that comes up whenever we speak of instructing, rather than following, the public. As an institution of learning, the museum is responsible for leading outward and away from self-centeredness. Cultural historians once worked to liberate the museum from the top-down propaganda of nationalist politics; it is time they exercised equal vigilance in drawing the line between the museum and the leisure industry. The job of museums is to preserve artifacts physically and morally: this means sheltering the past from the encroachment of ideology, from the sensibility of interested parties and from the laziness of thrill seekers.

Unarguably, every person or group deserves proper recognition; but it is just as important to see that who one is, is always in need of transcending. Perfectibility is the value that underpins both learning and the proper use of reason, and it is on this basis that the museum should cultivate what is best in humankind: our fragile ability to renounce self-absorption.

Notes

Must Museums Be Inclusive?


5. For a thoughtful discussion of multiculturalism, see Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).


10. Ibid.


15. Ibid.


17. Quoted from a previous version of the museum’s website, which is no longer accessible. Similar statements, however, can be found in a book co-edited by the museum director: Ken Ham and Bodie Hodge, eds., *How do we know the Bible is True?* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2011), 281–283.


Comic Art in Museums and Museums in Comic Art

Michael D. Picone

Abstract

Initially, being mass produced and sequential, comic art was excluded from fine art museums. Some comics artists themselves have expressed ambivalence about the value of inclusion (but counter-arguments are proposed, challenging the perception of incompatibility). However, a pivotal element in the break from the ranks of artistic modernism has been the appropriation of comic art motifs for use in museum-grade pop art, figuration narrative and their successors. In counterpoint, comic art is replete with examples of museum art being appropriated in order to obtain diegetic enrichment of various sorts, either for the purpose of parody or in relation to plot construction. Against this backdrop, and abetted by the twin challenge that art museums are facing to remain relevant and to increase revenue, a game-changing development is afoot, leading to a co-operative re-positioning of art museums and comics artists. With the Louvre taking the lead, many art museums in France and Italy are now commissioning works of comic art based on the museum’s own collections, often launched with companion exhibits. The resultant ‘art within art’ lends itself readily to rich experimentation with themes incorporating intertextuality and parallel narrative.

Keywords: high art, Louvre, low art, pop art, museums, appropriation

Introduction

One of the most original sequences in the first Batman film, directed by Tim Burton in 1989, involves the visit by the arch-villain the Joker and his henchmen to the fictitious Flugelheim Museum in Gotham City. The Joker and his goons proceed to deface, topple and trash priceless works of iconic art by masters such as Rembrandt, Vermeer, Gainsborough, Gilbert Stuart, Degas and Renoir. Burton is playing
with the fear of those who see comic art as an assault on ‘high art’. What better way to highlight and satirize this fear than for the viewer to be conducted by the high villain of comic art on an iconoclastic tour – very literally so – through an art museum, the very institution that, more than any other through history, has had the power to select and define the canon of high art? But, as the sequence progresses, the Joker stays the hand of one of his goons, who is about to slash Francis Bacon’s *Figure with Meat* (1954). ‘I kinda like this one’, explains the Joker as he examines the grotesque, almost unrecognizable image of Pope Innocent X, appropriated from a Diego Velázquez portrait (1650) and transformed into a dark, disintegrating, screaming figure whose throne is set against the backdrop of a flayed carcass, recalling Rembrandt van Rijn’s *Carcass of Beef* (1657). In a kind of multimodal mise en abyme, Bacon’s appropriation of prior images to make a jarring artistic statement on canvas has now been embedded in Burton’s appropriation of Bacon’s work to make a statement in film about ‘art wars’ pitting fine against popular. Fittingly, the Joker brings his ‘tour’ to its conclusion when he joins aspiring fashion photographer and photojournalist (and Batman’s love interest) Vicki Vale at a table to review her portfolio. After a quick dismissal of the fashion art, a corpse-filled photo reportage for *Time* magazine of the fictive Corto Maltese Revolution commands the Joker’s interest. He comments, ‘I don’t know if it’s art, but I like it.’ In a continuation of the subtext, Burton’s implication is clear: *Corto Maltese* by Hugo Pratt, either by itself or possibly representing a larger cohort of progressive work, has been pivotal in revolutionizing and elevating the comic art genre. Intentional or not, there is ironic relevance to the prominence given to appropriation in all of this. Appropriation of comic art motifs into museum-destined art, it shall be shown, has represented both an offence and an opportunity relative to comic art. Moreover, the appropriation has been

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1 I gratefully acknowledge many colleagues who offered their insights and encouragements in the aftermath of my two earlier talks on this topic, presented at the Joint International Conference of Graphic Novels, Bandes Dessinées and Comics, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, 5–8 July 2011, and at the annual meeting of the American Association of Italian Studies, University of Oregon, Eugene, 11–14 April 2013. The assistance of Rachel Picone and Benjamin Wood was indispensable in the collection of the relevant materials. I also extend my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers and the editors of European Comic Art, especially Ann Miller. Their suggestions for various improvements were of immense value.

This episode does not correspond to any events depicted in an actual *Batman* comic book. Perhaps it took an outside actor having nothing at stake, such as Tim Burton, to venture to include such a potent metaphor.
bidirectional due to the importation of museum art into comic art in order to achieve various diegetic effects, typically for the purpose of momentarily violating narrative levels (in order to effect narrative enrichment of various sorts) or for sustained plot development. This tit-for-tat appropriation, be it flirtatious, deferential or discourteous in any given instance, constitutes the backdrop for a new and extraordinary phase of co-operation.

Many museums and comic artists are now collaborating at an unprecedented level. It remains to be determined whether current initiatives, wherein public museums (other than museums already specializing in comic art) articulate their exhibits with comic art and even commission comic art, are just another episode in a tango-like dance of mutual attraction and repulsion or are truly the beginning of a definitive reconciliation. Conditions might be right for the latter, given the appropriately indulgent post-modern atmosphere in which we are witnessing the breakdown of barriers between fine art and popular art, and given the museums’ need to be perceived as dynamic and relevant. Though most dramatic when it involves public art galleries – bringing together ‘high art’ and ‘low art’ – the encounter is not limited to art museums and has recently surfaced in connection with exhibits that are articulated, to varying degrees, with works of comic art (usually pre-existent rather than specifically commissioned for the occasion) at the Musée Maritime (François Bourgeon’s Les Passagers du vent [Passengers of the Wind]), Musée des armées (Jacques Ferrandez’s Carnets d’Orient [Sketchbooks of the Orient]), Musée des Arts et Métiers (see below), Musée de Cluny (René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo’s Astérix), Musée des Tumulus de Bougon (Roger Lécureux and André Chéret’s Rahan), the British Museum (mangaka Hoshino Yukinobu’s Professor Munakata’s British Museum Adventure), and at other institutions and public monuments recognizing an opportunity. But the actual commissioning of bandes dessinées and fumetti by French and Italian museums, using as subject matter elements of the museums’

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2 See Ann Miller’s comments on narrative levels and intertextuality – both are at play by virtue of appropriation – in Reading bande dessinée: Critical Approaches to French-language Comic Strip (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), 134–144.

3 On the rise of comic art to a status of cultural legitimacy, see Bart Beaty, Unpopular Culture: Transforming the European Comic Book in the 1990s (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). On ripening conditions for artistic convergence between comics artists and other contemporary artists, see Thierry Groensteen, Bande dessinée et narration (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011), chap. 8. Note, however, that Groensteen does not see the potential for far-reaching convergence due to the essential difference between bande dessinée, as visual narrative, and other forms of art.
collection or the museum in its entirety, means that an important new chapter in the ongoing relationship between museums and comic art is now being written, and this merits reporting and reflection.

**Comic Art in Museums**

Tellingly, the first exhibit (1967) devoted to comic art in a public museum in France occurred, not in a fine arts museum, but in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. Although the exhibit was organized with the extensive input of the Société Civile d’Études et de Recherches des Littératures Dessinées (Socerlid), whose members fought hard for the legitimization of *bande dessinée* as an art form, the unsettling implication of the location of the exhibit was that comic art occupied its rightful place in the world of functional, manufactured things, alongside textile prints, wallpaper designs, children’s toys and art in advertising. Moreover, the exhibit itself was not a solo act. Comic art did not occupy the limelight but depended on a prop, using pop art and its younger French cousin, *figuration narrative* – these constituting emerging but recognized art forms appropriating the iconography of comic art – to make the claim that it was also a stakeholder in the world of respectable art. A similar event, constituting the first exhibit (1983) of importance in a public art museum in the United States incorporating comic art, took place at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City (in the auxiliary downtown gallery rather than in the main uptown gallery). There too comic art had to do a duo act with pop art in order to be cast in a role and make a pitch for respect. Art Spiegelman later opined, ‘The truth is that the whole early era of Pop Art was built on the notion of comic books as junk, not as art. It had more to do with the way that Marcel

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4 The two most influential members of Socerlid who had a hand in organizing the popular exhibit *Bande dessinée et figuration narrative* (7 April to 30 June 1967) were Claude Moliterni and Pierre Couperie. For more details about this exhibit, see Joel E. Vessels, *Drawing France: French Comics and the Republic* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 206.

5 Forty years later, comic art is still found wandering in the wilderness at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. With a good measure of calculated irony, the museum conveyed a message about the parameters that comic art is allowed to inhabit when, in order to inaugurate the newly opened Galerie des jouets [Gallery of Toys], the museum commissioned an exhibition (*Toy Comix*, 15 November 2007 to 9 March 2008) and an eponymous anthology by thirty-four international comics artists whose contributions were all based on the toys populating the gallery: *Toy Comix* (Paris: L’Association, 2007). In a deliberate reversal of roles, toy figurines were not the derivative products of comic art, instead becoming the inspirational source.
Duchamp saw urinals.\textsuperscript{6} Kim Munson’s highly informative commentary on the Whitney exhibit and subsequent exhibits of consequence in the United States describes, among other things, the consternation felt by comics artists who saw pop artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein attain public notice, critical acclaim and financial gain by capitalizing on the borrowed images, motifs and texts of comic art.\textsuperscript{7} Let it be observed here, moreover, that the pop artists accomplished this in a way that undercut the very basis of the comic art form itself. By extracting snippets of comic art and converting them into oversized paintings or elements of pictorial mash-ups suitable for display in museums, the pop artists and the crafters of \textit{figuration narrative} seemed to prove that comic art could only be a stakeholder in the official world of visual art in a dissected form, at the expense of one of its essential elements, narrative sequence. Thus, as expressed by Bart Beaty, the museum played the role of ‘gatekeeper’ presiding over the restricted presence of comic art, ‘with comics allowed entry only once they have been appropriated, deconstructed, and abstracted by artists working in a fine arts tradition’.\textsuperscript{8}

This underscores the dilemma facing comic art, suspended as it is between the worlds of visual art and textual art, which follow opposing paths to legitimacy, commoditization and greatness. A work of visual

\textsuperscript{6} See David D’Arcy, ‘From the Garbage Can to the Gallery’, \textit{Modern Painters} 72(9) (2005). The allusion is to Duchamp’s ‘ready-made’ item of artwork titled \textit{Fountain} (1917) and consisting of a standard wall-hung urinal placed on its back and signed ‘R. Mutt’, purportedly recalling Bud Fischer’s \textit{Mutt and Jeff} comic strip (1907; see commentary by Laurence Grove, \textit{Comics in French} [New York: Berghahn Books, 2013], 208–209), but also signifying an animal (usually a dog) begat without benefit of pedigree.

\textsuperscript{7} Kim Munson, ‘Beyond High & Low: How Comics and Museums Learned to Co-Exist’, \textit{International Journal of Comic Art} 11(2) (2009), 283–298. According to Munson, the first exhibit of consequence in the United States where comic art was finally allowed to be the only attraction (\textit{Masters of American Comics}) took place jointly at the Hammer Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 2005. For a brief commentary on the role of comic art in \textit{figuration narrative}, see Jean-Louis Pradel, \textit{La Figuration narrative des années 1960 à nos jours} [\textit{Figuration narrative} from the 1960s to the Current Day] (Paris: Gallimard and Réunion des musées nationaux, 2008). For more commentary on various ‘fine’ artists incorporating comic art motifs, including newcomers such as Lucy McKenzie, as well as commentary on various pivotal museum exhibits featuring their work while, by and large, giving incommensurate exposure to the source works by the comics artists themselves, see Bart Beaty, \textit{Comics versus Art} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 2–7, 50–69, 188–198. The situation that Beaty laments was only partially remedied at the recent major retrospective on Lichtenstein at the Centre Pompidou (\textit{Roy Lichtenstein}, 3 July to 4 November 2013), where a few examples of the original inspirational comic art by Russ Heath and Tony Abruzzo were indeed included but given restricted prominence.

\textsuperscript{8} Beaty, \textit{Comics versus Art}, 190.
art can be declared great (that is, collectable and museum worthy) and commoditized (that is, be assigned a high monetary value) only when it exists in the form of a unique or limited-edition piece, usually of suitably large dimension for display, whereas for any work of textual art to be declared great, it must first be commoditized through mass production in small format. In an alternative world, sequential comic art aspiring to be museum worthy would emulate the example forged early by the Bayeux tapestry, whose prominence is not only owing to its intrinsic interest as a rich primary source of medieval narrative, but also to its displayable dimensions and its singularity. However, in the real world, being commoditized through mass production in suitably small format but being highly visual, comic art dwells in limbo, its hybridity constantly frustrating its aspirations toward recognition according to any pre-determined path. To the uninitiated eye, it ends up looking a lot like mass-produced decorative art, not an art that aspires to greatness. Given that it must depend on mass production, comic art began making greater strides towards legitimacy and even attained cases of recognized greatness (à la Maus, Watchmen, V for Vendetta and Persepolis) when it began divesting itself of the decorative art stigma by following the textual path to legitimacy and being re-conceptualized and re-advertised as the graphic novel. But does it follow then that comic art, in its true form, must be forever alien to the museum-centred world of great visual art?

Jacques Tardi, Philippe Druillet and Jean Giraud (a.k.a. Mœbius) apparently thought so. Invited in the 1970s by the Centre Pompidou in Paris to mount an exhibit, they declined. In their minds, the de-coupling of their art from its sequential context, for the purpose of display in a museum exhibit, would constitute a distortion and ultimately a betrayal of the art form. Moreover, the absence of the narrative element would inevitably emphasize the visual element, which, in turn, would diminish their own stature by presenting them as illustrators instead of as authors à part entière. Given this backdrop, the recent collaborative project between the Centre Pompidou and sequential artist Edmond Baudoin, 

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9 Mikaël Demets, ‘La Bande dessinée au musée: Consécration ou hérésie ?’, Evene.fr, 15 February 2009, http://www.evene.fr/arts/actualite/bd-bande-dessinee-musee-quintet-lyon-1822.php (accessed 3 October 2013). True to character, perhaps, and wishing to maintain his complete creative independence, Tardi recently refused the highest honor that the French government can bestow and rebuffed the announcement of his induction into l’Ordre National de la Légion d’Honneur (Le Monde.fr, 2 January 2013). However, Mœbius must subsequently have changed his mind, given the major exhibition devoted to him at the Fondation Cartier in 2011, called Mœbius-Transe-Forme.
revolving around a Dalí exhibition, takes on added significance. But before segueing into such innovative collaborations, consider briefly, in counterpoint to the above, a few points that might cast the museum, both its contents and its practices, in a different light vis-à-vis the nature of comic art.

The inevitable de-contextualization of comic art, once a panel is hung on a museum wall, is a legitimate complaint. On the other hand, only a painting or sculpture created specifically for a certain location in a certain museum, and with all attendant circumstances in connection with the installation of that work of art known in advance by every viewer across time, does not likewise suffer from some form of de-contextualization, sometimes radically so. Few works of art in any public art museum are displayed in their full context, and interpretation suffers as a consequence. This is especially true of narrative art. For example, regarding art based on history, legend or classical myth, even though the artist strives to create a single painting or sculpture that summarizes the narrative or captures its high point, once the events being narrated, along with their context, have faded into the past and ceased to reside fully in collective memory, interpretation becomes difficult. Since comic art is narrative art, a comparison is in order.

Beholding Théodore Géricault’s *Le Radeau de la Méduse* [The Raft of the Medusa] (1819) at the Louvre, the uninitiated viewer sees a dramatic painting that appears to tell the story of a shipwreck but knows nothing of the actual historical events surrounding the sinking of the *Méduse*, the abandonment of the passengers by captain and crew absconding with the few lifeboats, and the resulting desperation of more than a hundred passengers crowded onto their makeshift raft, who then endured severe privation and unspeakable horrors, including murder and cannibalism, until a mere dozen or so, as depicted in the painting, found rescue.10 And the uninitiated viewer knows nothing of the political context that gives the painting its full narrative force as a powerful metaphor for a population set adrift by an incompetent and corrupt restored monarchy. In what substantive way does this scenario differ from pulling a panel or a page from a graphic novel and hanging it on a museum wall? In both cases, the uninitiated viewer knows that the artist is telling a story, but is only able to ascertain a fragment of that story and its relevance until the full context is supplied from other

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sources. Yet, unless Tardi, Druillet and Giraud were willing to make the claim that they had never been inspired or edified by visiting an art museum and viewing the de-contextualized works of art that they found there, it seems they would have had little ground for boycotting the art museum when it came to their own art. Either no narrative art can be allowed to endure in a museum, or else all of it belongs, including appropriate pages and panels extracted from sequential comic art.

Paradoxically (viewed from the perspective of sequential comic art), though a work of art is out of context once it enters the museum, rather than saying it is ‘de-contextualized’, it would be more accurate to say that it is ‘re-contextualized’ and to note that this happens in a fashion that should actually make sequential comic art feel quite at home. Consider that art museums themselves and their exhibits are grand narratives that must be read much like a comic art sequence. We no longer live in the nineteenth century, when paintings were usually installed crowded together and rather haphazardly, wherever they would fit on a museum wall, sharing only a general theme or no theme at all. That once common state of arrangement is preserved in many paintings of paintings, that is, paintings of galleries (a convention exploited effectively by Marc-Antoine Mathieu to create various mise en abyme situations in Les Sous-sols du Révolu: Extraits du journal d’un expert [Basement Vaults of the Bygone: Excerpts from the Logbook of an Expert; Eng. ed., Museum Vaults: Excerpts from the Journal of an Expert]; see below), such as Nicolas Sébastien Maillot’s Vue du Salon Carré du Louvre [View of the Louvre’s Salon Carré] (1831), which shows that Le Radeau de la Méduse (1819), referenced above, was hung there at that time, along with Anne-Louis Girodet’s large Scène du déluge [Flood Scene] (1806), surrounded by an assortment of baroque paintings from two centuries earlier sharing no common theme. Although dimensions can sometimes trump other considerations, today’s museum curator does not typically arrange paintings in an exhibit incongruously or haphazardly. There is a rationale for the selection of the paintings and the careful sequencing of their instalment. The rationale usually becomes partly evident by consulting the explanatory panels provided, these constituting extra-diegetic components, as there often are in comic art as well, to accompany the mimetic component, that is, the works of art themselves. But even these aids cannot adequately relate all the subtleties contributing to the exact sequence arrived at or to the

11 Compare Grove’s commentary on Peter Paul Ruben’s narrative series comprising the Cycle de Marie de Médicis (1622–1625, Musée du Louvre), Comics in French, 83.
juxtaposition of certain works in the same room. The astute museumgoer, like the alert comic art reader, is always thinking about why the ‘panels’, that is, the individual works of art, are arranged the way they are in a given sequence and how the works appearing together on a given ‘page’, that is, on a wall or in a room, might speak to each other (as they sometimes do literally in museum-based comic art, such as in Frédéric Bézian’s Bourdelle: Le Visiteur du soir [Bourdelle: The Night Visitor] and in Alessandro Rak’s Adonie [a regional festival honoring Adonis]; see below). The act of sequencing works of art in a museum and then properly interpreting that sequence is, in fact, a major component of the first bande dessinée commissioned by the Louvre, Nicolas de Crécy’s Période glacière [Ice Age; Eng. ed., Glacial Period], and the same theme surfaces in two other albums in the series (see below). Clearly, some creators of comic art recognize the parallels that exist between their own art and the conceptual arrangement of a museum and its contents. To be sure, the comic art author has the advantage of being able to create from scratch the appropriate panels for the sequence, whereas the museum curator must piece together ‘panels’ created by others in order to arrive at an appropriate sequence for an exhibit. But in neither case is the sequence arbitrary, and in both cases the overriding aim is the same: to create something that is readable and communicative, which means, of necessity, that both constitute art-based sequential narratives. One could even reasonably assert, perhaps to the indignation of a few, that an art museum is an example of experimental comic art in everything but name only and that, conversely, a work of comic art is a sort of paper museum (or web-based museum, in a growing number of cases) where the spatio-temporal gaps between panels are simply greatly reduced compared to the those of the museum exhibit. The most recently commissioned collaboration, at the time of writing, between a fine arts museum and a comics artist, which takes the form of both an exhibit (Les Fantômes du Louvre: Enki Bilal [The Ghosts of the Louvre: Enki Bilal], 20 December 2012 to 18 March 2013, Musée du Louvre) and a book, seems to underscore this very point. Enki Bilal’s Les Fantômes du Louvre is not a bande dessinée in the traditional sense; it is more like an exhibit catalogue presenting and annotating a selection of paintings and other objets d’art in association with the conjured ghosts who constitute their forgotten entourage. In this case, full identity of reference has been achieved: the museum has become the bande dessinée and the bande dessinée has

become the museum. However, this is not the first time that there has been a museum on paper.

The use of the term museum (Lat.) / museo / musée in association with a collection of curiosities, first private then public, has a long history, beginning in fifteenth-century Italy. By association, certain kinds of publications in the nineteenth century were also called ‘museums’. For example, caricaturist Charles Philipon (1800–1862) chose the following titles for two periodicals: *Le Musée pour rire: Dessins pour tous les caricaturistes de Paris* [The Museum of Laughter: Drawings for All of Paris’s Caricaturists] (1839–1840) and *Le Musée ou magasin comique de Philipon* [Philipon’s Museum or Comic Shop] (1843). The latter in particular incorporated narrative sequences that may be the witness of an early transition towards sequencing in the paper museum prior to the full development of sequenced conceptions and installations in brick-and-mortar art museums.\(^\text{13}\)

Finally, concerning the ‘offence’ committed by pop artists in dissecting comic art and appropriating its motifs on their way to recognition and fortune in the art world, while this understandably provoked the consternation and jealousy of comics artists, it also provided an opening. Insomuch as comic art was now a source of raw material in the high art world, it was now also a part of the conversation.\(^\text{14}\) Moreover, by contributing to the post-modern revolt against abstract expressionism, à la Jackson Pollock, which had come to re-define and dominate much of modern art, pop art helped pave the way for comic art. Thus, by re-introducing aspects of figurative art, including comic art motifs, pop art and *figuration narrative* provided an opportunity for comic art to purchase its first toehold on legitimacy, thereby helping set the stage for the innovative kinds of collaborations between art museums and comics artists that are now emerging.

**Museums in Comic Art**

As a prelude to any comment on museum-commissioned works of comic art, let the record be set straight. Appropriation has, in fact, been a two-way street. Not only have pop artists, *figuratistes* and their contemporary successors appropriated elements of comic art for the purpose of creating museum-grade art, but comics artists have also

\(^\text{13}\) On the *Musée ou magasin comique de Philipon* as an under-recognized precursor to comic art, see Vessels, *Drawing France*, 36–37, 243n50.

\(^\text{14}\) See commentary by Grove, *Comics in French*, 208–214.
returned the favour. In order to enhance comic art, an array of iconic images corresponding to great works of art gracing the walls of many museums have been appropriated. Transferred to the pages of comic books and graphic novels, these images may be recast as parodies, either transparently for comedic value or subtly to obtain other forms of diegetic enrichment, or they may constitute essential elements in plot development. Concerning the last type, where the appropriation is essential to the plot structure of the work of comic art, a synergistic development has sometimes arisen, even where there was no prior intent on the part of the comic art author, such that the presence of the appropriated image(s) has then been exploited by the home museum to complement and help commoditize an exhibit.

** Appropriation for Parody  

According to some definitions, parody obtains comic effect accompanied by ridicule of the imitated source, whereas pastiche obtains comic effect without ridicule. For Thierry Groensteen, pastiche implies that a similar graphic style is shared by the source image and the appropriation, whereas parody accrues where the appropriation adopts a different style, tone and setting.\(^\text{15}\) Using Groensteen’s criteria, the examples given in this section would mostly fall under the heading of parody. In the humorous series *Astérix*, for example, anachronistic rifts in the diegetic world are plentiful and purposeful in order to produce comic effect. The appropriation of iconic museum art for the purpose of parody conforms perfectly to this dynamic. The appropriation of *Le Radeau de la Méduse*, referenced above, lends itself to the humorous depiction of the shipwrecked pirate crew in *Astérix légionnaire* (*Asterix the Legionary*) languishing on a raft and assuming postures that mimic the subjects in the painting.\(^\text{16}\) Instead of desperately waving at a passing ship, in the *Astérix* appropriation the lookout is waving good-bye to the pirates’ sinking vessel. As in the example just given, the appropriation must be sufficiently transparent to be recognized independently by the


\(^{16}\) In the *Astérix* appropriation, a textual pun plays on the name of the ship, La Méduse, and the metaphorically derived verb *méduser*, which means to be paralyzed or speechless with astonishment: ‘Je suis médusé’ [I am dumbfounded], utters one pirate. Stringent copyright controls defeated attempts to include a reproduction of the panel. However, the panel can be found online and in André Stoll, *Astérix: L’Épopée burlesque de la France* [Asterix: France’s Burlesque Epic] (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1978), 107.
reader, since there are no explicit indicators that it is, in fact, a parody of a famous painting.\(^{17}\)

That the horrendous circumstances originally occasioning the creation of *Le Radeau de la Méduse* no longer have any force in collective memory, resulting in the de-contextualization of the painting, as mentioned above, is substantiated by the fact that it has been widely parodied in sequential art for comedic effect. In addition to the example just given, many other examples can be cited.\(^{18}\) Most are easily recognizable, which, as stated, is important for the parody to work as a comic device; however, this is not always the case.

When an iconic work of museum art is appropriated with subtlety, it takes a meticulous reading to spot it and then a measure of reflection to interpret it, since it will likely serve a purpose that is not readily apparent, but the subtlety of the appropriation is precisely what keeps it from being superficially misinterpreted. The challenge for the author is to dissociate the iconic source of the appropriation just enough to keep it from being misread as clever but vacuous, while leaving enough of the original image intact so that the alert reader will recognize it. Once recognized, the presence of the altered image signals to the reader that a momentary breach in the diegetic world is intended and invites probing in order to penetrate its meaning and the import of the alterations. An example can be drawn from Joann Sfar’s *Le Chat du rabin: La Bar-mitzva* [*The Rabbi’s Cat: The Bar-Mitzva*], set in Algiers in the 1930s. In the right-hand center panel in Figure 1, the rabbi’s daughter Zlabya is found reclining on her bed, adopting the classic pose of the North African or Near Eastern *odalisque*, as portrayed by Henri Matisse’s *Odalisque à la culotte rouge* [*Odalisque in Red Culottes*].\(^{19}\) The identification is made the more sure because the red and gold hues of the *odalisque*’s culotte have been transferred to Zlabya’s blouse. Providing an additional hint, the double-

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17 Regarding the source image behind the parody, Stoll assures us that the association is automatic for the average French reader (*Astérix: L’Épopée burlesque*, 107). Stoll is a rich source of other, similar examples.


19 Space limitations precluded inclusion of a visual of Matisse’s *Odalisque à la culotte rouge*, which is on display at the Musée nationale d’art moderne at the Centre Pompidou (a different version, bearing the exact same title, is housed at the Orangerie). Reproductions are available online. See http://www.flickr.com/photos/26095468@N04/8179199471/in/photostream (accessed 6 October 2013).
strand necklace that Zlabya has worn throughout the *bande dessinée* has been momentarily transformed in this panel (and in the close-up panel immediately above it, where it can be more clearly seen) in order to match the single-strand necklace of the *Odalisque à la culotte rouge*. In the very next panel, however, Zlabya’s necklace clearly reverts to its prior double-strand state and remains so for the duration. Sfar takes advantage of the crossed legs in the original to confirm that the beads are indeed a clue. The uncrossed legs in Sfar’s appropriation reveal ankle beads that were hidden in Matisse’s original, playfully informing the reader that the beads themselves are revelatory if the clue is followed to the intended destination. Once that destination is reached, the reader is primed for reflection on the nature of the altered appropriation in relation to its source.

To venture an interpretation, Sfar appears to be using this appropriation as a device to subtly critique the long-standing Orientalist fascination in ‘high art’ – exemplified early on by both the neo-classical Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres’s *La Grande odalisque* (1814, Musée du Louvre) and the romanticist Eugène Delacroix’s *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement* [Women of Algiers in Their Apartment] (1834, Musée du Louvre) – that has led to the construction of an eroticized North African woman. Matisse carried the fascination forward well into the twentieth century.²⁰ By appropriating the image of one of the *odalisques* in Matisse’s ‘harem’ of such paintings and converting her into the innocent Zlabya, Sfar has symbolically de-objectified the North African woman. Note that there is one striking difference in the two versions. In Matisse’s original, the eroticized woman is bare-breasted but veiled. In Sfar’s appropriated version, the ‘real’ woman is fully clothed but, both literally and metaphorically, is now unveiled. This conforms to his strategy of deconstructing the Western European notion of the ‘exotic’ by drawing the reader into relationship with characters that feel real and whom the reader ends up caring about, in contrast to myriad nameless *odalisques* inhabiting the world of high art. The paradox and the genius of *Le Chat du rabbin* is how Sfar turns Orientalism against itself and employs a heavy dose of magic realism (particularly in the form of a thinking, talking cat) to actually de-mythologize the ‘Orient’ and make it more approachable to the European reader. In the process, ‘low art’ reverses roles and teaches ‘high art’ a lesson.²¹

Figure 1: Le chat du rabbin: la Bar-mitsva, p. 42, Joann Sfar, © Dargaud Éditeur Paris, 2002.
The interpretation advanced here is in partial opposition to the one advocated by Shannon Lawson.\(^ {22}\) Lawson takes Sfar severely to task for perpetuating the stereotypes of the past by incorporating the tropes of Orientalism. It may be that Lawson arrived at her conclusion precisely because she has not taken into account Sfar’s effective use of parody, as exemplified in Figure 1. Sfar’s creative method, illustrating Linda Hutcheon’s critical approach to parody, ‘both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies’.\(^ {23}\)

**Appropriation for Plot**

With or without parody, many works of sequential art have appropriated one or more examples of a museum’s iconic masterpieces as central elements in plot development. In some cases, these works of sequential art have subsequently been employed in the commoditization of the home museum, even though they were not commissioned for that purpose. For example, Joann Sfar’s two-volume series *Chagall en Russie* (*Chagall in Russia*), in which Chagall’s artwork appears in embryonic form in the young artist’s sketches or fully formed in dream sequences, was featured in association with the exhibit *Chagall entre guerre et paix* (*Chagall between War and Peace*) at the Musée du Luxembourg (21 February to 21 July 2013).\(^ {24}\) Appropriations of museum art, both subtle (e.g., a parody of Eugène Delacroix’s *La Mort de Sardanapale* [*The Death of Sardanapalus*], 1827, Musée du Louvre) and overt, can be found in the macabre series *L’Île des morts*, by Thomas Mosdi and Guillaume Sorel.\(^ {25}\) The eponymous painting *Die Toteninsel* [*Island of the Dead*] (1880–1886) by the Swiss symbolist Arnold Böcklin is an essential

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centrepiece to the unfolding story. *L’Île des morts* became an exploitable aid in commoditization when the Musée d’Orsay conducted a special exhibit titled *L’Ange du bizarre: Le Romantisme noir de Goya à Max Ernst* [Angel of the Odd: Dark Romanticism from Goya to Max Ernst] (5 March to 9 June 2013). The exhibit curator made sure to include in the show one of the five versions of the Böcklin painting, and the integral version of the *bande dessinée* was then prominently featured in the special gift shop set up just for the show.

An early but incomplete example of museum art and architecture being used as a central device in plot development can be found in *Les Mystères de Pâhry*. After *La Fièvre d’Urbicande* [Fever in Urbicande] (1984), it was apparently intended to be the next installment (or an auxiliary product) in the series *Les Cités obscures* by François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters. Parts of it appeared in (*À Suivre*), but the full version never came to fruition. Existent fragments were published in 2007 along with a revised edition of *Les Murailles de Samaris* [The Great Walls of Samaris], the first album in the series (1983).26 Like its namesake, *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–1843), a wildly popular serial novel by Eugène Sue, the protagonist in three of the four fragments has a hidden identity.27 However, in the parallel world of Pâhry, the protagonist is not a grand duke disguised as a common laborer, but instead is a fugitive not daring to show his face in public places associated with high culture and the seat of political power. Constantly on the move, he passes unnoticed through the crawlspaces, ventilation shafts, hidden passageways and underground facilities of the Opéra Garnier, the Palais de l’Élysée and the Musée du Louvre (parallel versions, of course). He often eavesdrops on the inhabitants and visitors. This motif lends itself well to the portrayal of ‘low art’ as having fugitive status vis-à-vis the received canon of ‘high art’ in the museum. At one point, underneath a gallery in the Louvre, momentarily purchasing a grip on a floor register, the protagonist overhears the remark of a visitor: ‘Tout de même, ce musée est trop grand … Tous ces tableaux se ressemblent, vous ne trouvez pas?’ [Anyway, this museum is too big … All the paintings look the same, don’t you think?] (Fig. 2). A companion visitor replies, ‘Il suffit d’apprendre à regarder’ [You just have to learn how to look] (read, perhaps: ‘You have to be properly inculcated’). Taking a swipe at an exaggerated sense of self-importance


in connection with the museum-centred art world, the surroundings of the fugitive’s hidden location in the entrepôt des cadres, where myriad empty frames are neatly stored inside countless other empty frames, seem to echo and confirm symbolically the first disparaging remark. As is frequently the case in Les Cités obscures, someone falls at a pivotal moment. In this case, it is the ‘low art’ fugitive who lets go of his grip and attempts to find support by grabbing a frame. Instead, it gives way, and, by falling, the fugitive literally and symbolically shatters the monotony/monopoly of the empty frames (Fig. 2).

The ‘art wars’, symbolized by the presence of a nameless fugitive hidden in the Louvre, are mirrored by ‘architecture wars’ – inevitably so, given the signature architectural obsessions of Schuiten in virtually all of his work – in the final fragment of Les Mystères de Pâhry. It also incorporates a museum motif, and does so by introducing another protagonist, this time named, who occupies a marginalized role: L’Étrange cas du docteur Abraham [The Strange Case of Dr. Abraham]. Dr. Abraham’s migraine headaches are, literally, monumental: they are accompanied by visual effects presaging something that will be architecturally groundbreaking. His warnings about what will transpire raise suspicion, but their portent is ignored. Instead, he is denigrated, along with his ‘race’, and eventually executed. The personage of Dr. Abraham has clearly been devised to take aim at anti-Semitism as a prototype for any other prejudice, including artistic, that approximates it. Dr. Abraham’s execution cannot prevent the ground from breaking open and giving rise to the brazen Centre Pompidou, whose appearance, literally and figuratively, smashes the Haussmann-like neo-classical uniformity of Pâhry.

Space is insufficient here to allow for a presentation of a range of other non-commissioned works of comic art that have used museum art to superb effect in plot construction. Deserving of more commentary are Jan Dix, a bimonthly series launched in 2008 by fumettista Carlo Ambrosini, in which the eponymous protagonist, a Dutchman, is portrayed as a kind of Indiana Jones of the art world, and Moving Pictures, initially a weekly web comic until the print version appeared in 2010, by the Canadian duo Kathryn and Stuart Immonen, in which attempts at hiding French museum inventories during World War II becomes the backdrop to a well-constructed interpersonal drama.28

Figure 2: Excerpt from *Les Mystères de Pâhry*, p. 66, François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters, © Casterman, 2007, used with the kind permission of the authors and Éditions Casterman.
More historical in orientation, titles worthy of mention include Catherine Meurisse’s *Le Pont des arts* (employing a double entendre: the name of a Parisian bridge matches a set of vignettes bridging great works of art and great writers) and the biographical series *Pablo* (that is, Picasso), by Julie Birmant and Clément Oubrerie.\(^2^9\) *Fumettista* Milo Manara’s *A Riveder le stelle* [To Behold Again the Stars] (the final line from Dante’s *L’Inferno*) (1999), in the series *Le Avventure di Giuseppe Bergman*, is particularly rich with intertextual complexity and parallel narrative, both based in large part on museum art.\(^3^0\) After an initial ‘woman at the well’ encounter (John 4:4–42) with Bergman, it is the anonymous *ragazza* herself who takes on a Jesus-like role, including temptation, death and resurrection. However, the ‘prophesies’ that she must fulfil are not found in the canon of biblical texts, but in the canon of visual art, ranging from the modern and profane to the classical and divine, as contained in a book of art history. The narrow separation of fantasy and reality, faith and delusion, art and life are intertwining preoccupations throughout. In the process, life imitates art, presaging a similar story line that will appear in a number of museum-commissioned works.

**Museums Commission Comic Art**

Helped along the way by pop art and *narration figurative*, as mentioned at the outset, in the post-modern era the traditional barriers erected between fine art and popular art have become pliable, resulting in the possibility for new collaborations between art museums and creators of comic art. In tandem with this dynamic and working to accelerate it are economic necessities. In an age where an infinite number of images are freely available online at a keystroke and where home-based visual entertainment is pervasive, museums must find ways to remain relevant and to stimulate public curiosity. Commissioning comic art and celebrating the launch of an album with an exhibit occupies a place on the list of similar initiatives that Hilde Hein had in mind when she remarked, somewhat unflatteringly: ‘The museum’s ... menus and sale items are coordinated with exhibition themes ... Like it or not, the


\(^{3^0}\) This album appeared first in French translation, then in the original Italian the following year: Milo Manara, *Revoir les étoiles* (Tournai: Casterman, 1998); Milo Manara, *A Riveder le stelle: Le Avventure metropolitane di Giuseppe Bergman* (Milan: Mondadori, 1999). The integral edition of all six volumes in the series is now available: Milo Manara, *Tutte le avventure de Giuseppe Bergman* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2012).
museum presents itself as a compound aesthetic totality that beckons the public with banners outside and gimmicks within.\textsuperscript{31} In short, comic art products lend themselves readily to the growing diversification of museum efforts at institutional commoditization in the quest for relevance and revenue. The phenomenon seems to be gaining steam in Europe, and a growing number of institutions are participating, though some, as we have seen, are content to use pre-existent comic art that has relevance for their collections, rather than commissioning new works. To the extent that budgetary priorities are a driving force, it is tempting to strike a somewhat cynical tone:

Fueled in part by Pop Art’s strategic confusion of high art, popular culture and consumer goods, but also by marketing strategies of our media-saturated ‘buzz’ culture, the aesthetic autonomy of serious painting and sculpture central to Modernism’s hegemony has been compromised to the point that Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum, that high temple of Modernist spirit, now plays host to blockbuster exhibitions of Armani fashion, motorcycles, and Norman Rockwell.\textsuperscript{32}

Norman Rockwell was not a comics artist, but as the best-loved illustrator in the United States for decades until his death in 1978, his work epitomized the wide appeal of popular art, and did so in a way that sent cold chills down the spines of high art devotees. For them, the Rockwell exhibit (2001) was sacrilege, but the general public voted with their feet in favor of the initiative.

However, not long after Andrew McClellan published the remarks just cited (in 2003), with little fanfare the Louvre decided to do something new. Fabrice Douar, deputy director of the Department of Publications at the Musée du Louvre, contacted Sébastien Gnaedig, editorial director at Futuropolis, about a joint project that would ‘créer une passerelle entre le monde de la bande dessinée et celui du musée’ [create a link between the worlds of comic art and the museum].\textsuperscript{33} Initially, two works were commissioned, the authors being granted complete artistic control save a single stipulation: the works were to be based on the Louvre, either the museum itself or a part of its collection. The result was Nicolas de Crécy’s \textit{Période glacière} (2005) and Marc-Antoine Mathieu’s

\textsuperscript{31} Hilde Hein, \textit{Public Art: Thinking Museums Differently} (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006), 120.
Les Sous-sols du Révolu (2006). Given the initial lack of publicity, perhaps the initiative was, as claimed in later press releases, purely in the interest of forging links and promoting artistic synergy. Or perhaps the Louvre was just testing the waters. Most likely, it was a bit of both. Whatever the case, the experiment was deemed a success. More bandes dessinées were commissioned and plans were put into place for a temporary exhibit. Following the publication of two more albums, and with a manga album in production – respectively, Éric Liberge’s Aux heures impaires [On the Odd Hours] (2008), Bernard Ysulaire and Jean-Claude Carrière’s Le Ciel au-dessus du Louvre [The Sky over the Louvre] (2009) and Hirohiko Araki’s Rohan au Louvre [Rohan at the Louvre] (2010) – an exhibit was installed and launched (Le Louvre invite la bande dessinée [The Louvre Invites Comics], 11 January to 13 April 2009), this time with all the attendant fanfare. For some commentators, this represented a watershed moment in the legitimization of bande dessinée: literally and figuratively, the highest art authority in the land, the Musée du Louvre, had bestowed its imprimatur on comic art. The initiative has not yet run its course, and more Louvre-based bandes dessinées have been appearing uninterruptedly, so far all in collaboration with Futuropolis: Christian Durieux’s Un Enchantement [An Enchantment] (2011), David Prudhomme’s La Traversée du Louvre [Touring the Louvre] (June 2012) and Enki Bilal’s Les Fantômes du Louvre (November 2012).

Though the Louvre may have the distinction of being the first fine art museum to commission a work of comic art, the distinction of being first to install an exhibit incorporating commissioned comic art may go to the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte in Naples. In collaboration with COMICON Napoli, the museum celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2008 by hosting an exhibit highlighting two original fumetti created for the occasion: Cretto [Cracked Surface] by Andrea Bruno and Morire d’amore [To Die of Love] by Maurizio Ribichini. The exhibit, Fumetto al museo, la nona arte a Capodimonte [Comic Art in the Museum, the Ninth Art at Capodimonte] (20 April to 11 May 2008), also included less substantial creations by a host of other comic art authors, both Italian and international. The exhibit catalogue was published as Fumetto al museo, la nona arte a Capodimonte (Naples: Electa Napoli, 2008), with cover art by Alessandro Rak. At the time of writing, Morire d’amore is also viewable on Ribichini’s blog: http://maurizioribichini.blogspot.com/2008/06/fumetto-al-museo.html (accessed 3 October 2013).

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35 The exhibit catalogue was published as Fumetto al museo, la nona arte a Capodimonte (Naples: Electa Napoli, 2008), with cover art by Alessandro Rak. At the time of writing, Morire d’amore is also viewable on Ribichini’s blog: http://maurizioribichini.blogspot.com/2008/06/fumetto-al-museo.html (accessed 3 October 2013).
themselves with the collection, Bruno and Ribichini chose for inspiration, respectively, the modern *arte povera* of Jannis Kounellis and the painting *Sant’Agata* (c. 1637) by Neapolitan artist Francesco Guarino. Once again, by appropriating a work of fine art and inserting it into a work of comic art, intersecting parallel narratives could be exploited. In *Morire d’amore*, instead of alternating between fantasy and ‘reality’, the reader is made to alternate between present and past. In fact, there are two past narratives, one explicit and the other mostly implicit. The implicit narrative is the story of Saint Agatha of Sicily, tortured and martyred for her faith (c. 251), which is discussed by two museum visitors as they view the painting in the ‘present’. But the progression of events related to the actual martyrdom is not depicted. Instead, another past narrative is shown, based on Bernardo de’Dominici’s biographical notes, providing an explanation for the fact that Guarino painted and then, curiously, covered up Saint Agatha’s iconic emblem (a pair of severed breasts on a tray). In the reconstructed narrative, Guarino, in love with the model who posed for the painting, inspires the jealousy of her husband, which in turn leads to the model’s murder, then to the artist’s decision to blot out the gruesome attribution, and finally to his own demise from heartbreak. In this manner, two past narratives about ‘dying of love’ are made to overlap and intersect with each other and with the present.

The following year, on the heels of the Louvre exhibit, a consortium of Etruscan archaeological museums, once again in collaboration with COMICON Napoli, launched a joint project, ‘Etruscomix, L’Etruria in Fumetto’, which was conceptualized along the lines of its Capodimonte predecessor and resulted in another exhibit (30 June to 25 October 2009) and publication. The collaborating institutions – Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia (Rome), Museo Cerveteri and Museo di Tarquinia – invited six *fumettisti* to spend a week immersing themselves in the collections and frequenting the associated necropolises in order to fuel their creative imaginations. The result was *Viaggio Etrusco, sei affreschi a fumetti* [Etruscan Voyage, Six Comic-Art Frescoes] (2009). Like *Morire d’amore*, most of the *fumetti* undertake journeys into the past.

Not to be outdone, in 2009 the Musée Bourdelle, the converted and expanded Paris studio of sculptor Antoine Bourdelle (1861–1929), also

37 Francesco Cattani, Marino Neri, Paolo Parisi, Michele Petrucci, Alessandro Rak and Claudio Stassi, *Viaggio Etrusco, sei affreschi a fumetti* (Rome: Black Velvet, 2009), with cover art by Milo Manara.
began a player and, at the behest of museum director Juliette Laffon, launched *Bourdelle: Le Visiteur du soir* by Bézian (2009). Since the Musée Bourdelle is dedicated to sculpture, the after-hours interloper in the story cannot use paintings as a gateway to a parallel world (there are plenty of study sketches and the like housed at the museum, but these don’t have the proper salience). Instead, the sculptures themselves enter into an exchange of thoughts or utterances (it is not clear which), while the interloper eavesdrops on another night ‘visitor’, Antoine Bourdelle himself, and his guests – Auguste Rodin, Alberto Giacometti and Isadora Duncan. In the end, the reader is not sure whether this is a trauma-induced hallucination or a visit to the nether world in an altered state of consciousness.

**Emergent Themes**

In effect, the appropriation of museum art into comic art constitutes a laboratory for experimenting with intertextuality and parallel narrative, the two being virtually indissociable. In the mix, certain themes have surfaced. One common theme has already been mentioned: the entanglement of fantasy and reality, of art and life, as portrayed in Manara’s *A Riveder le stelle*, where life imitates art very literally; or maybe life *is* art. Taking a completely different approach, David Prudhomme drives home the same point in *La Traversée du Louvre*. As if taking a cue from Henri Cartier-Bresson’s notion of the ‘instant décisif’ [decisive moment] in relation to photographic framing, Prudhomme’s museum visitors unwittingly mirror, mimic and interact with the surrounding artwork in a variety of striking juxtapositions. Sometimes the artwork and visitors seem to have exchanged roles, the former quizzically observing the latter.

The flip side, of sorts, to life becoming art is art coming alive, as it does in Éric Liberge’s *Aux heures impaires* and in Alessandro Rak’s *Adonie* (in *Viaggio Etrusco*). In the case of the former, the art even succeeds in liberating itself from the confines of the museum, while in the latter, it does not, and remains captive to a dream. Dreams or altered states of consciousness also allow art and life to interact in Bézian’s *Bourdelle: Le Visiteur du soir* and in Christian Durieux’s *Un Enchantement*. In the latter, the protagonist climbs into a painting, reminiscent of

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Schuiten and Peeters’s *La Tour* [*The Tower*], to end the story in a different world. Likewise, in Francesco Cattani’s *L’Episodio del fabbro* [*The Episode of the Blacksmith*] (in *Viaggio Etrusco*), the protagonist, emerging from a tunnel, enters the world of mythological beings of antiquity. Animate but not ‘alive’, the ghosts of the past are conjured by museum art in Araki’s *Rohan au Louvre* and Bilal’s *Les Fantômes du Louvre*.

Like most of the *fumettisti*, Yslaire and Carrière, in *Le Ciel au-dessus du Louvre*, also embark upon an imaginary journey into the past. Transporting the story line into the future, so that the museum can be rediscovered as a repository of a lost heritage, the contents of which must then be properly interpreted in order to reconstruct the past, is a theme that surfaces in Convard, Adam and Vignaux’s *Le Pendule de Foucault* [*Foucault’s Pendulum*], in association with the Musée des Arts et Métiers, and in the first album in the Louvre-based series, Crécy’s *Période glacière*. In the latter, the same plot device is used as an opportunity to explore the commonality between the arrangement of the contents of a museum and the arrangement of panels in a *bande dessinée* (Fig. 3), this being a theme shared by Mathieu in *Les Sous-sols du Révolu* and by Prudhomme in *La Traversée du Louvre*. This amounts to a kind of oblique metafiction, insomuch as it constitutes an indirect commentary on one of the codes of comic art creation.

Also characterized by its futuristic thrust is an elaborate exhibit at the Musée des Arts et Métiers (4 June 2013 to 5 January 2014) bearing the hybridized title *Mécanhumanimal* (*mécanique + humain + animal*) and devoted to Enki Bilal’s idiomatic brand of science fiction. Fittingly, the multimedia exhibit (even boasting interactive 3-D replicas of Bilal’s futuristic gadgets) is accompanied by a hybrid publication, commissioned by the museum, that merges pre-existent *bande dessinée* by Bilal (excerpts from *La Trilogie Nikopol*, 1980, 1986, 1992), new artwork, texts by an assortment of guest authors and a museum catalogue, resulting in a printed product that is hard to categorize and that is, in some respects, similar to the monograph developed by Bilal to accompany the Louvre exhibit, *Les Fantômes du Louvre*.

The theme of ‘art within art’ is common as well, and is explored using various devices. When a painting is appropriated integrally, very

42 See Ann Miller, *Reading bande dessinée*, 133.
often it has higher resolution and looks more substantial than the graphics in which it is embedded. The right-hand frame in Figure 3, in which a close-up of Louis Hersent’s *Les Religieux de Saint-Gothard* (1824, Musée du Louvre) is embedded, is an example. This creates an odd effect for the reader. A visitor to an art museum sees the paintings embedded in a surrounding where everything else has higher resolution than the objects contained in the paintings. Besides the static nature of the paintings and the lack of real depth, lower resolution is one of the things that the eye and brain rely on to differentiate paintings from reality. When a painting is embedded in comic art, everything is reversed. It is the mimetic ‘reality’ that has low resolution and it is the embedded painting that, in comparison, has high resolution. Since the reader typically identifies with the ‘animate’ characters in the unfolding story, not the static paintings, by virtue of association the reader becomes part of a low-resolution world where art has more substance than life.

Art within art also creates an opportunity to use mise en abyme to advantage. This is a temptation that Marc-Antoine Mathieu could not resist, given his demonstrated penchant for this device in previous work.\(^{44}\) In *Les Sous-sols du Révolu*, he first uses it to create a telescoping mise en abyme. In a receding progression, a first painting captures a gallery of paintings including a second painting capturing another gallery of paintings including a third painting capturing yet another gallery of

\(^{44}\) See Ann Miller, *Reading bande dessinée*, 139–141.
paintings. He also creates a looping mise en abyme that is only discoverable if the reader abandons linearity and takes the time to compare the appropriated version of Samuel F. B. Morse’s *Gallery of the Louvre* (1831–1833, Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago) with the original. In Figure 4, the painting directly above the doorway does not appear in the original, where Morse had instead placed a reproduction of *Cena in Emmaus* [Supper at Emmaus] (Tiziano Vecellio, c. 1530, Musée du Louvre). In Mathieu’s appropriated version, this has been exchanged for Hubert Robert’s *Projet d’aménagement de la grande galerie du Louvre* [Projected Installation of the Grand Gallery of the Louvre] (1796, Musée du Louvre). A few pages earlier in the album, a fragment of Robert’s painting was included, in which the reader sees a copyist reproducing a painting. But the painting being reproduced is not the

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**Figure 4**: *Les Sous-sols du Révolu*, p. 35, fold-out, Marc-Antoine Mathieu, © Futuropolis / Musée du Louvre Éditions, 2006. In the telescoping mise en abyme, the first painting, facing the top of the ladder, is contained within the second painting, which is contained within the third. The looping mise en abyme incorporates the view through the doorway and the painting immediately above it, both being images of the same Grande Galerie in different phases.

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45 At the time that Morse painted the *Salon Carré* at the Louvre, *Le Radeau de la Méduse*, mentioned earlier, was hanging in it. However, it is not visible in Morse’s painting because he decided to repopulate the *Salon* with his own selection of masterpieces from the Louvre. Perhaps that is why Mathieu has renamed Morse’s painting *Le Voleur du musée* [The Museum Thief] (or *Le Musée du Louvre*, unscrambled). See David McCullogh, *The Greater Adventure: Americans in Paris* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011).
original that appeared in Robert’s painting (Raffaello Sanzio’s Sacra famiglia di Francesco I, c. 1518, Musée du Louvre). Instead, the copyist is shown to be reproducing a painting of the view through the doorway in Morse’s painting, as retained in the appropriation (Fig. 4). Thus, the appropriated version of Morse’s painting contains the appropriated version of Robert’s painting, and vice versa, creating a looping mise en abyme, a fitting correlate to the inescapable basements of the Révolution (Louvre, unscrambled), all of which is symbolic. Intrinsic to human experience, there is no escape from endless iterations of art.

A variation on the theme of ‘art within art’ has taken shape under the sponsorship of the Centre Pompidou, with the launching of the graphic novel Dalí par Baudoin, by Edmond Baudoin, to complement and help commoditize a grand retrospective, Dalí (21 November 2012 to 25 March 2013).46 Baudoin’s creative challenge was formidable, not only because of the grandeur of Dalí, but also because of the particular nature of the commission. Departing from the previous pattern, rather than giving Baudoin free reign, Jeanne Alechinsky, editor of museum publications, commissioned Baudoin to create the first instalment in the series Monographies d’artistes en BD. His assignment was to create a companion retrospective on Dalí’s life and art, while simultaneously showcasing his own distinctive artistic brand. Consigning the details of Dalí’s life to an annotated time line in a separate section at the end of the book, Baudoin singled out a series of formative moments in Dalí’s life for pictorial and textual elaboration in the graphic novel itself. Baudoin is also a character in the graphic novel, along with a young female companion. Their musings concerning the enigmas of Dalí’s artwork and salient moments in his life become the vehicle for unpacking the idiomatic iconography developed by Dalí. Throughout, Baudoin’s artwork melds with Dalí’s. To a certain extent, so do their lives: as the narrative progresses, both Dalí and Baudoin age. The only one who remains constant and ageless is the nameless female companion, symbolizing the two artists’ common muse. Baudoin’s book is instructive – not only biographically but also as an illustrated reference on Dalí’s iconography – and engaging for its beauty and originality.

Conclusion

It is fitting to bring this article to closure with the just-cited example of the sponsorship of comic art by the Centre Pompidou, the same institution whose overtures were rebuffed in the 1970s by an initial cohort of refuseniks who esteemed that comic art had no place in an art museum. Since then, there have been many retrospectives on the work of various comics artists in museums around the world, including at the Centre Pompidou (e.g., *Héros de papier: Les Récits complets des années cinquante* [Paper Heroes: Integral Tales from the Fifties], 29 June to 26 September 1988; *Hergé*, 20 December 2006 to 19 February 2007). Indeed, there are far too many to keep track of them all. In this article, some initial exhibits were singled out for mention because of their particular importance in highlighting the asymmetrical relationship between fine art and comic art. As shown, against the backdrop of frequent creative appropriations in both directions, there has subsequently been a re-positioning of both museums and comics artists. Still occupying the locus of power, many museums have nevertheless become more accepting of comic art, in a conducive post-modern ambiance, in order to maintain relevancy and enhance revenue, culminating in the commissioning of comic art by museums themselves. This co-operative departure solidifies the relationship and opens the door to rich intertextual experimentation. The question remains as to whether this creative collaboration constitutes a temporary co-habitation of convenience at the behest of the power broker or a permanent arrangement. In a promising development, Baudoin’s book for the Centre Pompidou and Bilal’s for the Musée du Louvre make it apparent that this collaboration is already evolving and diversifying in a fashion that has the potential to weave comic art into the fabric of museum art in ways unforeseen just a few years ago. Once unleashed, the creative imagination of comics artists is limitless and, perhaps, so is the future.

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language in relation to the visual arts. He is author of *Anglicisms, Neologisms and Dynamic French* (John Benjamins, 1996), a detailed study of borrowings and lexical creativity in the French of France. He is co-editor of the *Dictionary of Louisiana French, as Spoken in Cajun, Creole, and American Indian Communities* (University Press of Mississippi, 2010), and is co-editor of *Language Variety in the South: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (University of Alabama Press, forthcoming). In *Teaching the Graphic Novel* (ed. Stephen E. Tabachnick, Modern Language Association of America, 2009), he authored ‘Teaching Franco-Belgian Bande Dessinée.’ He has been named *Chevalier de l’Ordre des Palmes Académiques* by the French National Ministry of Education.
Culture, Identity, Difference: Developing a Museum-based Anthropology Education Resource for Pre-university Students

Paul Basu and Simon Coleman

**ABSTRACT:** In its 2002–3 Strategic Review, the Royal Anthropological Institute reasserted the importance of the public communication of anthropology for the future of the discipline. Two significant venues for public engagement activity were identified: museums and pre-university education contexts. We present an account of the development and piloting of an anthropology teaching and learning resource that bridges these two arenas. Complementing efforts to introduce an anthropology A-Level, the *Culture, Identity, Difference* resource uses museum collections as a way of introducing anthropological perspectives on topics such as belief, ethnicity, gender and power to enhance students’ studies across a range of different A-Level subjects. We reflect on some of the lessons learnt during the process, including the value of developing resources that can be used flexibly and creatively by teachers and students, and the need to approach the museum as a space of encounter, exploration and experimentation rather than as a didactic educational venue.

**KEYWORDS:** anthropology, education, learning resource, material culture, museums
sphere. Rather, this is an activity to which all professional anthropologists should be committed in their various institutional settings. It is no coincidence, then, that the initiative we discuss here – the development of a museum-based anthropology education resource targeted at pre-university students – has been funded by a consortium made up of an anthropology department (that of Sussex University), a Higher Education academy that promotes teaching and learning development in the social sciences (C-SAP), a local authority-run public museum with ethnographic collections (Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton and Hove) and, indeed, the RAI, through its Economic and Social Research Council-funded Education Programme.

In contrast to the RAI’s main pre-university educational focus on the development of an anthropology A-level, the objective of our Culture, Identity, Difference learning resource and the ‘Discovering Anthropology through Museum Collections’ research project, which gave rise to it, has been to use museum collections as a way of making explicit the ‘implicit anthropology’ that exists within other more established A-level curricula (Basu, Coleman and Posey 2006). Thus we have conceptualized the learning resource as a means of enabling secondary school and further education students (along with their teachers) to discover anthropology for themselves, whilst enhancing their experience of whatever subjects they are formally studying. The research on which the resource is founded thus ranged widely across related issues such as better understanding how anthropology students currently happen upon their chosen undergraduate discipline; identifying existing A-level topics that share broad concerns with anthropology; working with teachers and curriculum specifications to inform our decisions about the most effective approach to designing the resource; conducting original collections-based research; piloting early versions of the resource, and so forth. These are some of the issues and activities that we shall report upon in this article before going on to discuss the finished resource itself.1

**Chance Discoveries**

Although the educational landscape for 14–19-year-olds has been undergoing a period of considerable reform in the UK, so-called GCSE and GCE A-level qualifications continue to be the ‘traditional route’ that most young people use to gain entry to university in Britain. According to the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual), over 780,000 A-levels are awarded every year in more than 80 subjects (www.ofqual.gov.uk/71.aspx). As noted above and elsewhere in this special issue, however, until its launch in September 2010, there was no A-level in anthropology, and, at the time of writing, the success of this new qualification has yet to be established. Similarly, whilst anthropology is included as an option in the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum (see Balzani this issue), in practice this is not widely available. In East and West Sussex, for example, only two Further Education (FE) colleges offer the IB, and neither offers courses in anthropology.2

As part of our preliminary research for the Culture, Identity, Difference learning resource we were therefore keen to know whether students were being introduced to anthropology at school in some other way – for example, through their A-level studies in an allied field such as sociology. A survey was thus conducted among first-year anthropology undergraduates at Sussex University in October 2006 as part of their induction.

All but ten of the 74 survey respondents arrived in the Department of Anthropology at Sussex University via a conventional A-level route. The majority could not recall having heard anthropology being mentioned at school or college, and, with the exception of four of the seven students who had come via an IB route, those who had been introduced to an-
Anthropology at school or college noted that this was due to the personal enthusiasms of a particular teacher rather than the incorporation of anthropology into a more formal educational curriculum. Most respondents reported that no specific A-level subject had orientated them towards anthropology, although ethnographic research methods are included in some sociology A-level units.

A large number of respondents admitted that the first time that they had encountered the word ‘anthropology’ was when looking through university prospectuses or researching what degree subject to study (for instance, using the ‘Stamford Test’ on the UCAS website, which aligns personal interest keywords with degree subject recommendations). A significant number of students reported that they had first encountered anthropology when talking with relatives or friends who were already acquainted with the discipline. Others explained how they had discovered it for themselves during their travels or gap year experiences overseas, or through their reading, watching of ‘ethnographic’ television documentaries, or whilst pursuing an interest in world music, for example.

The following small sample of responses to a question concerning how students first encountered anthropology attests to the haphazard nature of this ‘discovery’, and it also confirms that many of these students come from relatively privileged socio-economic milieus in which interest in other cultures is more likely to be fostered, and the opportunity for travel and exposure to other cultures greater (Mills 2003).

Members of my extended family have been (and still are) engaged in social research overseas and I remember being fascinated by their stories of foreign lands and cultures.

Travelling. My parents would take me to very different countries whilst growing up to see new things. They would teach me about religion, language, traditions and politics. I then discovered that this fell under the anthropology umbrella.

While travelling in the rainforest of Ecuador I met the son of a shaman who is an anthropologist. I had known about issues addressed by the subject but did not have a name for it until then.

I sort of realized that things I’m interested in had a technical name and that they were all linked and it was anthropology.

The latter three comments are particularly interesting since they also demonstrate that prospective students are often familiar with and actively engaged in issues addressed by anthropology, without necessarily knowing that such a discipline exists. For these students, the crucial discovery is in finding a name for something already known. This was an important observation for our conceptualization of the learning resource. One of its tasks, therefore, was simply to introduce a new word into the vocabularies of its users. This lack of public recognition of anthropology and its contribution to contemporary issues is, of course, a much broader concern for the discipline and one of the underlying motivations for promoting anthropology education in pre-university contexts.

Investigating the A-level Profile of Anthropology Undergraduates

Despite the increasing popularity of alternative pathways into Higher Education (HE), A-levels remain by far the most popular entry qualifications to universities in the UK. In 2005, for example, UCAS data show that there were 1,583 applicants to anthropology degrees in the UK, 1,129 or 71 percent of whom had A-level qualifications. For this reason, our initial research was focused on A-level education, although, as will be discussed later, the focus of the Culture, Identity, Difference learning resource itself became less specific as a result of our consultation with teachers and our other findings.

Having established in our preliminary survey of Sussex undergraduates that few students are explicitly introduced to anthropology
at school, we wanted to identify the implicit anthropology content in a range of A-levels and to devise ways of making this content explicit in a manner that enhanced the teaching and learning experience of the existing curricula. Our starting point was to gain a better sense of which A-level subjects applicants to anthropology undergraduate degree programmes typically take, believing that such choices both reflect the broader educational interests of the prospective students and indicate those A-levels most likely to include (implicit) anthropological content. A statistical report was commissioned from UCAS detailing applicants’ qualifications for the ‘JACS’ subject classification codes for anthropology (L6) and sociology (L3) respectively.5 Table 1 shows the ‘top 10’ most common AS- and A-level qualifications held by applicants to UK anthropology and sociology undergraduate degrees in 2005.

The fact that the majority of applicants to undergraduate sociology programmes possess a sociology A-level demonstrates that there is a clear association between A-level profile and undergraduate degree choice. (We found an even stronger correlation in data collected at Sussex University, with 70 percent of sociology applicants possessing a sociology A-level, and no less than 93 percent of geography applicants possessing a geography A-level.) In this respect, it is also significant to note that the UCAS statistics demonstrate that there were six-and-a-half times as many applicants to sociology degrees in 2005 as there were to anthropology degrees. This point reinforces the potential importance of the new A-level in anthropology as a significant means of popularising the discipline.

Whereas we had expected sociology, religious studies and general studies A-levels to feature prominently at the top of the anthropology applicants’ entry qualifications, we were surprised to find a much more general profile, with, for example, only 24 percent of applicants to anthropology programmes having a sociology A-level. Indeed, aside from strong associations between sociology and geography A-levels and their respective degree programmes, we found a remarkable similarity in the A-level profiles of applicants to the sociology, geography and anthropology programmes that we investigated. English literature figures highly as a very popular choice, for example, whereas the prominence of history in the anthropology applicants’ profiles, compared to psychology in the sociology profiles, suggests a stronger orientation to the humanities rather than science. That said, the presence of biology high in the anthropology profiles reflects the fact that some anthropology programmes teach courses in both social and biological anthropology, and a biology A-level is often an entrance requirement to these programmes.

Table 1: ‘Top 10’ most common AS-/A-level qualifications held by applicants to anthropology and sociology degree programmes in the UK, 2005 (UCAS statistics)

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Literature</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sociology</strong></td>
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<td>685</td>
<td>7016</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>History</strong></td>
<td><strong>Psychology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>584</td>
<td>3893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biology</strong></td>
<td><strong>English Literature</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>446</td>
<td>3252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychology</strong></td>
<td><strong>General Studies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>415</td>
<td>3138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media Studies</strong></td>
<td><strong>History</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>404</td>
<td>2879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Studies</strong></td>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>394</td>
<td>1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociology</strong></td>
<td><strong>Religious Studies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>381</td>
<td>1776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geography</strong></td>
<td><strong>Geography</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>329</td>
<td>1677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Studies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Biology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>280</td>
<td>1377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>French</strong></td>
<td><strong>Media Studies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>213</td>
<td>1320</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The somewhat general character of the anthropology applicants’ A-level profiles informed our decision not to associate the *Culture, Identity, Difference* resource too closely with any particular A-level subject(s). This strategy ran contrary to our original plans and the initial advice of museum education staff, who recommended providing explicit and very specific curriculum links in the resource. We felt that it would be better to produce a more flexible resource that could be used creatively by teachers and students across a range of subjects. Such an approach was encouraged by the teachers with whom we consulted, and was further justified when confronted by the fact that the exact specification of A-level programmes is liable to change. Indeed, our project coincided with a period of wide-reaching revision and reaccreditation of A-level programme specifications in response to the government’s 2005 white paper concerning education reform for 14–19-year-olds (DfES 2005). With continued uncertainty regarding the future of A-levels, this seems a prudent decision if the learning resource is to have a reasonably long ‘shelf life’.

**Working with A-level Curriculum Specifications**

Despite the desire to avoid linking the resource too specifically with particular A-level modules, it was nevertheless important for us to examine the curriculum specifications of a number of key A-level subjects in order for us to identify examples of implicit anthropology content and to ensure that our educational resource was compatible with the teaching and learning approach determined by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and A-level awarding bodies. In choosing which A-level specifications to analyse, we retained our initial inclination towards sociology, general studies and religious studies, but we also explored other subjects such as media studies, psychology and archaeology that we had not anticipated including.

Our research focused on the three major awarding bodies in England and Wales: the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA); Edexcel; and Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR). General studies and religious studies A-levels are offered by all three, whereas sociology is offered only by AQA and OCR. Each of the awarding bodies has its own A-level specifications that accord with the criteria established by QCA, which also has the responsibility of approving each programme. Thus, for each subject researched, it was necessary to examine the QCA subject criteria and assessment objective documents alongside the different awarding bodies’ programme specifications, examiners’ reports, and teacher support handbooks where available.

A detailed analysis was carried out for each of the key A-levels, such that we gained a good working knowledge of the aims and objectives, structure, teaching and assessment methods, and topics covered in each of the qualifications. This familiarity was especially helpful when it came to discussing the practice of teaching these A-levels with teachers. Owing to limitations of space, comment is here restricted to four particularly germane issues:

1. *Assessment methods and teaching approach.*

   The teaching approach determined by A-level programme specifications and assessment methods was much more rigid and prescribed than we had anticipated. We had originally imagined that our learning resource would be most effectively employed in student-directed coursework modules. Whereas coursework seems to be a common assessment component in Key Stage 4 (GCSE, 14–16 years) education, the majority of A-levels are assessed exclusively by examination. The reduction of coursework and increasing use of exams as the standard assessment mode in A-levels was fur-
ther reinforced as part of the curriculum reforms introduced in the wake of the abovementioned 2005 government white paper.

2. Examiners’ comments. We noted examiners’ evident frustration at the narrow range of case examples that candidates use to illustrate their answers to particular exam questions. This lack of variety may be caused by teachers in different schools drawing from the same limited pool of published teaching resources, or else reflect current events covered prominently in the media. Examiners reported that examples were usually UK-focused rather than drawing on cross-cultural or historical examples from other societies. This provides a major incentive for teachers to adopt a learning resource that enables students to draw upon a wide variety of ‘ethnographic’ case examples relating to a given topic.

3. Introduction of ‘Stretch and Challenge’. In response to government directives to ‘encourage teaching that challenges students and promotes independent thought and learning’, optional questions have been introduced into A-level examinations that require extended answers. These are designed ‘to give students the opportunity to demonstrate the full breadth and depth of their knowledge and understanding’ and also to make assessment ‘less formulaic and predictable’ (www.ofqual.gov.uk). This development may increase the demand for learning resources such as ours, which seek to provide complementary material relating to the existing curriculum and encourage students to develop more independent research and study skills.

4. Identification of ‘implicit anthropology’ and ‘bridging concepts’. Our analysis of the A-level programme specifications was largely concerned with identifying topics in each subject curricula which had an implicit anthropology content. A database of ‘anthropological’ topics addressed in the various A-levels was compiled and, as we suspected, there was in fact a great deal of anthropological content implicit within these programmes. To illustrate this point, a summary of anthropological themes in the revised AQA specifications for sociology, general studies and religious studies A-levels is provided in Table 2.

It was, of course, necessary to look beyond the broad topic headings summarized in Table 2 to unpack the thematic content. Thus, the ‘culture and identity’ unit in the sociology A-level involves exploring issues such as socialization; conceptualizations of self, identity and difference; and the relationship of identity to age, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality and social class. In the ‘families and households’ unit, issues such as gender roles, domestic labour and power relationships are addressed, as well as investigations into the diversity of contemporary family and household structures, and the nature of childhood.

Similar content was found in the revised OCR and Edexcel A-level specifications. In each of these A-level subjects, and in others (certainly in English Literature, for example), there is clearly much potential for identifying ‘bridging concepts’ that link their implicit anthropology content with explicit anthropological themes and case examples, and to do so through the medium of ethnographic museum collections.

Consulting with Teachers

At the beginning of our project we had hoped to enlist a large number of A-level teachers in
Table 2: Summary of ‘implicit anthropological’ content in revised AQA A-Level specifications.

**AQA AS-/A-Level Sociology**

| Unit 1 | Culture and identity  
|        | Families and households  
|        | Wealth, poverty and welfare  
| Unit 3 | Critical awareness of contemporary social processes  
|        | Beliefs in society  
|        | Global development  
| Unit 4 | Power and politics  
|        | Stratification and differentiation  
|        | The nature of social ‘facts’  

**AQA AS-/A-Level General Studies A**

| Unit 1 | The similarities and differences between cultures, nature and use of language  
|        | The role of artists and art in society  
|        | The role of religious and value systems; beliefs and values; tolerance and moral issues  
|        | Freedoms, rights and responsibilities  
| Unit 2 | Human and social behaviour and approaches to social studies and policy  
|        | The impact of political and economic issues on science, society and the environment  
| Unit 3 | Research methods in science and social science  
|        | The dilemmas and complexity of multi-faith and pluralist society  
|        | The power of language and images to transmit, persuade and distort  
| Unit 4 | Social interaction at personal, local, national and international levels  
|        | The approach of different social sciences to our understanding of people and problems  
|        | Solving world problems; co-operation and intervention  
|        | The contribution of science and technology to lifestyles in different societies  

**AQA AS-/A-Level Religious Studies**

| Units 1–3 | Philosophy of religion  
|          | Religion, art and the media  
|          | Religion and contemporary society  
|          | Major world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism)  
| Unit 4   | Life, death and beyond  
|          | Religious authority  
|          | Ways of moral decision making  

the Brighton and Hove local authority area as participants in the development of the learning resource. This proved to be much more difficult than anticipated, partly for reasons discussed in the next paragraph. Nevertheless, we did attract a small group of enthusiastic teachers from four different institutions (all state-supported). These were interviewed first by telephone and later in person in an attempt to gain an understanding of their teaching methods, their use of the awarding bodies’ curriculum specifications and teaching plans, their openness to including museum visits as part of their teaching practice, and, more generally, their existing awareness of anthropology.

Discussions with teachers confirmed our impression that very little flexibility is possible within the existing A-level curricula: the subject specifications and teaching materials are often very precisely defined and can limit
more creative approaches. The inclination of teachers to invest in making their lessons more engaging seemed to reflect both their personal motivation and the culture of the institution at which they taught (our impression was that in the better-resourced institutions, the teachers were more inclined to invest imaginatively in their teaching approach). This was also reflected in teachers’ inclinations to include museum visits as part of their teaching practice. Some were very keen to explore the possibilities; others felt that they were already over-committed and did not welcome the prospect of what they perceived as additional workload and responsibility. Whilst schools have generally cut back on extra-mural activities, it is interesting to note that, during the period of our research, the Department for Education and Skills published a manifesto concerned with promoting Learning Outside the Classroom (DfES 2006). The Culture, Identity, Difference resource encourages the use of museums as learning environments and will, it is hoped, appeal to teachers inclined to follow this government directive. However, it became clear to us that the resource should not rely on the organization of class visits to museums in school hours for its effectiveness, but rather be designed to be used in a variety of ways, including wholly classroom-based activities, museum visits by individual students in their own time, and indeed supporting a more formal class visit.

Perhaps the key message that emerged from our initial period of consultation with teachers was that it is crucial that the resource should, as a facilitator of learning, make teaching easier and not more burdensome. Teachers were not necessarily interested in teaching a new subject, for which they would not feel qualified, to their students, but they were interested in anthropological resources that could enhance their current teaching. For these teachers, both the anthropological perspectives introduced in the resource and its use of museum collections as educational media were particularly appealing.

### Examining Existing Museum-based Educational Resources

Our main museum partner in the project was Brighton Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG, part of the Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton and Hove), and since BMAG’s own educational staff were closely involved in the project, we were able to learn from their experience of working with schools and colleges in the Brighton and Hove region, and their expertise in developing teaching and learning resources based on the museum’s collections. In common with many museums, however, BMAG’s existing educational initiatives tend to be targeted at younger students, with Key Stages 3 and 4 particularly well served (i.e. 11–14 and 14–16 age groups). The more advanced level of the Culture, Identity, Difference resource therefore fills a significant gap and this was one of the motivations for BMAG to participate in the research and fund the production of the resource.

As well as reviewing the more general academic literature on object-based learning and museum education (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Roberts 1997; Hein 1998; Hooper-Greenhill 1999), we also surveyed teaching and learning resources produced by the British Museum (BM), the Museum of London (MoL), the Horniman Museum (HM), the Natural History Museum (NHM), and the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM). The majority of these were ‘school visit’ orientated, with advice for teachers on group management in galleries, ideal group size, timing and supervision, as well as suggested activities for use by student groups while visiting (e.g. trails, quizzes, worksheets). A few of the museums also provided suggestions for activities to be done before and/or after visits, though this was not particularly common. Many resources are strongly linked
to national curriculum requirements, although, as noted above, the majority are targeted at younger learners.

Those resources we did find for A-level teachers and/or students at the above museums included bookable study days and gallery visiting guides with extensive bibliographic references for subjects such as archaeology (MoL), art and design (BM), classical civilizations (BM, MoL), English literature (MoL), geography (MoL), history (MoL) and music (PRM). We did not find any A-level resources relating to our primary target subjects (sociology, general studies and religious studies); nor did any of the museums with ethnographic collections (BM, HM, PRM) offer resources that were explicitly aimed at introducing anthropology to educational users from other disciplines.

Developing the Culture, Identity, Difference Learning Resource

We turn now to a discussion of how our research with anthropology students, UCAS statistics, A-level specifications, teachers and museum education resources translated into the development of the Culture, Identity, Difference learning resource itself. A number of phases were involved in this process:

1. Development of the resource concept. As noted above, we were conscious that teachers were not necessarily interested in introducing anthropology in itself to their lessons, but they were interested in using an anthropological resource to enhance their teaching of other subjects. To maximize flexibility in how the resource could be used, we agreed that it should include components that could be disaggregated from one another and reconfigured as desired, rather than be bound in book or booklet form. Based on the key themes that emerged from our study of A-level specifications, we settled on Culture, Identity, Difference as a generic title for the resource, with a more discreet subtitle referring to the discipline of anthropology (Discovering Anthropology through Museum Collections). We wanted the cover of the resource folder to include keywords that teachers could immediately relate to their own teaching interests, and for its design to reflect an ‘anthropological perspective’. This, we felt, could be summed up in the idea of looking at possibly familiar things in a different way, as well as seeing things in a global, cross-cultural way (‘comparison’ thus combined with ‘context’). Our choice was therefore to incorporate an ‘upside-down’ world map image on the cover onto which keywords from a range of A-level subjects would be ‘mapped’.

2. Identification of key ‘bridging concepts’. From our analysis of A-level specifications, we compiled a long-list of bridging concepts that linked the A-level curricula with anthropological topics. From this list, and conscious of needing to identify objects that would ‘speak’ to these topics in the displays of BMAG and comparable museums, we then selected six concepts that would be incorporated into the learning resource as follows:

- Belief
- Ethnicity
- Family
- Gender
- Identity
- Power

3. Identification of key objects on display at BMAG. For each of the six bridging concepts, we identified four objects in the BMAG collections. Each object would speak to the bridging concept theme, and provide a way of introducing the different cultures and societies from which the
objects came. We decided to restrict ourselves to objects currently on display in the museum’s galleries, and those which would stay on display for the foreseeable future. As well as typical ‘ethnographic’ objects from the museum’s ‘World Art’, ‘Performance’ and ‘Body’ galleries, we also wanted to include one object for each bridging concept that teachers and students would already be more familiar with (hence the inclusion of Barbie dolls and a judge’s wig, for instance). We wanted to include objects from diverse geographical regions and to include contemporary as well as historical material. After much deliberation, the 24 objects listed in Table 3 were chosen for inclusion in the resource.

Whilst we associated each of these objects with a particular bridging concept, we wanted to design the resource in such a way as to make it clear that this was a somewhat arbitrary choice, and that any of the objects could, in principle, be used in conjunction with any of the bridging concepts. We also hoped that, by including more familiar ‘Western’ objects, teachers and students might think about how everyday objects around them also ‘speak’ to the issues addressed in the resource.

4. Object research, photography and creation of ‘object lessons’. Having identified which objects would feature in the learning resource, it was necessary to conduct original research on each of the objects. This included collating what information was already available about the objects at BMAG, but also using the resources of the British Museum’s Centre for Anthropology and conducting other library- and internet-based research. The objective was to produce a series of short ‘object lesson’ texts for each of the objects. Over two sides of A4, these each follow the same template, and, under the subheadings ‘What is this object?’, ‘Where does it come from?’, ‘What does it tell us about belief (or whichever bridging concept it is being associated with)?’, and ‘How did it get to Brighton Museum?’, information is provided about the object, its original context, its relationship with a particular bridging concept, and its new context as part of a museum collection. Each object

**Table 3**: Brighton Museum and Art Gallery objects chosen to articulate with the bridging concepts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Sinhalese disease mask, Sri Lanka</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Guanyin, Chinese goddess of mercy</td>
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<td>Mande amulet necklace, West Africa</td>
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<td>Hindu shrine, Gujarati community, Brighton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Fire Dreaming painting, Western Desert, Australia</td>
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<td>Hairdresser’s signboard, Kenya</td>
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<td>George and the Dragon carnival costume, Brighton</td>
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<td>Rawang headman’s dress, Burma</td>
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<td>Family</td>
<td>Gogodala headdress, Papua New Guinea</td>
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<td>Wedgwood ceramic wedding group, England</td>
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<td>Malagan fish sculpture, New Ireland</td>
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<td>Karamojong headdress, Uganda</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
<td>Abelam clan spirit figure, Papua New Guinea</td>
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<td>Igbo maiden mask and costume, Nigeria</td>
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<td>Sande society mask and costume, Sierra Leone</td>
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<td>Barbie for President 2000 dolls, USA</td>
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<td>Identity</td>
<td>Akha headdresses, Burma, Thailand, China</td>
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<td>Chinese shoes</td>
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<td>Maori ancestor figure, New Zealand</td>
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<td>Neo-classical European bust, England</td>
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<td>Power</td>
<td>Asante state swords, Ghana</td>
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<td>Abeokuta sculpture, Nigeria</td>
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<td>Tlingit raven rattle, Canada</td>
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<td>Full-bottomed legal wig, England</td>
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Figure 1: Two sample object lesson sets: a Sri Lankan ‘demon mask’, associated with the ‘Belief’ theme, and three ‘Barbie for President’ dolls, associated with the ‘Gender’ theme.
lesson sheet also includes a regional map showing where the object had originated, as well as contextual images showing similar objects in use or further illustrating the text. New photographs were also taken of each object, including close-up shots of details mentioned in the object lesson texts: these images are arranged on a separate A4 sheet, without text, as a purely visual resource for each object, encouraging students to develop their observational skills. Two sample object lesson sets are shown in Figure 1.

5. Organization of the resource. The resource was designed in a loose-leaf A4 format and collated in a ring binder. It is divided into two parts: a short ‘Orientation’ part, which includes an introduction to the resource, notes on how to use the resource (encouraging experimentation), a short introduction to the discipline of anthropology (with recommendations for further reading), practical notes on the museum as a learning environment, and a museum-based activity sheet entitled ‘Learning to look’. The second part of the resource is entitled ‘Object lessons’ and comprises six tabbed sections corresponding to each of the bridging concepts (i.e. ‘Belief’, ‘Ethnicity’, ‘Family’, ‘Gender’, ‘Identity’ and ‘Power’) (Figure 2). Page numbering has been kept to a bare minimum, since we did not want to suggest that there is only one way of ordering or arranging the materials, and whilst each section is colour-coded so that they can be easily reassembled, we wanted to ensure that the design allowed teachers to take the pack apart and use it in creative ways.

Piloting the Resource

Throughout the development process outlined above, we continued to liaise with our group of teacher-consultants, and before finalizing the design and getting the resource printed, we created a high-quality draft version with which to pilot it. Collecting and collating feedback from this piloting process was funded by the RAI’s Education Programme, with most trialling of the resource taking place in the Summer Term of 2008.

The draft resource was distributed to 18 A-level teachers drawn from our initial focus group and supplemented by members of the teacher reference group that has been working with the RAI’s Education Committee at different stages of developing the anthropology A-level. The resource was trialled across a number of different A-level subjects, including: sociology, psychology, religious studies, travel and tourism, archaeology and media studies.

All but one of the teachers who piloted the resource were supportive of the decision not to include specific curriculum links and appreciated the opportunity to be creative with a learning resource that did not curtail their own teaching skills. This also meant that the teachers used the resource in relation to subjects and modules that we had not necessarily anticipated in our planning: thus, as well as sociology modules on ‘the individual and society’, which we had anticipated, it was also used to support teaching on the socio-cultural impact of tourism, or to help psychology students think about cultural biases in psychology methodologies, for example. Some teachers valued the inclusion of activity sheets, while others preferred to use the resource to get students to think and talk more freely.

Teachers reported using the resource for group work, with numbers ranging from small discussion groups of two or three students to groups of over 25. The time devoted to the resource ranged from a single one-hour session to five full-length afternoon sessions and a day trip to a museum. Despite these different teaching contexts, various trends emerged in the piloting. For example, a number of respon-
Figure 2: The ‘object lesson’ part of the resource, with ‘tabbed’ bridging concept sections. Pictured is the ‘index page’ for the ‘Power’ section, with images of the Asante state swords, Abeokuta sculpture, Tlingit raven rattle, and a full-bottomed legal wig.
Students explained how they had started a session by distributing the image sheets and asking the students to extract as much information as possible from these purely visual media before distributing the object lesson information sheets. Thus, a psychology teacher from Hove explained how she distributed image sheets from the ‘Power’ and ‘Family’ themes, got the students to discuss them, and then used the information sheets to explain what the objects were and where they had come from. She then got the students to discuss how each object related to the concepts of power and family. The teacher described how a free-flowing debate then ensued, covering topics such as knives acting as symbols of power for young adults today (relating to the Asante state swords); the power represented by a judge’s wig as opposed to a crown, leading to a discussion of the power of the law court versus the power of monarchy in contemporary Britain; the continued validity of the ideal nuclear family in British society; and interpretations of the depiction of a European figure in an African sculpture (the Abeokuta sculpture), leading to a discussion of European representations of and attitudes towards African societies in general. Other teachers remarked on how the resource’s focus on material culture enabled students to engage more easily with abstract concepts, and how looking and learning about artefacts from other cultures helped students think about their own culture and society, and their place within it.

Whereas we had been careful to design an anthropological resource that would support a range of different A-levels, some teachers preferred to use the resource to introduce students to the discipline of anthropology more specifically. Thus a sociology teacher at a further education college in Norwich created an optional series of five three-hour sessions around the resource, expecting perhaps five or six students to attend. Considering that the sessions were held in the students’ own time and in addition to their regular college commitments, she was pleasantly surprised that 35 students attended the first session, with 26 or 27 regularly attending the subsequent sessions. Each session was based on a different theme covered by the resource, with all concepts except ‘Belief’ utilized. This teacher explained how students particularly liked being ‘let loose’ on the images of the artefacts and being encouraged to think and talk freely in identifying what they were and where they came from. It is a tribute to the skills of this teacher and the commitment from students that she was able to engender around the resource that a day-trip to Cambridge University’s Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) was organized and enthusiastically attended. (As preparation for the visit, this teacher got students to identify and download images of MAA objects comparable to the BMAG objects that featured in the resource, demonstrating how the resource can indeed be imaginatively ‘localized’ and its effectiveness not limited to those within reach of Brighton.)

Indeed, whilst many of the teachers piloting the resource utilized it exclusively in the classroom, others also built in museum visits to support classroom exercises. Where teachers preferred ‘self-motivated’ rather than ‘organized’ visits, this was not simply because organized trips place greater demands on teachers, but also because it reflected their pedagogical approach. Thus one Brighton-based teacher found the resource effective in helping students to acquire and develop independent learning skills and to realize that there are learning opportunities beyond their classrooms and textbooks.

Teachers were asked how their students responded to the material and whether they felt it had enhanced students’ learning ability. In general teachers reported that it often made textbook learning about concepts and other cultures seem ‘more real’. A travel and tourism A-level teacher from Peterborough commented that students showed improvements in recording and retrieving information after
their work on the ‘Identity’ section of the resource. In particular, he noted that it was helpful in sharpening students’ critical analysis ability, their ability to retain information, and their skills at analysing visual information. A colleague from the same school teaching religious studies commented that the quality and presentation of the photographs was a significant aid in getting students to engage with the resource. One sociology teacher from London trialled the ‘Family’ section with his students and was struck by how it challenged their assumptions about the ‘absence of culture’ in British society:

It was interesting to see how many students did not have a sense of how much symbolism is included in British marriage (comparing it to today’s version of partnership, and whether it is lost), although most of them are from a South Asian background and knew and compared it to their own ceremonies and symbolism.

One interesting point was raised by a teacher about the use of printed image sheets, as opposed to images projected in a PowerPoint presentation for instance. Being able to hold the images enabled some of her less intellectually or verbally confident students to take part in discussions from which they might otherwise have been excluded:

Students could simply point and say ‘Look at this thing on the top’ or ‘Why’s he doing that?’ without embarrassing themselves by their lack of precise vocabulary.

There was a more general sense in which being able to hold the images, look at them closely and identify things of interest made the artefacts much more approachable and accessible. There was also a welcome and liberating sense for some students of a ‘levelling of the playing field’, as the artefacts and information about them were, for the most part, new to everybody.

Some of these latter points speak to the wider rationale of our project: that is, to help unlock the value of material culture (and hence museums as particular repositories of material culture) as pedagogic tools. Our aim was to show how thinking about things allows us to think beyond things and to engage with abstract concepts (Pearce 1990; Paris 2002). This rationale is nothing new, of course, and it motivated the assembling of many public museum collections in the first place, but object-based learning has become increasingly marginalized in mainstream education, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels. The museum visit has thus become seen as a peripheral activity rather than an essential part of the curriculum, and as a result a valuable alternative to text-based learning has become neglected. More generally, however, our hope has been that ‘object lessons’ can encourage closer observation of the material environment within but also outside the marked context of the museum.

**Revisiting Anthropology, Museums and the A-level Curriculum**

Piloting the draft version of the *Culture, Identity, Difference* resource resulted in some suggestions for minor modifications that we were able to incorporate into the final version, which was published by the Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton and Hove in January 2009. On the whole, however, the piloting process confirmed the potential value of the resource to teachers and students across a range of A-level subjects in the social sciences and humanities. At the time of writing we are conducting further evaluation work with teachers using the finished resource, and we are also collecting feedback from museum educators and museum ethnographers in different museums in the UK.

One of our current objectives is to consider whether a version of the resource could be developed specifically in support of the new anthropology A-level. It would, of course, be
somewhat ironic if *Culture, Identity, Difference* were to be adopted as a teaching resource for the A-level given that it was designed to introduce anthropology to those who were not already studying or teaching it. However, this would also further demonstrate the value of designing a resource that facilitates such flexibility of use and function.

Many museum professionals with whom we have discussed the issue have been impressed by the quality of research and the production values that have gone into making *Culture, Identity, Difference* and doubt that similar resources could be mobilized to create a version that substitutes their own ethnographic collections for those of BMAG, which feature in the current version. This is to miss the point in a way, since the objective would be to create a version of the resource that was not site- or collection-specific, but one that would work at a more general level. There is, however, a greater doubt in the minds of many museum professionals that we have encountered, and this is a belief that secondary school teachers cannot be enticed to bring their students into the museum.

In the light of our experiences developing the *Culture, Identity, Difference* resource, we have to wonder whether museums are as much to blame as teachers or the current assessment-orientated ethos of secondary education promoted by qualification authorities. The problem seems to lie in a continuing adherence to outmoded notions of what a museum is, or at least what its pedagogical function is. This is the notion of the museum as a didactic educational arena: a dry space of facts and esoteric specialisms that can intimidate the generalist. In our research, we have been confronted by the perhaps understandable concern of educators (whether teachers or museum personnel) that they will not be able to meet students' expectations and provide the necessary expert curatorial knowledge to explain a particular object or context. In terms of safeguarding their own professional authority and identity, it is much safer for such educators to regard museums as an educational environment for younger learners who can be sent out to make drawings of exhibits or answer simple questionnaires.

Rather than regarding museums as didactic educational spaces, what we have attempted to engage with in the *Culture, Identity, Difference* resource is an alternative conceptualization of the museum as a space of encounter, exploration and experimentation (Basu and Macdonald 2007), where the meaning or significance of an object emerges dialogically with differently situated audience members and with their existing interests and knowledges (Hooper-Greenhill 1999). Seen in this way, it is the questions that we pose to ‘things’ (and the questions that they pose to us) that are most important. To question the point of a blunted sword or the purpose of wearing an archaic style of a wig carries its own lessons that do not require expert knowledges, only a willingness to approach familiar issues – about power and its symbols, for instance – in creative ways. The skills that such a reconceptualization demands are eminently transferable ones – observation, critical analysis, lateral thinking – rather than narrower fields of enquiry that might justifiably be regarded as the domain of the curator or collector.

Indeed, those exceptional museums that have invested energy and resources into developing senior secondary (and higher) education use have recognized that, as well as providing routes into subject-specific knowledges, one of the primary roles of education staff is to teach teachers about museums and material culture more generally, including exploring the nature of knowledge in museums and the kinds of transferable observational and analytic skills mentioned above. As education staff at the Manchester Museum explained to us, much time is spent explaining to both students and teachers how much museum staff do not know about the things they work with. Freed from expectations that they should be the font of
all knowledge, teachers are able to experiment more confidently with the museum and its collections as inspirational learning resources.

Such an approach might be described as an ‘ethnographic’ one. It is an approach that places observation, experience and inductive reasoning above the mere replication of pre-formulated knowledges. And, of course, observational and analytical skills honed in the precincts of the museum may be extended to the ‘real world’ beyond, such that students are encouraged to look about themselves and reflect on and analyse their own social and cultural environments.

The association between anthropology, museums and ethnographic collecting has a long and, indeed, ambivalent history (Stocking 1985; Shelton 2006). A legacy of this association is the remarkable diaspora of ethnographic artefacts that can be found in museums great and small throughout Europe and North America, the contemporary relevance of which is sometimes brought into question (Shelton 1992). At the same time, the relevance of anthropological perspectives on contemporary issues – for example, those relating to issues of culture, identity and difference – is beyond doubt. In the Culture, Identity, Difference learning resource, we have sought to reconcile these anthropological applications, demonstrating that there is indeed an important contemporary use for historical ethnographic collections in formal as well as informal education, not least in supporting senior secondary-level teaching and learning on themes such as belief, ethnicity, family, gender, identity and power that feature in a wide array of A-level curricula. In so doing, our objective has been to raise the profile of anthropology among sixth-form teachers and students in the belief that this will raise public consciousness of the discipline and of the value of its contribution to public debates more generally.

Beyond these objectives, however, what our resource seeks to promote is an ‘anthropological consciousness’ among learners. It is not concerned with the communication of ethnographic facts and figures, but with helping students and educators discover for themselves a new way of looking at, thinking about and engaging with the world – an ethnographic way.

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Simon Coleman is Jackman Professor at the Centre for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto. He was previously Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sussex and Editor of the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and is currently co-editor of Religion and Society: Advances in Research. He has interests in charismatic Christianity, pilgrimage and hospital chaplaincy, and has carried out fieldwork in Sweden, England and more recently in Nigeria. He has worked on a number of projects funded through C-SAP relating to students’ experiences and knowledge of anthropology before, during and after their undergraduate careers.

Notes

1. In addition to ourselves, the project team included Katherine Prior, Sarah Posey and Nicole Blum, and we were assisted at different stages by Su Hepburn, Helen Mears, Harriet Hughes and Derek Lee. Michael O’Hanlon kindly acted as an external evaluator of the project. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our colleagues in this project, as well as our funders (C-SAP, the RAI, the Department of Anthropology at Sussex.

2. In the UK, only three IB schools/colleges presented candidates in anthropology in 2007: Truro College, Cirencester College and Deacon’s School, Peterborough (Marzia Balzani pers. comm.).

3. <www.ucas.com/students/beforeyouapply/whatstudysteam/stamfordtest>. UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) is the organization responsible for managing applications to higher education courses in the UK.

4. An A-level qualification consists of advanced subsidiary (AS) and A2 units typically taken over two years. The AS can be taken as a standalone qualification or as the first half of a full A-level qualification. Applicants to undergraduate anthropology programmes at UK universities typically need a minimum of three full A-level qualifications.

5. The Joint Academic Classification of Subjects (JACS) system is used by UCAS and other agencies to classify academic subjects, especially at undergraduate level.

6. The Department of Education and Skills was subsequently reorganized and its remit is currently split between the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (the latter being currently responsible for Higher Education in England).

References


Girl Museum: a Global Project

Ashley E. Remer

Introduction

Girl Museum is a virtual art and social history museum dedicated to researching the unique experience of growing up female, and documenting this through telling stories and exhibiting historic and contemporary images and material culture related to this experience. At Girl Museum, we want to raise global awareness about the issues and realities of both nature and nurture that face girls today and will face them tomorrow, via the lessons of yesterday. To achieve this, we are doing original research, producing exhibitions, building an archive, and partnering with individuals who are already out there doing good work and with organizations that support them, as well as providing venues in which girls themselves can have a voice.

I am the founder and Head Girl of Girl Museum. I was born in Gainesville, Florida, on 12 October 1974 and my parents were always open-minded and respectful of me as an individual. As a whole, the family encouraged my creativity and fairly wild imagination, while instilling in me a staunch commitment to volunteerism and social justice. My interests have always resided in cultural history and the arts, and, luckily, I have been able to work in the theater, museums, galleries and universities throughout my life. These are just a few facts about me, but it is important for you to know them since they inform the ethos, and shape the framework of Girl Museum.

Origins

The origins of Girl Museum lie deep in the memories of my own 1970s girlhood. My first memory of the being-a-girl meta message was not defined by what I wore or wanted to be. I could be anything I wanted and didn’t know any other way of being. My moral code came directly from the sentiments behind the Free to Be You and Me soundtrack: be...
kind, honest, fair, and be yourself. Armed with pioneers, adventurers and comediennes as my heroines, like Pippi Longstocking, Laura Ingalls Wilder and Lily Tomlin, I was set to conquer the world.

Then everything changed in 1981. Not only was the entire country shifting in its attitude towards personal and social freedom, but I came face to face with the realization that only boys could be Indiana Jones when they grew up. Trying not to let this get me down, I became obsessed with archaeology, anthropology and art history, as well as learning how to use a bullwhip. Unbeknown to me, this attempt to be Dr Jones shaped the rest of my life: I developed what I think of as my own proto-museological methodology and practice; I was approaching the world as a precocious amateur curator, creating my own way of categorizing stuff before I learned about the “proper process”. Mine was a world of collection and analysis, of delving into layers of meanings and obscured truths, always looking for the next mystery to solve. And that is how, broadly speaking, Girl Museum came to be.

The conception of Girl Museum

My first job after graduating from university was as a security guard at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. This is the perfect training ground for doing research into how people interact on a mass scale with art, with space and with each other. My informal analysis revealed that both the visitors and the museum had a fundamental unawareness of each other’s expectations. During the many hours of observation and discussions with staff and visitors, I imagined the ideal museum to visit and in which to work. What I learned from my time in those hallowed halls was that I love the past and want to preserve it, but only as a set of lessons for the living.

Another observation I took away was about children and art. Of course they love the mummies, but they really want to see themselves. This was most easily achieved in the wing devoted to the 19th cen-
tury because that was the period during which most of the images of children were produced. This realization imprinted itself on me, but I didn't ever investigate why it did. Years later, while working on my MA, I recalled this fact. I was pulling together my interest in archaeology, art history and anthropology into a neat package with my research into children's grave decoration and this brought me to the France and England of the 18th and 19th centuries—deep into the notion of childhood as represented in art.

It was a natural progression to shift my focus to girls in art. In my pursuit of the discipline of academic art history, I was made aware of three issues of particular relevance here: the lack of women artists; the extremes of feminist art; and the revisioning of the art historical canon to account for these missing women. But this revisioning was focused primarily on the producers of art, not on the subjects: this, for me, was the problem. At first glance, girls in art history are limited to saints, sinners, princesses, and prostitutes. I had never seen girlhood per se exhibited in a museum environment. Since I do not see art and life as separate things with mutually exclusive sets of values and expectations and had been imagining for years that I would start my own museum, there came the point when my deferred dream made me sit up and say, “If not now, when?” So I decided to give myself a job and start a museum dedicated to girls.

I envisaged the Girl Museum as a new model of an old institution: a freestanding virtual online museum, with no stanchions and no offices. It would be open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and have no admission charge. It would neither own nor invest in objects so would not be involved in their accession or de-accession. It would act co-operatively, endorse and support other museums, non-profit organizations and NGOs. It would use the Internet to its fullest capacity by using copyright-free images and would leave (almost) no carbon footprint.

Birth

Girl Museum Inc. was born in March 2009. After about forty-eight hours of learning furiously how to create something from scratch in Photoshop, I had given my baby its first logo. The next task was giving
the baby some clothes, in the form of a website. While I knew that it was really important to make a good first impression and essential to focus on the mission and the ethos of the project, there was also some urgency. So, for the sake of speed, a very simple site was soft launched in July, while I made a plan for a more in-depth version.

**Early development**

To address the concerns I have as a museum professional, an art historian, an anthropologist and a woman, I developed a plan to allow us to have four exhibition streams with accompanying educational curricula: our point of view is a girl-centred one so we are able to look at art in a different light so as to counter the traditional skewed perspective. The first is *Girlhood in Art*, which has a fine arts focus. In this series we consider topics, such as those covered in our “Girl Saints” and “Illustrated Girls” exhibitions that one would be unlikely to find in a traditional institution. (“Girl Saints” opened on 24 December 2010 and “Illustrated Girls” will open in late 2011.) *Art of Girlhood* takes an anthropological approach to specific aspects of girlhood; it is based on fieldwork and interviews. Many of the subjects in this exhibition such as, for example, an examination of Japan’s Girls’ Day and the changing traditional roles of girls in urbanized Polynesia, come from essays I wrote or ideas I had as a graduate student. *Girls in the World* addresses contemporary social issues within an historical context. The current state of the world is, I believe, the result of unheeded lessons and poor decisions made in the past, so it is important to bring to light the historical context behind issues like the state of education for girls today, so-called honor killings and female genital mutilation. *GirlSpeak* is our interactive and community-driven exhibition series; it is the most flexible. Within this section, we can involve specific community projects and support groups; put out a call for submissions; and help girls curate their own shows. The plan is to launch a new exhibition every three to four months. Currently we have eight original exhibitions in various stages of research, development and production.
This was really the time of serious planning, writing and reaching out to people with whom I had grown up and who knew about non-profit organizations so that I could learn from them and get advice. During that initial high of bringing forth a new entity into the world, I was worried that filling in a form incorrectly would bring the IRS to my door instantly. Actually creating a non-profit organization was difficult without a lawyer, but it was doable. After only two and half months of incorporation, I applied for 501(c)3 status and got it after five months.

First Year

In the expected economic life cycle of a non-profit organization, we are still in the start-up or invention phase. We are just starting to tick the boxes that lay the groundwork. Our museum took its first steps. We launched our first exhibition, *Defining Our Terms*, on 3 November 2009. This was crucial since it enabled us to showcase our mission, set our definitions and show how this whole project would work in exhibition format. Its functions included being our inaugural exhibition as well as a brochure guide to the museum as a whole.

By December 2009 I felt that I had barely scratched the surface of what needed to be done. But, in nine short months, we had received our non-profit status; built our website; written a very basic business plan; launched our blog and first exhibition; become a partner in the Flip Video Spotlight Program; applied for three other small grants; received several donations; and had our first meetings with important women like Dr Claudia Mitchell. With the next few months already packed with meetings, research agendas and exhibitions, there was no time to feel anything beyond the need to move forward. Our website got a make-over, which was nowhere near what we envisioned but it was a step up from what we had, with slightly more depth and interaction.
While we offer our exhibitions, resources and curricula, the vision for our online building is yet to be realized. In spite of this, I have received many unsolicited emails from people who want to be friends and who offered assistance to us. Among these I found a very special message. Miriam Forman-Brunell, Professor of History at University of Missouri-Kansas City offered support and guidance that came just when we were in need of outside validation. Miriam’s “friending” of the museum sparked the motivation to create the Advisory Board and some of the most amazing women in the field agreed to lend their support. Running a museum is no easy task and not one to take on alone. Finding others to believe in one’s personal dream is difficult, especially when the mission requires enormous passion and time, and promises little or no monetary reward. Luckily I reached out to receptive women to help form the inaugural Girl Museum Board, also known as the League of Extraordinary Women. Dr Teri R Yoo is the Communications Coordinator and Webmaster for the Florida State University Fine Arts Museum as well as the Museum Studies Graduate Certificate Program Academic Coordinator. Mercedes Pino is the Director of Career Services at St Thomas University School of Law. Their friendship and expertise have helped nurture this fledgling project and has encouraged me when all seemed impossible.

Overwhelmed by the amount of work still to do—on the table and in my head—I did what any self-respecting museum does: I advertised for interns. The response was excellent: both the academic and experience level of the women who applied was beyond my expectations. While it is a distressing snapshot of the industry for those trying to get jobs, it was a testament to our purpose that such outstanding girls wanted to be volunteers. After a month, I assembled a team of seven interns from around the world—our first cohort of Junior Girls. Working very hard from the start, these women have helped create exhibitions and curricula, write articles for the blog as well as apply for grants. I could not have imagined a better team.

A dream came true with the opportunity to travel to Japan for *Hina Matsuri* or Girls’ Day. Thanks to the wonderful support of the Asia New Zealand Foundation, I received a grant to visit Tokyo, Kyoto, Wakayama and Katsuura in March 2010 to research and document the celebration of Girls’ Day. Not only was the trip professionally and per-
personally rewarding, but I made wonderful contacts and incubated ideas for possible future projects about girl culture in urban Japan.

When I applied for the travel grants I saw that I would have to adjust to a necessity that challenged my fundamental concept of Girl Museum. Despite wanting us to be completely virtual, I realized that we needed to produce real temporary community-based exhibitions wherever possible to accompany the online exhibitions. I began to see this as a way of providing local girls with opportunities for creativity and activity—a perfect way to get them involved in what we are doing, so this Asia: New Zealand Cultural grant, along with another from the generous New Zealand Japan Exchange Program, provided the funds to create a physical exhibition to present at Japanese festivals in New Zealand. *Hina Matsuri: Celebrating Girls’ Day in Japan* took place on 5 September 2010 in Wellington and on 25 September 2010 in Auckland. The online exhibition was launched on 1 October 2010.

**Eighteen Months Old**

As Girl Museum opens up to the world, seeking partners and collaborations with the public, we continue to grow. Having a Facebook page and a presence on other social networking sites is fine, but quite meaningless unless there are real connections. Our first outreach exhibition honored women’s and girls’ history by featuring a girlhood heroine on each day of March—Women’s History Month. The idea was for women and girls to send in an image along with a short blurb about a heroine—what she meant to them as a child and how she made an impact on their lives. Our plan was to turn these submissions into quilt squares and weave them together into a virtual *Heroines’ Quilt*. Despite a few technical glitches, the project was fairly successful and we achieved our goal.
Arranging play dates for Girl Museum has been a challenge. Some see the project as interesting, others don’t quite get it. Many want to be involved, but just don’t know how. I became aware of many of these issues at the 2010 American Association of Museums (AAM) conference in Los Angeles. For the most part, people were very positive about Girl Museum; many saw us, not as a new upstart, but, rather, as a slow burner. My potential as a museum director was recognized by the AAM in their awarding me an Emerging Museum Professionals fellowship. This was an honor and it has given me a great opportunity, from a different perspective, to meet other people who are doing interesting things. Through the AAM’s mentoring program, I was fortunate enough to have Mary Case as my guide. She was very supportive and the mentoring programme was advantageous. I will be on a panel with several others discussing non-traditional museums as vital forces at the 2011 AAM conference in Houston.

Growing Up

The best and most challenging part of a project like Girl Museum is the vastness of its possibilities. Every day I try not to have too many ideas about new exhibitions and projects and ways that we can connect to people; I must resist feeling overwhelmed. My personal plan for Girl Museum’s future is to take it slowly, to build the museum with carefully considered baby steps, rather than get too big too quickly, become unable to cope and lose control. First, I want to take back the word girl itself from being only a derogatory term or a consumer group category. Next, I want to offer a clear and positive choice to young people googling “girl” to help counter the millions of pornographic returns. Also, we need to learn how to raise money. Fundraising is essential for non-profit organizations. With our model of having extremely low overheads with no physical building to maintain, no acquisition budget and minimal costs, and engaging top quality volunteers dedicated to the mission, I
have faith that the money will come. I believe that when we do seek funds we will be transparent and thin enough (in a business sense) for donors to feel confident that their money will be funding projects directly rather than being used for expenses like building maintenance, couriers and so on. We don’t fit the current definition of what a museum is for the purposes of grants but I have decided that it is better not to distort ourselves to comply with these categories. Eventually they will expand and we will be welcomed. As long as we focus on our virtual structure as well as on our collaborative site-specific, community-driven expressions of creativity, advocacy and protest, we can maintain our integrity.

While the impetus and the methodology of Girl Museum have come from art, the most important aspects of this project are making connections with girls out there in the world, doing good work, advocating for girls, and putting our great ideas into practice. Eventually we would like to produce documentaries and short films as well as provide opportunities and support for girls to express their creativity in a safe and supportive multimedia environment. We welcome any inquiries and suggestions for projects to showcase or develop.

I hope this review has inspired you to go and do something productive that honors the girls in your life.

With an MA in Art History from the University of Auckland, Ashley E. Remer has traveled the world as a cultural nomad, working as an art historian, writer, editor, curator, and critic. Currently based in New Zealand, Ashley is the founder and Head Girl of the newly established Girl Museum Inc, an online museum dedicated to research and exhibiting contemporary and historic cross-cultural representations of girlhood. She is also a Content Developer/Associate Producer for the international exhibition design firm, Story Inc.

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Who Is a Victim of Communism?

Gender and Public Memory in the Sighet Museum, Romania

Alina Haliliuc

Abstract

The Memorial Museum of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance is the main museum of communism in Romania. This article attends to this museum’s politics of representing gender and argues that its exhibits reify resistance to and victimization by the communist regime as masculine. The museum marginalizes women, in general, and renders unmemorable women’s lives under Nicolae Ceaușescu’s pronatalist regime, in particular. The absence is significant because Romania is the only country in the former communist bloc where women experienced unique forms of systematic political victimization under Ceaușescu’s nationalist-socialist politics of forced birth. This article illustrates how the museum’s investment in an anti-communist discourse creates a gendered representation of political action under the communist regime.

Keywords: abortion, communism, Nicolae Ceaușescu, memorialization, post-socialism, pronatalism, resistance, socialism, victimization, women

The issue of a masculine bias in conceptualizing East European and Russian dissent to communist regimes is little explored in historical scholarship. Although many scholars documented the profoundly gendered ways in which communist states controlled their populations, an implicitly male model of dissent still dominates our understanding of resistance to these regimes. Maria Bucur notes that, as scholars of dissent in the communist bloc focused predominantly on male intellectuals, “‘dissent’ has been defined and understood beyond gender divisions but, in effect, in an implicitly sexist manner.” In this model, public, visible, vocal, and explicit forms of dissent are valued over private, less visible, embodied, and implicit ones. A long-challenged bourgeois distinction between the private and public spheres is reified in this way, as only public actions are coded as political, on the grounds that they are spoken or done on behalf of the entire population. Actions performed in the private sphere are coded as women’s issues and non-representative for the larger public. Reminding scholars of the extent to which the communist totalitarian regimes controlled the
realm of the family, the body, and sexuality, Bucur advocates for an embodied turn in our understanding of dissent. As communist regimes made the family and the body sites of intense regulation to ensure the workforce needed in controlled economies, acts that reclaimed a private space from the invasive government could be construed as forms of dissidence.

The performative notion of dissidence that Bucur proposes gains particular relevance when considering dissent in communist Romania, where Nicolae Ceaușescu’s regime constituted “an extreme instance of state intrusion into the bodies and lives of its citizens.” Ceaușescu banned abortion under almost all circumstances between 1966 and 1989, with the socialist-nationalist objective of increasing the population to secure Romania’s autonomy. Gail Kligman emphasizes that “the customary connotation of ‘demographic policy’ as understood in the West does not adequately capture the extent to which demography was harnessed for ideological goals by the Ceaușescu regime,” which saw demography as crucial for state sovereignty in the Soviet bloc and internationally. The strict implementation of this socialist-nationalist legislation led to political interrogations, imprisonment, and thousands of deaths among women of reproductive age who tried to have illegal abortions.

Given the centrality of women’s bodies to the reproduction of Ceaușescu’s political regime and women’s full awareness of the legal repressive measures of their actions, I consider, with Bucur, Romanian women’s illegal abortions as political dissent. It is true that not all women viewed their illegal abortions as conscious political acts, and may have decided to abort for personal reasons, such as more control over their careers or a more decent standard of living. But when the boundaries between the public and the private were so painfully porous under socialism, women’s insistence on treating their bodies as a private realm and not socialist property for reproducing the state, meant performing, in full awareness of legal repercussions, acts of resistance to the socialist regime.

In Romania’s Museum of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance, located in Sighet (hereafter, the Sighet Museum), the masculine bias in conceptualizing political oppression and resistance under communism is unshaken. Exhibits about the first years of communism feature actions done by and for men in the public sphere, while exhibits about Ceaușescu’s regime almost completely disregard women’s abortion-related experiences. By placing the Sighet Museum in the context of post-socialist public efforts to remember the recent past, this article offers a close reading of its exhibits that unpacks the ways women’s voices and actions are marginalized and erased in the first and most popular museum about the communist regime.

The Public Memory of Communism in Contemporary Romania

The Politics of Public Memory and the “Unmemorable”

It has become an axiom across the disciplines that public memory is rhetorical and an important source in the formation of publics and identities. As John Gillis notes, “the core meaning of any individual group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time
and space, is sustained by remembering, and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity." If personal memory is alive, that is, changing, fluid, selective, and open to the vagaries of forgetting and misremembering, public memory is a mode of remembering that aims at “fixing” what people remember. In doing so, public memories are future-oriented and intervene in the construction of publics and identities.

While “fixing” a person’s or a community’s memories is never complete, given that meaning is not set in “texts” or “artifacts,” but in the fluid interplay between them and individual reception, the available public memories deserve critical interrogation as they are important imaginative resources for self- and collective understanding. When social actors with enough cultural, economic, and political capital build enduring memory sites ranging from museums and memorials, to iconic journalistic images and stamp collections, the feminist scholar is left to wonder what is considered worth remembering and what is deemed unworthy to enter the field of public representation.

As Nikolai Vukov explains in his analysis of museum-based memory in post-socialist Bulgaria, memories that do not enter public representation may be “experiences that are well-known and can be revived by an act of recollection, but are generally not treated that way … They are retained in the memory but are prevented from being displayed … present in the mind, but hidden from view; they have undeniable presence but are denied materialization.” The tension here is not between memory and forging, but between memory and representation in highly public and authoritative sites of memory such as memorial museums. By sanctioning publicly what is worth remembering about the past, sites of memory such as the Sighet Museum try to intervene in the memory and identity of both those who lived through and those who came after the communist era.

The Memory of Communism in Romania

In Romania’s museum of communism, women’s abortion-related experiences remain “unmemorable.” Public memory fluctuated after 1989 between the political and ideological interests of the neo-communist political parties invested in forgetting communist offenses, on the one hand, and their opposition invested in remembering and indicting the communist regime, on the other hand, with silencing effects for women’s experiences.

Romanians’ problematic dealing with their past was announced by the bloody “revolution” of 1989 and its aftermath. The country was the only one in Central and Eastern Europe not to have had a “velvety” change of political regime: over one thousand people were killed in 1989, including communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife. The Romanian Communist Party, proportionally the biggest in the communist bloc, disappeared overnight, while the post-communist political elite, consisting mainly of former occupants of the upper echelons of the Communist Party, now branded themselves as liberals. Given the moral ambiguity among both the political elite and regular citizens, public explorations into the communist past have been marked by either erasure or moralizing memorial efforts.

Remembering the Romanian communist past was not a priority of the post-communist administration. President Ion Iliescu founded the National Institute for the
Study of Totalitarianism in 1993, but this official effort was rather perfunctory and inefficient. The lack of official investigation is not surprising given that former members of the Communist Party dominated Iliescu's administration. The so-called historical parties—the National Peasant Party (NPP) and the National Liberal Party—opposing the Iliescu administration tried to build their legitimacy as inheritors of the two main pre-communist political parties by engaging in moralizing efforts at remembering. The “historical parties” condemned the former regime in unequivocal terms. It praised as heroes the anti-communist fighters of the 1940s and 1950s, and depicted as victims the former political prisoners and the population at large.

The anti-communist memorial discourse was motivated both politically and psychologically. Politically, the “historical parties” vilified communism to undermine the legitimacy of Iliescu's neo-communist administration and bolster their own credibility. The anti-communist discourse also resonated psychologically with many Romanians. Bucur explains that the lack of internationally renowned dissidents in Romania, coupled with the high membership rates in the Communist Party, “seemed to denote a lack of moral fiber among Romanians.” Remembering the early period of the communist regime allowed regular Romanians to partake in the moral halo of the early anti-communist fighters, while also remembering the communist regime as overpowering and their own agency as profoundly limited.

The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance has been the most prolific and enduring of the anti-communist memorial projects. The Memorial includes an International Center for Studies of Communism, a cemetery outside Sighet, and the Memorial Museum. The memorial’s centerpiece, its museum, is a former prison for the political and intellectual elites who opposed the communist regime, which closed as a place of detention in 1977. Renovated after 1993, the building maintains its prison structure, hosting exhibits in both its hallways and its former cells.

The renovations were conducted by the Civic Academy Foundation, a non-governmental organization that was critical of the Iliescu administration and that eventually became an ally of the Civic Alliance Party. Because the Iliescu administration discouraged memory work, initial funding for the restoration came from private funds donated by Romanian exiles in the West. After the anti-communist “historical parties” won the 1996 elections, the new government funded the final steps of the restorations and the establishment opened its doors to the public as a memorial museum in 1997. The following year, the Council of Europe designated Sighet as one of the chief memorial sites in Europe, along with the Peace Memorial in Normandy and the Auschwitz Museum. Currently, the anti-communist memory of communism epitomized by the Sighet Museum represents the official position of the Romanian state. President Traian Băsescu instituted a Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania in April 2006, and, based on the commission’s report that same year in December, he condemned the former regime as “illegitimate and criminal” in a special address to Parliament.

The memorial museum has functioned as the most popular site of memory about the communist regime, organizing within its walls summer schools, public talks, and symposia, while also sponsoring research and publications on communism. Since 1998, its summer schools have hosted historians, public intellectuals, and early anti-
communist fighters. Thousands of students attending its summer schools have written essays about communism that have periodically been published. They have also written about communism. The museum boasts a conservative estimate of sixty thousand visitors yearly, the majority of whom are school-age children and adolescents.

Through its support from the Council of Europe and from international individuals associated with the struggle against communism, the Sighet Museum occupies a central place not only in post-socialist Romanian public memory, but also in Europe’s memorial landscape. Two of the memorial’s scientific researchers and frequent guests to its events are the former Soviet political dissident Vladimir Bukovski and Stephane Courtois, editor of *The Black Book of Communism*, the bestselling volume that gained international notoriety for arguing that the communist regimes victimized more people than any other, including Nazism. In its symposia and summer schools, the memorial brings together international figures such as Bukovski and Courtois, Romanian historians who participated in writing the Final Report for the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship, such as Alexandru Zub, Sorin Alexandrescu, and Vladimir Tismaneanu, as well as public administrators, priests, and young students.

What unites these various participants is the anti-communist discourse that they use. As Thomas S. Blanton, Director of the National Security Archive at George Washington University and frequent guest of the museum, notes with admiration, “The Sighet Memorial … is a world monument almost unique[,] dedicated to the struggle of the individual against power, the struggle of memory against forgetting, the struggle of victims against the oppressors. There is almost nothing like it.” Scholarship on the memory of communism in Romania has noted that the Sighet Museum demonizes the former regime, makes heroes of the “resistance in the mountains” of the 1940s and 1950s, while failing to present ethnic Romanians as both victims and victimizers during World War II. While such studies have effectively identified the Sighet Museum as participating in the anti-communist public memory, they have not paid detailed attention to how the museum performs this discourse, nor have they attended to the ways in which it codes the categories of political victimhood and resistance as masculine.

As a key memorial site due to its popularity, its alignment with the Romanian state’s politics of remembering, and its explicit claim to define victimhood and resistance, the Sighet Museum deserves close scholarly attention as it shapes how generations of visitors understand political oppression and resistance during socialism. In order to better foreground the significance of women’s absence in this key site of public memory, the following section highlights the measures specific to Ceaușescu’s regime that placed on the shoulders of its female citizens the main responsibility for producing and reproducing the socialist nation.

**Women’s Everyday Lives under Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Regime**

Nicolae Ceaușescu’s regime (1965–89) controlled Romanian women’s lives and bodies to an unprecedented extent in the socialist bloc. Though all communist states imple-
mented various measures of pronatalist social engineering in the form of incentives (from increased access to housing for mothers or longer maternity leaves), in Romania the regime also instituted disciplinary measures ranging from mandatory routine gynecological exams to imprisonment for aborting.26

The communist regime in Romania banned abortion between 1948 and 1957 to reverse decreasing birthrates that accompanied socialist urbanization. The law was not enforced, however, and its effect on birthrates was insignificant. Between 1957 and 1966, the regime liberalized abortion, a policy that the propaganda machine praised as promoting gender equality among all workers.27 As birthrates continued to drop through the 1960s and the new head of the party wanted to legitimate his rule by distancing himself from the policies of his predecessors, Ceaușescu reversed the 1957 legislation and mobilized a nationalist-socialist discourse in which producing children for the socialist state became a national duty.28 Through an elaborate cult of personality, Ceaușescu reshaped the paternalistic imagination common to all socialist parent-states, in which the party acts like the patriarch of an extended family-nation by controlling its resources. Instead, he positioned himself as the great national leader and father of his nation.29

Nationalism and paternalist socialism came together in Ceaușescu’s anti-abortion legislation. Declaring the fetus “the socialist property of the whole society,”30 Ceaușescu passed Decree 770 in 1966 that criminalized abortions for all women under forty or who had fewer than four children. In 1985, the legislation was tightened to allow legal abortions only for women over forty-five or with more than five children. Further measures reinforced the instrumentalization of women’s bodies. Mandatory biannual gynecological exams were instituted in the workplace, hospitals were staffed with agents of the secret police to check on the activity of the medical personnel, and state-produced contraceptives were scarcely available.31

In the absence of contraception, women turned to improvised abortion methods performed illegally, often by untrained strangers. The consequences were dire. If, in 1965, only 47 of 237 “maternal deaths” were due to abortion-related complications, by 1989, 545 out of 627 deaths had this cause.32 In the estimations of post-socialist reports by the Romanian Ministry of Health, between 1966 and 1989 approximately five hundred women died annually as a result of abortion-related complications.33 This number does not include the health problems that women frequently developed from illegal abortions, from damage to the uterine cervix to chronic infections.34 By 1988 Romania’s rate of maternal mortality from abortion-related complications was the highest in Europe and abortion became the leading cause of death among fertile women during Ceaușescu’s regime.35

By forcing women to have abortions in humiliating and hazardous conditions, at the risk of death, imprisonment, or long-term health damage, the anti-abortion legislation turned ordinary sexual contact into “moments of enormous risk and dread for women” and made them “recoil at the thought of their womanhood and femininity.”36 In addition, Ceaușescu placed Romanian women under the burden of maintaining paid employment. They were expected to carry the responsibility for child rearing, housework, and to be fully engaged in their paid jobs. While official propaganda paid tribute to women’s strength, the state maintained the traditional gender hierarchy:
it left unchallenged men’s “privileged status as ‘heads of the family’” and gave men higher paid jobs.\textsuperscript{37}

This burden carried by Romanian women became even heavier during the economic crisis of the 1980s, when Ceaușescu decided to pay off the country’s external debt by depriving the population of basic supplies such as food, electricity, and heating. As the state was increasingly unable to provide basic goods and services, a black or informal economy developed. Also called “private” or “familial” by its participants, it operated through exchanges of goods and services through family networks.\textsuperscript{38} Susan Gal and Gail Kligman explain that “the hardships of combining the provisioning of a family in a shortage economy with household labor, childcare, and waged work fell most heavily on women,” due to traditional gender roles.\textsuperscript{39} States where the second economy flourished, such as Romania, troubled the public/private bourgeois distinction by relying on and politicizing the private realm to an extent that warrants an understanding of acts performed in this sphere, such as abortions, as political. According to Gal and Kligman:

The household, far from being a site for only reproduction and consumption, was transformed for many into the place where the really intense, productive, and rewarding work of their lives was accomplished ... Although production/consumption as well as production/reproduction continued to be opposed to each other in official pronouncements, such distinctions were complicated in practice, since the major activities of production, consumption, and reproduction were often located in the same spaces of the home.\textsuperscript{40}

Ceaușescu’s nationalist-socialist patriarchal regime relied heavily on the ideological and legislative control of women’s actions and bodies, as women were to work for the socialist state, reproduce its subjects, and provide for them through the informal economy.

Given the centrality of the private sphere supported by women’s work and often by their illegal activities, we must ask to what extent Romanian women are represented as victims and dissenters in the public memory of communism. In focusing my analysis on women’s political victimization and resistance during communism, I do not mean to imply that all women experienced the same levels of oppression. The abortion legislation, as well as the gradual reliance of the socialist state on the private sphere and its informal economy, hit hardest the poorer, less educated, and rural women of reproductive age. Differences in class and education translated into differences in access to expensive black market contraceptives, better social connections, and the ability to contact and pay doctors in hospitals who, for high bribes, would make one of the diagnoses that allowed for a legal abortion (e.g., rape, pregnancy endangering the woman’s life).\textsuperscript{41}

I also do not imply that in refusing to give birth to children all women were taking a conscious political stance against the communist regime and were thinking of themselves as dissenters. I argue, however, with Bucur, that all women were aware of the potential consequences of this act to their freedom, social reputation, and career prospects in a system controlled by the state. With that profound awareness and a great
measure of courage, these women did reclaim control over their wombs and their lives from a state power that legislated control over them to reproduce itself ideologically and economically. The Sighet Museum, however, does not introduce this gender differentiation in its representation of oppression and dissent during the communist years. It operates within a bourgeois logic of the private-female versus the public-male spheres, in which only explicit, public, and traditionally masculine acts are considered political. Let us take a mediated visit through the museum’s exhibits.

A Panoramic Imagination: The Body of the Nation and the Communist Foreign Body

Main Exhibits: The Body of the Nation

The largest permanent exhibits are hosted at the museum’s entrance. They invite a panoramic perspective from the visitor, a perspective aligned with the homogeneously victimized nation through displays of the Romanian national map and through an overwhelming agglomeration of chromatically uniform photos.

“The Room of Maps. The Geography of Incarceration” constructs a spatial representation of communist victimhood understood as imprisonment, forced residence, forced labor, and political execution. Its centerpiece is a large white map of Romania, emptied of geographical and administrative symbols and populated by black crosses (Figure 1). This display is reproduced on the lateral walls of the room, in smaller pan-

Figure 1. “Map of Romania” exhibit. Photo by author.
els, where each map identifies through crosses different sites of repression: deportation centers, political psychiatric asylums, mass graves and sites of execution, forced labor camps, and prisons.

What strikes the onlooker in the recurring white maps of Romania is the replacement of all geographical and political markings usually populating a map with one symbol, multiplied and scattered across the blank space: black crosses. The dissemination of black crosses on the map invites identification not so much with the pain of victims, as with the Romanian nation pained by the former regime.42 Having only one signifier for victimization absorbs individual bodies and stories into a national body and reduces them to a singular pain. The striking contrast of black and white also tells the visitor of a dichotomous relation between the pure Romanian nation and the aggressive communist regime.

The museum’s investment in aligning the visitor’s empathy with the nation as a whole extends to the second exhibit, a hallway over thirty-feet long wallpapered with close-up photos of people victimized by the former regime (Figure 2). This exhibit creates a visual representation of the magnitude of damage done by communism. It encourages a panoramic perspective on the phenomenon through the use of photography in ways reminiscent of nineteenth-century statistics. Frank Biocca notes that photography was paramount to the statistical imagination at the time: “images were not ‘like’ statistics, or ‘applications’ of statistics; for the early statistical mind the composite was a statistical process. [S]tatistical processes were visual processes, which the

Figure 2. Hallway of photo portraits. Photo by author.
camera and the composite simply mimicked.” Through close-up shots situated side by side, this exhibit invites the visitor to take the perspective of the state bureaucrat who looks at the political body as a whole.

The exhibit forecloses the possibility of social categorization by arranging the photographs in a random order. These are photos of military and civilian men, middle-aged and elderly men in suits, young and elderly peasant men and women, and urban women from the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet the pictures are not arranged by any category of age, class, sex, historical period, category of victimhood, type of resistance, or any other criteria. Except for arbitrarily interspersed arrest cards, there is no verbal text to give meaning to the photos wallpapering the hallway. The paratactic relation among the pictures suggests that what is relevant is the magnitude of the phenomenon of victimization and resistance, and not its details. The variety of people’s ages, sex, and clothing is rendered barely noticeable through the chemical treatment of the photos. All of them fit a black-white-green color palette and look chromatically as if they come from the same period: early- to mid-twentieth century.

Like “The Room of Maps,” this exhibit leaves the visitor with an emotional grasp of the magnitude of victimization by communism, but makes no claims about the particularities and complexities of people’s experiences. They are no longer villagers and urbanites, men and women, poor and rich, religious or not, free or imprisoned, but only relevant as numbers. Although women are present on the walls of this permanent exhibit, their gender difference is also rendered unimportant through the paratactic arrangement of photos. Women’s gender becomes indifferent to the onlooker who sees the people covering the walls to saturation as a representation of a nation homogenized by political oppression. Thus, while “The Room of Maps” homogenizes the category of communist victimhood through abstraction, the hallway of sepia portraits, paratactically assembled, homogenizes victimhood through the non-differentiated excessive multiplication of individuals.

The two main exhibits frame the visitor’s experience by acting as passageways in and out of the museum. As frames, they carry implicit instructions on how to interpret the rest of the exhibits. Although many of the remaining rooms differentiate the social body by religion, class, and political affiliation, the two main visual exhibits position the visitor to see and remember the rest of the museum through the framework of a simplified and homogenized notion of victimhood, to look for similarity rather than difference, and to identify emotionally with the entire nation in its pain, rather than with its groups. As Lauren Berlant puts it, images “organize consciousness, not by way of explicit propaganda, but by replacing and simplifying memories people actually have with image traces of political experience about which people can have political feelings that link them to other citizens and to patriotism.”

Turning the pages of the museum’s guest book, the overwhelming majority of the comments speak to feelings of national pride that the museum inspired, and of an impulse to co-opt younger generations into identifying with the victimized nation: “We have to inform all the people, especially the youth, about the reality of the pain of this chapter in Romanian history” (9 May 2009); “The exhibits present shaking stories of people who died not only for their own freedom, but for the freedom of the entire people” (22 April 2009); and “the exhibits need to be known by more people, especially by
the youth who do not know the real face of communism and think it was only about the two hours of television a day and that you couldn’t find butter to buy” (12 April 2009).46 By voicing identification with the victimized nation and positioning the early anti-communist fighters as “real” victims and dissidents, comments like these indicate that the museum’s politics of organizing space and representing the past is powerful in organizing people’s memory and affect.

**Communist Victimhood: A Phenomenon of the 1940s and 1950s**

What follows the panoramic perspective is the story of the nation’s Soviet-supported communist capture: many groups resisted this invasion in the late 1940s and 1950s, but ultimately the nation succumbed, defeated. The two permanent exhibits have already framed this implicit temporal focus that allows communism to be vilified and the nation as a whole to be victimized. The majority of the remaining exhibits build the story of communism by concentrating on the early years of the regime.

Thirty-three out of a total of forty-six exhibit rooms are dedicated to the first decade of the communist regime exclusively.47 Numerous exhibits represent the imprisonment, deportation, and execution of politicians, religious and military leaders, and public intellectuals.48 Other rooms present the reorganization of agriculture, education, press, and religion through repressive methods. Still other exhibits depict how peasants whose property was confiscated, students, and armed legionnaires who refused to turn their arms against the Axis powers and continued to fight against the communists, resisted these changes.49 The story that these exhibits construct is that of a foreign body illegitimately and violently taking over Romanian politics, despite the continuing heroic resistance of the political elite and the regular Romanians.

As mentioned earlier, this narrative has a strong psychological motivation. Bucur argues that a focus on the 1940s and 1950s compensates for the image of moral fallibility that Romanians have when they look back to their past. This past was populated by their vast opportunist membership in the Communist Party, and lack of internationally renowned dissident figures. By focusing on the early resistance and Stalinist-type forms of victimization, the Sighet Museum can demonize the communist regime as a foreign Soviet imposition, while still boasting resistance.50 One of the unfortunate consequences of this representation is that the museum recognizes women’s oppression and resistance only when such acts took place in the early years of communism. It renders unmemorable the pronatalist legislation that made many women victims and dissenters of Ceaușescu’s regime.

**Women as Victims and Dissidents during Communism**

In the only exhibit dedicated explicitly to women’s political experience, “Women in Prison,” both photography and text are used in the work of representation. As in the previous hallway of sepia-colored photographic portraits, one of the room’s walls is covered with photos of women, this time accompanied by their names (Figure 3). Names of women victims also flood the upper part of the wall, covering the entire surface of the ceiling and almost half of the remaining two walls of the room (Figure 4).
Figure 3. Side wall of exhibit “Women in Prison.” Photo by author.

Figure 4. Names of women prisoners, ceiling view. Photo by author.
As Sonja K. Foss commented about the use of names in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, here too “the repetitive form of the name continually restates the message of waste” and profoundly individualizes by placing emphasis on the people who were victimized rather than on the communist regime and its perpetrators.51

However, while proper names individualize these women, other visual elements of the exhibit co-opt their individualized selves into a relational identity and a masculinist view of political action. A large panel explicitly identifies the “women in prison” as “Mothers, Wives, Sisters, Daughters” (Figure 5). Other large panels detail women’s relations. We learn, for example, that Elena Stetin, the sister of an anti-communist fighter, was imprisoned for “not having given in” her brother to the communist authorities, or that Nicole Valery Grossu, the secretary of Iuliu Maniu, head of the NPP, was condemned for her “collaboration” with the party. As we continue reading their stories, we find that the women of this exhibit were victimized either passively, because of their kinship with a man punished by the regime, or due to their acts of sacrifice for male figures. They are recognized as political victims only by association, a representation that continues to reify the category of political victimhood as masculine.

Although the museum gestures toward a representation of women’s acts of political resistance and victimization in the domestic sphere, it falls short of displaying communist opposition that is not aligned with men’s activities. It features acts done by women only for early “enemies” of the regime—their fathers, spouses, brothers, and

Figure 5. Banner “Mothers, Wives, Sisters, Daughters.” Photo by author.
sons—and none of the sacrifices made in the home about issues ranging from birth control and sexuality, to parenting and housework. Operating with the implicit conflation between public, male, and political action, the exhibit avoids any account of the women who were put behind bars for undergoing illegal abortions under Ceaușescu’s regime. Furthermore, in exhibits about the middle and later years of communism, women’s domestic forms of victimization and resistance go unnoticed among the many other forms of oppression and intimidation used by Ceaușescu’s regime. This is done through a change in the strategy of representation.

**Remembering Women during Ceaușescu’s Regime**

Most of the museum’s exhibits follow a narrative logic, in the sense that they gradually construct a coherent story about the communist regime as a foreign invader that victimized an overpowered nation. Visitors signing the guest book confirm their understanding of and attachment to this persuasive story when they repeatedly express empathy with the early victims of the regime and prideful identification with the anti-communist fighters. By offering abundant information and ordering events chronologically into a coherent story of the past, the museum operates as a repository of knowledge, employing what Gabriela Cristea and Simina Radu-Bucurenci have called a “modernist aesthetic.” This aesthetic is interrupted only occasionally. For example, the randomly arranged photos on the first floor hallway convey the scale of suffering produced by the communist regime and kindle the visitor’s negative emotions toward it. The rest of the exhibits build on these emotions when they construct a highly documented story of the communist takeover.

In contrast, exhibits about Ceaușescu’s era are thin in informative content and use a fragmented aesthetic that resists narrative coherence and easy integration into the museum’s larger story of the communist regime. These exhibits take pronatalism out of a linear narrative about communism and obfuscate it in collage installations. David Antin argues that the collage brings together dispersed elements in a way that suppresses “the ordering signs that would specify the ‘stronger logical relations’ among presented elements,” such as “relations of implication, entailment, negation, subordination.” One of the consequences is that, in a collage “items could be eliminated and others added without, so to speak, spoiling the plot ... because the relations that the collage does specify are those of similarity, equivalence, identity.” Ceaușescu’s nationalist-socialist politics of forced birth is turned into an optional episode in the story of communist victimization. According to the Sighet Museum, this episode could have been eliminated without “spoiling” our representation of the former regime.

More than any other room in the museum, this exhibit immerses the visitors in the “everyday life” of regular Romanians by populating the room with everyday objects that recreate a domestic environment of limitations and penury. Above a bookshelf hosting cheap decorations, a window frame displays a mock view of gray blocks of flats. The imaginary or memory-based immersion into a life of grayness and restrictions is further facilitated by nearly life-size cardboard figures of people standing in line for basic food supplies during the crisis of the 1980s (Figure 6). Objects indexing daily consumption patterns line up against the wall of cardboard cutouts: reusable
grocery bags, recycled milk and soda bottles, an egg carton. These objects remind visitors who lived through the economic crises of daily rhythms built around the practices of acquiring food.

The feeling of oppression is intensified by the collage installation on the remaining wall: clippings from newspaper articles speak about various forms of socialist control, from planning its economic production to planning family reproduction. Light red labels try to non-intrusively categorize the forms of oppression into: “the rationing of energy,” “food rationing,” “the choreographed mass demonstrations,” “the ideological renaming of cities,” “propaganda,” “collectivization and nationalization of property,” and “children of the decree (decret(e)i)” (Figures 7 and 8).

In this fragmented and overwhelming collection of communist offenses no distinction is made between forced birth and other policies of the era. The logic of the collage ends up flattening the differences among communist offenses and prevents the visitors from interpreting how Ceaușescu’s regime treated groups differently.

Figure 6. “Everyday Life under Communism” exhibit. Photo by author.
Figure 7. Collage in exhibit “Everyday Life under Communism,” detail 1. Photo by author.
Figure 8. Collage in exhibit “Everyday Life under Communism,” detail 2. Photo by author.
The exhibit further marginalizes women’s victimization during the quarter-century of forced birth by focusing the very part of the collaged panel dedicated to this topic to the children born under Decree 770. The red label discretely superimposed over this collage segment identifies the ensemble under the name of decreteli (children of the decree), and not under labels referring to women, or more encompassing labels such as the hypothetical “Victims of the Decree” (Figure 8). The fragments making up the collage are mostly pictures of the children who came into the world because of Decree 770. They wear uniforms of the organizations into which they were mandatorily inducted, and only one propagandistic newspaper article shows women on trial for abortion. If the entire installation renders the regime’s politics of forced pregnancy interchangeable with other communist offenses, the narrower collage segment further displaces the lives of women by focusing on children.

As such, the exhibit reproduces the socialist ideology that made children the focus of nationalist-socialist propaganda during Ceaușescu’s time. The preoccupation with children during communism continued after 1989, as orphanages full of unwanted children raised in poor or inhuman conditions and plagued by AIDS, came to domestic and international public attention. International humanitarian organizations flooded Romania to help these children. As it became known that not all were victims of AIDS, foreigners traveled in the early 1990s to adopt them.

The international discourse, Kligman explains, was dominated by an emotional rhetoric of saving children from terrible conditions in the orphanages, later to turn into one of saving them from a hard life in Romania. Disliked both by the Romanian press as reflective of a Balkanist view of the country, and by the political class that faced the pressures of a negative international reputation and struggled to regulate what became a practice exploitative of poor Romanian women, this international rhetoric maintained the focus on children as victims of communism and of the post-communist transition. Responding to it, the media and the political class reinforced the focus on abandoned children and further contributed to the inability to have a public memorial discourse that also accounts for these children’s mothers.

The exhibit “Everyday Life under Communism” illustrates this inability, as it immerses the visitors in the “everyday life” of limitations and penury of a regular Romanian. Although this exhibit easily lets us imagine or remember the experience of fear and deprivation shared by the entire population, it does not aid the visitor’s understanding of the additional experience of abortion-related terror that marked the lives of female socialist subjects of reproductive age, nor does it allude to women’s work in the informal economy. Kligman explains that in the years of Ceaușescu’s regime a culture of fear characterized Romanian society at large, while one of terror characterized only the lives of women of reproductive age. Unlike the early years of the regime, when a Stalinist-type terror governed the lives of a multitude of political opponents, during Ceaușescu’s years “terror became embodied in the sexual lives of women.”

But when representing the long years of Ceaușescu’s regime, women’s terror is rendered scarcely palpable and interchangeable with other forms of oppression. Women’s courage in dealing with the consequences of unwanted pregnancies does not find any expression, either. As viewers, we are again invited to identify with a non-differenti-
ated late-communist social body whose experiences of oppression are represented as equally shared, and whose resistance seems to have disappeared. The representation of pronatalism, if at all noticed in the collage installation, is rendered memorable only as a communist offense that brought more children to enlist in the Party’s ranks and to feed during the economic crisis. Women’s complex experiences of this legislation remain unmemorable within the museum’s walls.

**Conclusion: Continuity or Change?**

Whether by creating identification with the general population’s fear and material shortages in exhibits about late socialism, with the undifferentiated pain of a nation invaded by communism in the first exhibits, or with the male anti-communist fighters and their public, visible, and intentional acts of resistance, the Sighet Museum consistently preempts an understanding of the social body as significantly fissured along gender lines during communism. It teaches its visitors to view the regime as a foreign invader, resistance as a male-oriented and initiated phenomenon of the early years of communism, and the population at large as victims. Women’s victimization and resistance in the private sphere, through acts ranging from birth control to housework, are effectively rendered “unmemorable.” This is a significant absence in representation given that Romania is the only country in the former communist bloc where women experienced unique forms of systematic political oppression under Ceaușescu’s nationalist-socialist politics of forced birth.

The inability to feminize political victimization and resistance speaks to the inability of thinking outside the bourgeois private/particular/feminine—public/general/masculine binary that codes political action as belonging only to the second sphere. This binary was methodically undone by the socialist regime and notoriously criticized as problematic in non-socialist societies by feminist scholars. It is a perspective highly facilitated by the museum’s focus on the 1940s and 1950s, as those are the years when the bourgeois middle class was violently displaced through deportations, forced labor, imprisonment, and executions. As noted earlier, this temporal focus allowed the Civic Academy Foundation to indict the former regime and its post-1989 neo-communist successors. What this article has illustrated is the extent to which the focus on the first years of the regime and the investment in the anti-communist discourse also ends up normalizing the bourgeois division between a public-masculine realm coded as political, on the one hand, and a private-feminine sphere coded as non-political, on the other.

This divide resonates with the post-socialist remasculinization of the public sphere and feminization of the private one. Peggy Watson notes that democratization and the new market economy in Eastern Europe propagated masculinism in the public sphere, favoring both men and masculine values such as individualism and competitiveness.60 In Romania, Mihaela Miroiu explains, the reorganization of state-owned enterprises favored the male-populated industries (e.g., coal and mining) at the expense of female-populated ones (e.g., textiles), and marginalized women generally through fewer and lower-paid job opportunities.61 In response to an inequitable labor market and also as
a reaction to the mandatory double shift and to the state’s intrusions into the private realm during communism, post-socialist Romanian women have claimed the private sphere and have been invested in keeping it free from politics. As Gal and Kligman note, “the American feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ was particularly alarming to many East Central European women [since, to them] bringing ‘politics’ into the family sounded like inviting surveillance, corruption, and humiliation into the home,” destroying a realm that seemed relatively free from the state’s corrupting intrusion.

The museum’s nostalgia for the pre-socialist bourgeois society thus converges with the post-socialist polarization between the public and the private spheres. By noticing this coherence, however, I do not mean to suggest that the Sighet Museum or the public memory of socialism in Romania, more broadly, are doomed to reproduce the masculine bias in remembering victimization and resistance. The socialist regime’s pronatalism is not completely absent from public and individual memories and has the potential to become part of the public sphere in the future, although the voices that remember it are still weak. Lorena Anton finds, for example, that while “in the contemporary Romanian public sphere the former pronatalist times seem to be generally forgotten,” in the private sphere women in particular remember and talk about pronatalism. One of the privately shared stories that punctured the public amnesia about abortion was dramatized in Cristian Mungiu’s film, 4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days. The 2007 winner of Cannes Festival’s Golden Palm prize tells a real story from the lives of two college roommates trying to procure an illegal abortion in the 1980s.

Such memories are surfacing in the public sphere, but they are for the moment rare, ignored, or recuperated within the dominant anti-communist memorial discourse. Mungiu’s film, for example, did not gain wide viewership in Romanian theaters. The film received abundant reviews in the popular press; however, these reviews are impressive in their reluctance to talk about women’s fate under Ceaușescu’s regime and their tendency to read the film as just another reminder of everyone’s equal victimization during communism. A few other cultural artifacts have become part of the public sphere, but none have reached notoriety comparable to the Sighet Museum’s sixty thousand annual visitors. The emergence of these dissonant voices in the public sphere, however rare, indicates a potential for gendering the public memory of communism in the future and warrants scholarly efforts to follow the evolution of Romania’s public memory of its recent past.

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Notes


5. Ibid., esp. 20.

6. Ibid., esp. 9.

7. While decrees and laws differ in their institutional origin and length of time toward approval, they are functionally identical. This article follows Gail Kligman’s lead in treating them interchangeably. See Kligman, The Politics of Duplicity, esp. 42, notes 2, 3, 4.


10. In this article, I use “neo-communist” as a valuative term to refer to post-socialist politicians who held leadership functions in the former Communist Party. I use “post-communist” interchangeably with “post-socialist” as descriptive terms for people, institutions, and practices coming after 1989.


12. In its first five years, for example, the institute published eight books, five of which focused on “communist ideologies and structures” before 1919. Institutul national pentru studiul totalitarismului (The national institute for the study of totalitarianism), http://totalitarism.ro/en/index-en.html (accessed 15 November 2011).

13. Claudia F. Dobre, “Nous-mêmes comme les autres: Témoignages des anciennes persécutées politiques roumaines” (“We as others”: testimonies of the former Romanian victims of political persecution) (PhD diss., Laval University, 2007).

15. Other prominent memory sites include The National Association of Former Political Prisoners, founded in 1989 and announcing 98,700 members for the same year, and “The Memorial of Pain,” a highly popular television series about communist prisons between 1944 and 1964 that started broadcasting in August 1991 and aired 140 episodes over sixteen years.


17. See Bucur, Heroes, esp. 241.


22. Ioana Boca, executive director of the Civic Academy Foundation, phone interview with author, 4 April 2012. Ms. Boca estimates more visitors than indicated by the numbers of sold tickets because children are sold half tickets and groups of guests are not ticketed.


25. See Bucur, “Gendering Dissent;” Gal and Kligman, Reproducing Gender; Kligman, Politics; Verdery, What Was Socialism?

26. Gal and Kligman, Reproducing Gender, esp. 49.

27. Ibid., esp. 46–49.


32. Kligman, The Politics of Duplicity, esp. 214 and 316, n. 19. Kligman notes that the term “maternal death” usually refers to the death of pregnant women who may or may not have
other children at the time of death. However, the communist regime in Romania excluded from its definition of “maternal death” pregnant women without other children. The rate of mortality from abortion-related complications is thus higher than the records indicate.

33. Ibid., 214 and 317, esp. n. 25.
34. Ibid., esp. 217.
35. Ibid., esp. 208 and 213.
39. Ibid., esp. 53. See also Einhorn, Cinderella Goes to Market.

42. By borrowing the symbol of pain and death from Christian Orthodoxy, this exhibit also religiously homogenizes the national body, implicitly excluding the Jewish, Catholic, or atheist populations from citizenship.
44. For more on the concept of framing see Gregory Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), esp. 187–188.
47. This number includes permanent and temporary exhibits available during my field trip, in July 2009. The museum’s website indicates that these numbers have remained predominantly constant since my visit. See “The Sighet Museum, Virtual Visit,” http://www.memorialsighet.ro/ (accessed 5 April 2012).
50. Bucur, Heroes, esp. 240.
52. In using these notions, I follow Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci’s differentiation between museums that present a clear agenda and narrative (a modernist strategy), and museums that are less agenda-driven (a post-modernist strategy). Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci read the Sighet Museum as modernist in its entirety, but I illustrate how—in representing the years of
Ceaușescu’s regime—the museum switches to a post-modernist aesthetics that blurs the story of women’s victimization. See Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, “Raising,” esp. 277.

55. For an overview of the issues related to institutionalized children in Romania, see Kligman, “Abortion.”
56. It is estimated that at least one third of all international adoptions between 1990 and 1991 were from Romania. Kligman, “Abortion,” 410.
57. Ibid., 411.
58. Kligman makes this point, adding that a questionnaire by the US embassy revealed that in June 1991, thirty-nine of the adopted children came from private homes, fifteen from hospitals, and only thirteen from orphanages. The Iliescu administration ended what became a profitable baby trade by passing new legislation in 1990, which stipulated that children must reside in an orphanage for at least six months before they are given out for adoption. This law protected the rights of children and diminished abuses of mothers often coerced into giving up their children after birth. Kligman, “Abortion,” esp. 412 and 416.
65. Cristian Mungiu, 4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days (2007). In the DVD’s “Special Features,” Mungiu deprecates the state of Romanian movie theaters and talks about the few outlets available throughout the country for viewing his film.
66. Based on a close reading of forty-three reviews of the film, I argue elsewhere that the popular press erased the female characters’ experiences of the pronatalist legislation. This was done either by homogenizing all communist subjects as victims of a totalitarian regime, or by admitting to gender differences, but decontextualizing and reifying them as universal. Alina Haliliuc, “A Social Body without Gender: The Memory of Communism in the Reception of 4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days” (paper presented at the annual meeting for the National Popular Culture Association, Boston, April 11–14, 2012).
67. Another cultural product is Florin Iepan and Razvan Georgescu’s television documentary Das Experiment 770—Gebären auf Befehl (Experiment 770–Children of the decree; 2004). Although the documentary offers a rich presentation of women’s experiences of the era, it is unavailable on DVD and gathered only 1,900 YouTube viewers at the time this article was written. Most recently, a collection of short autobiographical essays has brought the memory of forced births to a general reading public. See Radu Pavel and Dan Lungu, eds., Tovarășe de drum. Experiența feminină în comunism (Roadside comrades. The feminine experience during communism) (Bucharest: Polirom, 2008).
The Memorialisation of the Highland Clearances in Scottish Museums
Economic and Socio-Political Uses of Heritage
LAURENCE GOURIÉVIDIS

ABSTRACT
This article focuses on the representation of the Highland Clearances — one of the most painful and controversial themes in modern Scottish history — in Scottish museum spaces. It brings to light the social, economic and political implications of the interpretation of this period through a survey of twelve independent local museums and two national museums. It argues that the Clearances have become a crucially defining landmark at a local but also national level. Yet the way the Clearances are represented in narratives differs significantly, showing the extent to which the meaning ascribed to the clearing process and its consequences is socially and historically conditioned. Whilst the symbolic and emotional resonance of the period as a traumatic rupture prevails, it has also come to articulate a political vision intrinsically linked with land reform in a devolved Scotland, and a transnational identity owing much to the imaginary of the Scottish diaspora.

KEYWORDS
Collective memory, diaspora, emigration, heritage, identity, land reform, museums, Scotland

People’s use of history is inextricably linked with the selection of past events, dates, figures which become encapsulated in artefacts and stories — in carefully chosen interpretations of the past. In the public space, these may materialise in the shape of street names, memorials, commemorative ceremonies, monuments or museums which foreground a communal heritage, fostering feelings of belonging and shared identity. In the process, past and place are both ascribed meaning(s) largely conditioned by current concerns and priorities.

Heritage literature has emphasised the significance of contemporary concerns in heritage construction and use. In particular, studies have focused on present-day uses of the past in heritage as an eco-
onomic and political resource, and have associated this process with dissonance — the past being multi-sold and multi-interpreted (Ashworth 1994; Graham et al. 2000; Ashworth and Graham 2005). ‘[Heritage] possesses a crucial socio-political function. Consequently, it is accompanied by an often bewildering array of identification and potential conflicts, not least when heritage places and objects are involved in issues of legitimization of power structures’ (Graham et al. 2000: 17). Additionally, Smith’s work (2006) has shown heritage to be an active cultural process, articulating identities and a sense of belonging (with the construction and negotiation this implies) or conversely capable of challenging received identities. She has also underlined the centrality of remembrance and commemoration in heritage performance, with the emotional power and resonance of elements of the past.

Such issues are equally critical to the analysis of museum practice and development as well as dealings with the past. The authority of museums legitimising a specific discourse or policy position has long been established, as has, more recently, their potential for debate, contest and challenge, a function seen as closely correlated with the advent of the ‘new museology’ (Bennett 1995; Karp et al. 1992). Similarly their critical engagement with notions of identity has been investigated most commonly in relation to the function and role of national museums (Boswell and Evans 1999; Mason 2007; McIntyre and Wehner 2001; McLean 2005), or as regards specific issues such as race, gender, inclusion and diversity, agency and authority (Golding 1997; Goodnow and Akman 2008; Merriman 1997; Sandell 2007). While they can reinforce master narratives of the past, museums may also give recognition to shifts in interpretation or plural viewpoints. Additionally, as products, museums have been made to respond to a range of consumers’ needs and aspirations and have had to identify their market, a process which may well influence their uses of the past, interpretive shifts or methodologies. In some areas — urban and rural, their establishment and orientations have also been increasingly conditioned by their role as engines of economic regeneration (Heywood 2002; Sandell 1999).

One of the central — and not unproblematic — notions around which the argument of this article revolves is that of ‘community’ now framing a large segment of the research in museum studies (Crooke 2008; Watson 2007; Watson and Waterton 2010). It is not unproblematic as, like identity, it is fluid, changing and multilayered. In the national context, community can refer to subnational groups whose voices are being embodied in a variety of museum spaces, reflecting the diversity of museum audiences in terms of gender, occupation, age, ethnic origins
and interests, to name but a few of their characteristics. ‘Community’ relates as much to the group(s) the museum serves as to the group(s) targeted; it can be linked with the museum scope, as in the case of community museums, established and run with little or no help from state organisations. Admittedly such museums are identified with restricted social and territorial boundaries — tightly bound ‘communities’ — yet they may well be placed on tourist routes, thereby becoming the locus where different communities intersect and interact. In the words of Hooper-Greenhill (2000: 121), ‘interpretive communities are located in relation to interpretive acts. It is only through the common repertoires and strategies used in interpretation that such communities can be recognised’. In the representation of past events and their implications, museums project the identity of the group(s) they serve according to shared interpretive frameworks and discursive references stemming from assumed common cultural and historical positions. Some events, processes or symbolic elements may be singled out in tales of origin or in the genesis of present positions/circumstances.

The focus of this article is on one of the most emotive and contentious events in Scottish history: the Highland Clearances, which lasted from the middle of the eighteenth century to 1886. They are linked to the socio-economic transformation of northern Scotland and the western and northern Isles. Very broadly, the process involved comprehensive agrarian reforms such as changes in land use marked by the introduction of large-scale sheep farming in glens occupied by small peasants, often combined with attempts at developing alternative industries such as fishing, textile production and kelping on coastal areas. This economic restructuring was part and parcel of a movement which dominated national elite discourse and policies throughout Scotland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Improvement. Improvement was a byword for economic development and included the rationalisation and modernisation of agriculture with a view to achieving higher productivity and industrial progress. In the Highlands and Islands, such changes implied severe social disruption as peasant communities were displaced or removed from the land they had occupied, at times, for generations. Their removal was in some cases associated with resettlement programmes elsewhere on the estates but, for many, evictions meant migration to other parts of the country, notably to the expanding industrial centres of the south or emigration to various parts of the British Empire. The period also led to the emergence of crofting — a type of agriculture now closely meshed with the administrative and cultural identity of the region: the crofting districts. Crofting is part-
time farming and resulted from the size of the plots that were carved out for displaced tenants; they were made deliberately small so that tenants would be forced to undertake other economic activities. In 1886 the Crofters’ Act, which put an end to mass evictions through security of tenure, was passed following a period of social and political agitation known as the Land Wars. Consequently, between the middle of the eighteenth century and 1886, thousands of families were removed or cleared off the land, at times forcibly, and the landscape of the region was entirely reshaped — in socio-economic, demographic and also environmental terms (Devine 1988; 1994a; 2006; Dodgshon 1998; Hunter 1976; Richards 1982; 1985; Withers 1988).

As Richards (1982: 6) and Devine (1987: 5-8) have argued, the expression ‘Highland Clearances’ is ‘an omnibus term’ and they were ‘far from homogeneous in origin and effects’ (Devine 1987: 5). The clearing process was diverse and atomised: it was a succession of episodes differing in terms of scale, chronology, geographical location and environmental specificity, social and economic context, proprietary situation and orientation and, obviously, consequences. However, if the historiography of the Clearances has associated the process with phases and very specific contexts, thus highlighting its complexity and multifaceted nature, their history is characterised by its recurrent instrumental use for ideological purposes. That this should be so is closely related to the events’ emotional and symbolic power, but also stems from a clash of ideologies and cultural values which has pervaded assessments of and responses to the Clearances from the outset (Hunter 1976; Withers 1988). Although evictions and their immediate repercussions have now vanished from living memory, they are embedded in collective imaginaries — within Scotland but also more widely amongst its diaspora. Over time they have been reenacted in literature and popular history; they have also been used as potent symbols of social exploitation and oppression in political rhetoric (Gouriévidis 2010: 19-44; McCrone 1992: 50). That the Clearances awaken strong emotions is attested by the motion for an apology, which was debated in the Scottish Parliament (2000), and by the vocabularies in which conflicting publications on the topic are couched. The discourse surrounding them is frequently inclined to oversimplify this tense past and has become polarised and ossified into divergent ‘sides’, a situation neatly captured by Ascherson (2002: 213) in the distinction he draws between ‘Clearance Denial’ and ‘Clearance Memory’ — the latter classed as ‘the orthodoxy’. In this case, they are often read using universally acknowledged imagery and grammar of victimisation and
trauma, usually associated with the Jewish Holocaust or the shipping of slaves across the seas (Craig 1990: 69, 72, 76; Grimble 1968: 23). The title of a recent book on the subject by one of the leading historians of the period encapsulates their status in Scottish culture: *Debating the Highland Clearances* (Richards 2007). What makes representation of the Clearances challenging for heritage practitioners is both their highly charged character and their atomised nature.

In this article it is argued that for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, the Clearances — the expression is used broadly, inclusive of effects and aftermath — have become a crucially defining landmark: the traumatic prism through which the local inhabitants’ relation to the land and its use is read. Furthermore, if this has been true for the northern part of Scotland for some time, they have now also become appropriated into readings of the Lowland rural landscape and, therefore, have achieved symbolic significance in the national narrative. The economic and socio-political implications of such an interpretive choice will be explored through the study of a selection of Scottish museums.

**Towards a Typology of Clearance Narratives in Museums**

The museums surveyed are varied in terms of location, type, scope, history and remit, a variety which impacts greatly on the nature of the story told and the angle(s) chosen (see Table 1 and Figure 1).
### Table 1 Characteristics of the museums surveyed

**Note:** When several dates are mentioned, they indicate the date of opening and, in parentheses, that of refurbishment or complete revamp. Abbreviations in final column denote local (L), emigratory (E) and national (N)

None of these venues are entirely devoted to the Clearances; their exhibitions range from folk life, general history to clan exhibitions. Two of the museums listed are national institutions located in the central belt of Scotland and the remainder are independent and locally run, either by trusts or private owners — some with little or no curatorial expertise when they started their heritage adventure. The final column in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Opening date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Narrative strand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Skye Museum of Island Life, Kilmuir, Skye</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Folk life</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skye history mainly from modern times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Colbost Folk Museum, Colbost, Skye</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Folk life</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Isle of Arran Heritage Museum, Brodick, Arran</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Independent (Trust)</td>
<td>Folk life Arran history, mainly from modern times</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Strathnaver Museum, Bettyhill, Caithness</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Independent (Trust)</td>
<td>Strathnaver history, focus on Clearances Clan Mackay</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Clan Gunn Heritage Centre, Latheron, Caithness</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Independent (Trust)</td>
<td>Clan Gunn history</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Aros, Portree, Skye</td>
<td>1993-2002</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Skye’s story, mainly from modern times</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Mallaig Heritage Centre, Mallaig, Lochaber</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Independent (Trust)</td>
<td>History of Mallaig and West Lochaber, from modern times</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scottish country life from c.1750</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Museum of Rural Life, Wester Kittochside, East Kilbride</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Scotland’s culture and history; natural world; world cultures; science and technology; art and design</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of these venues are entirely devoted to the Clearances; their exhibitions range from folk life, general history to clan exhibitions. Two of the museums listed are national institutions located in the central belt of Scotland and the remainder are independent and locally run, either by trusts or private owners — some with little or no curatorial expertise when they started their heritage adventure. The final column in the
table refers to the way narratives of the Clearances are represented in displays, depending greatly on the focus and objective of each museum. However, three main strands seem to be guiding the readings of events with some measure of overlap: local, emigratory and national (respectively symbolised by the letters: L, E, N). The analysis presented is based on repeated visits over the past twenty years coupled with a questionnaire sent to independent museums that ten of them agreed to answer (Colbost Folk Museum and Aros did not respond). A more extensive survey can be found in Gouriévidis (2010).

The Local Strand

Given the fact that the majority of museums surveyed have very distinct locational terms of reference, the most prominent narrative focus concerns the local impact of Clearances. Exhibition narratives in this case may require looking into evictions, resettlement policies and their consequences, and the development of crofting agriculture. Underlying those presentations are the economic and demographic impacts of the process: changes in land use and population redistribution and loss. The issue of depopulation, of which the surrounding landscape peppered with ruined dwellings is a constant reminder, is frequently brought home through the use of photographs and maps. Significantly, in two cases, nearby archaeological sites provide material and visual evidence as visitors are invited to discover the remains of pre-clearance townships along specially designed trails (Strathnaver Museum and Glengarry Heritage Centre). Timespan, whose historical exhibition was entirely refurbished and reopened in 2008, is currently developing a similar approach, with the Kildonan Clearances Trail well under way; the project is relying on input from the local community and, through internet technology, from wider expatriate communities linked with the area. More widely, an increasing number of clearance related trails or sites are brought to the attention of visitors travelling through the Highland region.

In many of the museums of this strand, crofting appears not only as the very essence of the region’s individuality in physical terms, but also with respect to its intangible heritage: the mindset and culture of the local community, thereby warranting differential treatment with regard to land reform and protection. Furthermore, in some venues, most notably on the Isle of Skye (Skye Museum of Island Life [SMoIL], Colbost Folk Museum and Aros) and in Timespan’s
revamped exhibition, the resilience and actions of past generations of crofters during the crofters’ agitation of the 1880s are celebrated — their actions eventually leading to government legislation guaranteed the recognition of a way of life and ultimately its survival. Acting as memorial sites, those museums commemorate a debt owed to past social actors — along with the lessons for the present this may hold.

The Emigration Strand

Predictably, the experience of emigration is a prevailing element in clan museums, where the Clearances are engaged with through the presentation of the transition from chief to landlord and the collapse of the clan system and dispersal of clan members. The locations from which emigrants departed and their experiences as settlers are foregrounded, with, in some cases (the Museum of the Isles in particular), a profusion of detailed examples of communities and individuals. Some insight into the role of social leaders in emigration might be given, however narratives vary greatly in their treatment of or silence over this thorny issue; clan museums are places whose very essence is predicated upon the notion of group cohesion and unity transcending time. Eviction and emigration policies frequently stand for the very opposite — social fracture and, more painfully, betrayal — severely tarnishing the glossy image of the figurehead.

As one critical consequence of the period, emigration is a major subtheme in an increasing number of venues other than clan museums (see Table 1). More importantly, it is the angle from which the galleries devoted to Scottish history at the National Museum of Scotland (NMoS) tackle the theme of the Highland Clearances in a section entitled: ‘Scotland and the World’ which tells the story of the Scottish diaspora. In the video presenting Scottish emigration, the Clearances are singled out as a crucial element in the ‘mass exodus’ which characterised nineteenth-century Scotland; they also feature in the surrounding display, highlighting notorious examples and figures. Finally, they dimly filter through representations of settlers’ experience which, in fact, dominate a narrative providing limited background to ‘reasons for leaving’ and much on destinations and arrival. The NMoS is, arguably, the most compelling example of a trend which seems to have gained momentum in the 1990s and is threatening to spawn a meta-narrative for the period — the cleared migrant experience. However, even in its staging of Clearance emigration, the museum gives little
sense of the disparities between emigratory waves over the period, particularly with respect to causes and motivation. Emigration is narrowed down to coercion or forced departure and does little justice to those for whom it was a positive and even liberating step.

The National Strand

As a national museum, the NMoS, in status, may legitimately have been expected to provide a core narrative for the whole of Scotland—a central point of reference for visitors who are likely to radiate outwards from the capital. So it might have fleshed out the third strand of Clearances narratives which not many of the local museums address in any depth: the national spirit of the times or ‘Improvement’, in other words, the discourse which provided the intellectual justification or rationale for removals. The museum does have a section of its Enlightenment floor specifically devoted to the transformation of Scottish agriculture; it showcases progress and advance through the use of new farming methods and technological innovation with a presentation partly relying on models collected by the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland started in 1784, an organisation actively engaged in the dissemination and promotion of new ideas. However, nothing is disclosed as to the shape Improvement took in the Highlands in agricultural or social terms. To what extent did the Highlands and the Lowlands differ? How was the policy implemented on the ground? What effect did it have on ordinary Highlanders in view of the clan system? Presenting the social casualties of economic transformation might have tainted the notion of ‘Improvement’, which is ultimately left unchallenged and remains elusive with regard to regional and cultural specificities. When those casualties appear, they do so with a vengeance through movement abroad, thus making emigration the most memorable legacy of the Clearances, whilst reinforcing Scotland’s construction as a diasporic homeland.

The other national museum, the National Museum of Rural Life (NMoRL), also chose to inscribe—albeit with different emphases—its interpretation of the Clearances in a national narrative underlining dispersal, uprooting and loss of physical and familiar landmarks, rather than the rationale framing changes in land use: the Clearances as a socially disruptive force. Significantly, when the NMoRL was first opened in 2001, the Clearances display referred exclusively to the Highlands and Islands; five years later, a significant shift occurred as the
focus was altered, and the term ‘Clearances’ was widened to assimilate changes also occurring in the Lowlands. The marker ‘Clearances’ was used as a starting point of collective understanding to introduce the story of sweeping changes leading to Scottish urbanisation and the inadequacy of towns and cities in assimilating the rate of internal migration. ‘Clearances’ from then on have been deciphered as an experience uniting all Scots, thereby screening out major agricultural, legal and ultimately sociocultural differences such as the effect of the clan system on the mentalités of the Highland peasantry, the Highland land agitation and more significantly the particularity of crofting and the body of legislation regulating it since 1886. If this new stance also masks the cultural fissures which underpinned nineteenth-century discourses and often cast Gaelic Scots in the role of inferior racial types (Devine 1988: 125-126; Gouriévidis 2001; 2003-2004) and Lowland Scots as willing agents of the clearing process, it nevertheless brings into sharper focus issues of power and social engineering not so clearly nor commonly associated with the story of Lowland agricultural transformation. It is an interesting reversal of more conventional historiographical positions whose interpretations of the Clearances as a process emphasise the widespread social effects of agricultural transformation, propelled by the industrial revolution, before narrowing their focus to regional peculiarities, such as Clearances in the Highlands and Islands and rural depopulation in the Lowlands. Comparative analyses of the rural impact of agrarian changes in the Lowlands and Highlands have been a regular feature of modern historiography. Whilst sociocultural and political differences between the two areas were emphasised alongside disparities in the organisation and economy of the two rural communities, analogies were frequently drawn between the fates of dispossessed Highland tenants and those of Lowland tenants in the southern uplands, as well as in areas bordering the Highland region (Cowan 1992; Devine 1994b: 111-64; Dodgshon 1983). The phrase ‘Lowland Clearances’ was first coined by Ted Cowan (1992) before being popularised by a BBC Scotland radio series and subsequent publication by two journalists, The Lowland Clearances: Scotland’s Silent Revolution 1760-1830 (Aitchison and Cassell 2003). By foregrounding the experience of displacement, uprooting and ultimately landlordism, both national museums show that the Clearances are embedded in Scottish culture as a wound with strong national resonance and socio-political potency.

The analysis of the interpretation of the Clearances in Scottish museums over time confirms the strength of their emotional and symbolic power in collective memory; additionally, the shifts that have
occurred in their representation, whilst mirroring evolving historiographical positions, bring to light their use as a commercial, social and political resource serving a variety of contemporary needs.

The Economic Use of the Clearance Heritage

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) in a study on culture and tourism used the example of the Gaelic-speaking Highlands to illustrate its argument on the crucial role of cultural tourism — in this case summer festivals — in ‘sustaining communities threatened with out-migration’ (2009: 24). By and large, the local venues which long preceded national institutions in presenting the story of the Clearances did not expand on the economic potential of museum development in their survey answers, but those which did, such as Timespan and the Museum of the Isles, spoke of slowing down depopulation and revitalising the local economy. Their words mirror the assessment given of the Highland and Island region in the 1970s, blighted by unemployment and economic vulnerability, a situation that the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB), created in 1965, was meant to tackle. Central to its policies was the development of tourism and tourist infrastructures (HIDB 1979; HIDB Annual Report 1967: 3-4) of which museum-like venues were part and parcel.

For the curators of Highland and Island museums, which receive limited funding apart from the revenues gained during the tourist season and are often set in areas lacking economic dynamism, exhibition choices may well have been influenced by factors such as public appeal along with the spin-offs generated by tourism — increasingly presented in terms of local development and social vitality. Timespan and Aros are two such examples, as they saw the shape and style of their initial displays in part directed by their desire to cater for a large audience in terms of age, origin and interest. The elaborate scenography and multimedia communication on which their exhibitions relied portrayed the Clearances through tableaux high on emotionalism, verging on the dramatic: a brutal eviction (Timespan) and the poignant departure of an emigrant ship (Aros). It was history turned into spectacle, hijacked by designer- and consumer-led displays. Both exhibitions were discontinued — in 2002 at Aros and 2007 at Timespan. Whilst at Aros, the focus of the new exhibition has moved to the island’s environment, at Timespan, refurbishment led to a newly designed and upgraded display area enabling loans of artefacts from the national museums;
the Clearances story is no longer told through a reconstructed scene. Both exhibitions were part-funded by the HIDB (HIDB Annual Report 1987: 20) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) (HIE Annual Report 1992-93: 26). Government-sponsored agencies have undoubtedly been influential in initiating or assisting the establishment of museums identified as commercial ventures and as means of retaining tourists in the region, notably, given the Scottish climate, by providing them with wet weather facilities (HIDB 1981). With a similar objective in view, their endorsement of the creation of Clearance heritage trails is aimed at offering visitors alternative activities, in this case mixing culture with mild exercise.

Regarding international tourism, history and countryside were identified as prime motivators (Borley 1988: 16) and, by the early 1990s, when tourism was described as the single most important industry in the region, two valuable assets were singled out as underpinning new tourist strategies: the region’s environment and culture, respectively marketed as ‘green’ (HIDB Annual Report 1990: 32) and ‘Gaelic’ (Pedersen 1995) tourism. In both the Clearances snugly fitted the bill, as they provided the historical backdrop to interpretations dealing with the making of the region’s landscape — its apparent wilderness — or the decline of Gaelic through population loss, not to mention the long-lasting scars the clearing process left on the Gaelic-speaking community’s psyche and self-worth. Museums developing the local strand of Clearance narratives wove such aspects into their narratives in varying degrees and ways.

The growing emphasis on emigration in narratives illustrates the increased significance of a particular brand of cultural tourism catering for a specific market segment, namely the great reservoir of genealogical visitors that descendants of emigrants, including those who were ‘cleared’, represent. In the words of David Lowenthal (1996: 9): ‘Diaspora are notably heritage hungry’ and, for members of the Scottish diaspora, the homeland appears to be overwhelmingly imagined as ‘Highland’ in terms of landscape, social organisation, culture and language (Basu 2007: 67; Ray 2001). In the 1990s, a socio-economic actor had stressed the need to optimise the ‘Gaelic tourism product’ because of its appeal to overseas visitors and most notably those in search of their ancestral roots (Pedersen 1995). He also underlined the fundraising opportunities that the ‘wealthy and influential overseas diaspora’ (Pedersen 1995: 295-6) offered for the realisation of such projects, an opportunity long acknowledged by the Clan museums considered. Likewise, the team planning for the Scottish galleries of the NMoS tried
to capitalise on this market in its fund-raising activities, which extended well beyond Scottish shores to embrace places where Scottish emigrants had settled. It homed in on clan and St Andrew’s societies and was eventually successful in matching the funds awarded by the Heritage Lottery, especially through its American appeal (McKean 2000: 91-2).

Unsurprisingly, root tourism is the cornerstone of clan museums, providing their members with genealogical resources and a focal point for clan history and activities, but genealogical facilities are also offered by an increasing number of venues, for example Arran, Timespan (which since its refurbishment has also incorporated in its display a panel devoted to ‘remote connections’), Seallam! and Glengarry. In clearance narratives, the emphasis on emigration may well respond to the quest of a transnational imagined community of descendants of cleared emigrants looking to revisit an equally imagined homeland. It thereby gives shape to the memories of a social group whose identity is based on a shared Scottish—Gaelic—ancestry and a shared past. Their quest may also be heightened by the nature of the societies in which many now live and the policy orientations and discourses dominating them—multiculturalism, pluralism—recentring the distinct experiences of the diverse communities composing them, not least those of indigenous populations. According to Basu’s findings (2007: 200), the clearances loom large in the memory of expatriate Scots in settler societies, even those whose personal history is not related to the Highland region nor the period, mirroring the experience of Aboriginal groups, pervaded by dispossession, expulsion and trauma as well as deep spiritual attachment to an ancestral land. Just as clan museums act as points of convergence for their scattered members, so do an increasing number of Scottish museums—not least the NMoS—for the Scottish diaspora. Heritage tourism—and more specifically here root tourism—can have a variety of effects on the narratives produced and their modulation, the memorialisation of the past becoming prey to the collective imaginaries held—or thought to be held—by the group targeted. In the case of Clearance narratives, heritage tends to further the people’s memories of the process rather than elite memories; furthermore, in a large measure, it is the memory of a victimised group.

The Political Use of Clearance Heritage

Underpinning the representation of the Clearances in national museums—however cursory or fragmented their treatments might be—
are issues of power relations and, more specifically, landed power in Scotland. In smaller museums, particularly those developing the local narrative strand and taking visitors on a journey through time ending with an overview of the present days, the making of the region’s crofting landscape and its sociocultural consequences are frequently linked with present concerns and debates (Ullapool Museum and Visitor Centre, SMoIL, Colbost, Seallam! Visitor Centre, Aros). The protection of crofting as a culturally specific and valuable way of life is underscored with the Land War of the 1880s and the 1886 Crofters’ Act, hailed as decisive landmarks in the history of the area (SMoIL, Seallam!, Aros, Timespan since 2008), including in terms of linguistic or cultural renaissance (SMoIL, Seallam!, Aros).

The period when the majority of those museums emerged, mostly since the seventies, was one of growing social and cultural revival in the region (Macdonald 1997), helped partly by local government reform and partly by quangos and other organisations created to promote the regeneration of the area and, finally (most markedly since the nineties), partly in response to the boost given by the EU to minority cultures, especially after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. In this context, local museums performed a societal function, explaining the specificity of the present-day Highlands and Islands — their cultural wealth — in the light of the past and underlining its legacy in a world increasingly homogenised. Most of all, they acted as mouthpieces for heritage groups or simply individuals (Colbost, SMoIL) and as public platforms often relaying alternative views and contributing to public discussion. Significantly, it was a heritage crafted and located outside major geographical and institutional centres.

Very importantly, in those museums which take the story up to the present day, what is strongly emphasised and celebrated is the communal spirit of the crofting community and, ultimately, the values and benefits of a collective order set against the inordinate power of private landlords. The argument had immense resonance in the years which saw a heightened campaign, initiated by the socialist John McEwen (1977), to reveal and control patterns of private ownership in Scotland (see Wightman [1996, 1999] and Callander [1998] for later developments) and, from the 1990s, the expansion of the movement of crofting community ownership (MacAskill 1999; Warren 2002: 48-9). After devolution, which reestablished a Parliament in Scotland in 1998, the process for change culminated with the passing of the 2003 Land Reform Act that facilitated community buy-outs in the crofting districts. The Act’s aim was to address the imbalance of ownership and
control of rural land. It dealt with public right of access to the land and community right to buy land, and importantly, one part of the legislation was specifically devoted to crofting communities, conferring on them a pre-emptive right to purchase land — unlike other parts of Scotland.

At the heart of issues of land management and use in the Highlands and Islands were questions of lack of understanding of the needs of crofters, along with their lack of control in the decision-making process. In late-twentieth-century Scottish political discourse, the national reform of the land system in the future devolved Scotland was construed in terms of greater democratic accountability and consensus, the same values underpinning arguments in favour of devolution (McCrone 1997).

Land reform became one of the flagship policies of the new devolved assembly and a telling symbol of what was presented as new statecraft and policymaking for twenty-first-century Scotland. It seems that the changing political climate surrounding the future of a devolved Scotland has been propitious to the development of a unifying Clearance narrative. The contrast between expulsive forces and the painful experience of displacement and resettlement epitomised by ‘clearance’ spoke to the reformist agenda of twenty-first-century Scotland.

The strength of feelings generated by the Clearances has impacted on the interpretation of material culture even when the artefacts concerned do not relate to the period. Jones (2005: 107), for instance, has noted in her analysis of the meanings embedded in and discourses surrounding a ninth century sculpture from the north-east of Scotland known as the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab, that the Highland Clearances emerged as a core paradigm employed, in the early twenty-first century, by local people when discussing the relocation of newly excavated remains to the NMoS:

The Highland Clearances provide the main focus for the historic emplotment of these processes of displacement and fragmentation, and the frequent uninitiated references to them in conversation about the Hilton of Cadboll monument highlights its symbolic role in this respect. Such references take the form of a slippage between those in power and authority today and their perceived counterparts in the past, namely landlords and church ministers.

Heritage has acted as the stage upon which wider power issues have been performed, history offering precedents and justification.
Conclusion

As McCrone (1997) observed, ‘landownership’ was long seen as ‘a problem of Highland estate well away from where most Scots live’. Until recently, its most potent historical symbol, the Clearances, was not featured in national museums. In local heritage, serious and relatively extensive treatment of the period only emerged in the late seventies. The sense that this part of the Highland past needed reclaiming and asserting was shared by many individuals and groups who did not necessarily overplay its political potential, but certainly presented an alternative story to that of stately homes, sporting estates or uncontextualised folk life. The land reform debate of the late nineties and eventual legislation passed by the devolved assembly helped redefine the place of the Clearances in the national narrative.

At the same time, the New Scotland and its nationalist-led government are actively pursuing and cultivating links with its diaspora — often very broadly defined — in the hope of ‘harnessing [its] power’ (Scottish Government [2010]; see also Ancien et al. [2009]; Carr et al. [2009]; Rutherford [2009]). If the strategy is manifestly economic — not to mention political, with the prospect of a referendum on independence in which economics takes centre stage in the debates — the increasing prominence given to Scotland’s diasporic community in Scottish heritage also taps into the need to respond to a quest for origins and expatriate identity on the part of descendants of cleared inhabitants and more widely of Scottish emigrants. The centring of the Clearances within narratives of exile partakes of the manufacture of transnational memories in which forced departure and trauma find pride of place; they owe much to the prevalence of Highland images in the imaginary repertoire of diasporic Scots and of the Clearances as a dominant trope within their interpretive community.

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commemorative practices and monuments. More recently she has developed a comparative approach looking at the representation of migration in Scottish and Australian museums. Her publications include *The Dynamics of Heritage: History, Memory and the Highland Clearances* (Ashgate, 2010).

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The Jewish Museum in Prague has as many as 40,000 items in its collections, the uniqueness of which is underlined by the exceptional circumstances under which most of them were acquired by the museum. Nearly all of the items were confiscated during the Second World War from Jews who were sent to concentration camps and from Jewish communities that were closed down.

Many visitors share the commonly held view that the Nazis brought Jewish ritual objects from the whole of occupied Europe to Prague so that after their victory they could create a ‘museum of an extinct race’. In reality, however, things were not that simple and what seems to be an attested and undoubted fact is more like a self-perpetuating legend. The issues relating to the war-time Jewish Museum in Prague have recently been covered in detail by my colleague Magda Veselská, who specializes in the history of our institution and its prominent personages and who describes the fate of its collection of Torah scrolls.

Above all, it should be pointed out that the Jewish Museum in Prague was not created by the Nazis. The museum has been in existence since August 1906. The museum’s collection programme was clearly based along regional lines, covering solely Jewish memorial objects from Prague and Bohemia. At the time of the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the museum’s collection contained approximately 760 items.

On the very day that the Protectorate was established, the German occupation authorities began gradually to enforce racial anti-Jewish laws in Bohemia and Moravia. For Jews living there this meant the systematic removal of their properties, their civic and human rights, and ultimately their lives.

The Jewish Museum in Prague continued to exist, but at the beginning of December 1941, it was turned into a storehouse for the property of the emptied synagogues of Prague, where divine worship was banned by the Nazis in September 1941. The last entry in the museum visitors’ book dates from 24 November 1941. It is symbolic that on the same day the first of a long succession of regular transports of Jewish prisoners left Prague for the Terezín ghetto.

* Leo Pavlát is the Director of the Jewish Museum in Prague and a member of the leadership of the Prague Jewish community.
All the activities of the Jewish community in Prague were under the direct control of the ‘Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung’ (Central Office for Jewish Emigration), which later became the ‘Zentralamt für die Regelung der Judenfrage in Böhmen und Mähren’ (Central Office for the Regulation of the Jewish Question in Bohemia and Moravia). On 27 March 1942 the provincial Jewish communities were dissolved and placed under the Prague community. Several areas of the Protectorate had already been evacuated in the first months of 1942, the Jews being deported. This led to concern about the survival of liturgical objects and documents, which were in the care of the Department for the Administration of Provincial Communities at the Prague Jewish Community.

In April 1942, the museum was to reopen with the approval of the Central Office. At this time, employees of the Prague Jewish community asked the Central Office to allow the collections of the Jewish museums in Mikulov and Mladá Boleslav to merge with those of the Jewish Museum in Prague. Encouraged by the positive response they received, they further informed the Central Office that there were also many valuable objects owned by the rural communities that had been closed down. On 28 May 1942, on instructions from the deputy head of the ‘Zentralstelle’, SS-Untersturmführer Karl Rahm, the Department for the Administration of Provincial Communities at the Prague Jewish Community sent a circular letter to the provincial communities ordering them to send to Prague all ‘historical and historically valuable’ objects. It is clear from this that a selection of the best and most interesting items was to be shipped to Prague. Boxes and packages from 29 provincial communities arrived in Prague in June and July 1942.

A new concept for a central museum emerged from the discussions that were taking place at the end of June and the beginning of July 1942: a rural museum was to be integrated into the current museum in Prague, which was also to include an important site – the Old-New Synagogue. These discussions were attended by the founders and chief curators of the Jewish Museums in Prague and Mikulov – Salomon Hugo Lieben and Alfred Engel respectively. Also involved in the discussions was the Chairman of the Prague Jewish Community František Weidmann, who brought with him the outstanding museum specialist Josef Polák – an important contribution to the team.

No complete documentation has survived from that period. From the little information that is available, however, it is clear that the project was elaborated on the initiative of the Czech Jewish Community in the middle of 1942. The representatives of the Central Office merely approved the proposals that were put forward and did not give any specific instructions to the community employees. The museum, however, was supposed to acquire for its collections all quality items that were available, which is why from the outset it counted
on the availability of items from the Treuhandstelle, which was in charge of the private property of deportees. For reasons I shall discuss later, the Nazi authorities did not object to the project and approved the statutes of the wartime Central Jewish Museum. The museum acquired the Pinkas, Klausen, High and the Old-New synagogues, in addition to the Ceremonial Hall. The administrative centre was based in the former Jewish school in Jáchymova Street in the centre of Prague. All of the museum’s activities were controlled by the Nazi authorities.

The actual inauguration of the activities of the Central Jewish Museum, however, is directly linked to 3 August 1942, when a new summons was sent to the communities outside Prague. This time, each and every item from the property of the rural synagogues, including books and archive records, were to be shipped to Prague, and the museum staff were supposed to select items for the collections. Detailed instructions were issued regarding the procedures to be taken when arranging, signing and sending consignments.

The museum, which operated until the middle of February 1945, acquired Jewish property from 136 former communities in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. In the two and a half years of the museum’s existence, the museum staff handled as many as 212,822 objects, books and archive materials, for which were used approximately 101,090 catalogue cards. Of this amount, over 70 percent were archive materials and books and 20 percent were liturgical objects from synagogues.

The museum had a few specialist committees, which for twelve hours a day registered, sorted and individually classified the dispatched objects into three basic categories on the basis of their historical and artistic importance. The main outcome of the committee’s work was a card catalogue, which has been preserved intact and which to this day makes it possible to identify with accuracy all the items in question.

At the height of the activities of the Central Jewish Museum there were fifty employees, although this number was forever changing as a result of deportations. Other departments of the Jewish community and the Treuhandstelle also took part in the museum’s activities, notably in the conversion of separate buildings and the preparation and organization of installations.

All these people knew that what was at stake was the very survival of the Jews. In the midst of destruction they had one goal: to save the substantial records of Jewish culture in Bohemia and Moravia, to preserve them for future generations of Jews and to do all they could – under dire conditions and at continual risk of death – to acquire and document as many items as possible. With this goal, albeit disguised in rhetoric acceptable for the Nazi liquidators, they led a silent but heroic campaign against destruction and oblivion.
The attempts of the Czech Jews to create as scholarly and professional an institution as possible can be seen from the museum programme as formulated by Josef Polák in November 1942.

If the Central Jewish Museum is to operate as a scholarly institution collecting, preserving and documenting the records of Jewish culture from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, it is necessary that it has from the very beginning a well-designed programme of activities. A well-functioning museum should not aim to make an impact by means of the unusual and sensational character of its rare exhibits, but by the completeness and the well thought-out nature of its collections, which should reflect as fully as possible the social, economic and cultural development of, in this case, the Jews living in the Protectorate.

The idea of the Central Jewish Museum as an objective and scholarly institution that was separate from Nazi ideology was developed by the staff, acting on Nazi orders, with a view to documenting accurately all the Jewish objects that had been confiscated. It was this aspect of its activities, however, that was key to the Nazis’ interest in the museum. While the Jews wanted to care for and promote the unique heritage of Jewish culture, even in the midst of destruction, the Nazi authorities had more in mind the creation of an ideal storehouse. This is evident from the German report on the museum’s activities for 1943, which states the following:

The aim was for the museum to become a centre for the collection of all synagogue objects, books and archive material from the property of the former Jewish communities of Bohemia and Moravia. The gathered material was later sorted and documented by specialists. The specialist staff were then given the task of selecting the items of most value and historic interest and of displaying them in special exhibitions.

As yet I have made no reference to exhibitions, even though the fact that they were held is regarded by many as proof that the Nazis wanted to establish an anti-Jewish propagandistic museum with the symbolic title ‘museum of an extinct race’. So, what exhibitions were organized by the Central Jewish Museum and what were they actually like?

The first exhibition, which was dedicated to Hebrew manuscripts and printed books, was completed at the end of November 1942 in the High Synagogue. It was prepared by Dr Tobias Jakobovits, a former librarian at the Prague Jewish Community, and Salomon Hugo Lieben, an outstanding historian and Hebraist. This exhibition focused on the history of Hebrew typography and included a section on the most valuable Jewish archive documents.

The second exhibition of the war-time museum focused on Jewish festivals and ceremonies and on everyday Jewish life. It was held in the Klausen Synagogue in April 1943 and provided an effective display of the main European Judaism  Volume 41  No. 1  Spring ’08  127
collections, especially of silver artefacts and textiles. Polák and Zelenka managed to put together an outstanding modern installation which was admired by visitors long after the end of the Second World War. At the end of 1943, the Klausen Synagogue hosted another exhibition of modern art, which in the relevant archive documents was labelled as an exhibition of degenerate art (‘entartete Kunst’).

The third exhibition was held in 1943/44 in the Old-New Synagogue. Presenting the building both as an important house of prayer and as a historical memorial site, it also featured some of the synagogue’s furnishings.

The Pinkas Synagogue exhibition on the history of the Jewish population in the Czech Lands that was planned for 1943 did not take place. On the instigation of the Zentralstelle in November of the same year, however, work began on the building of the Prague Ghetto Museum in the Ceremonial Hall by the Old Jewish Cemetery. Hana Volavková and Josef Polák worked on this project in the first half of 1944. Following Pollak’s arrest in August 1944 and the deportation of most of the key staff of the Central Jewish Museum and the Jewish community, however, work on the project ceased. Further deportation of museum staff in February 1945 put a definitive end to all the museum’s activities.

All the above exhibitions were created by Jewish specialists. Having managed to turn the confiscation of Jewish property into a specialist rescue operation, they then followed a similarly positive goal when organizing exhibitions: they intended to create a picture of Jewish life and history that would approximate in a comprehensive and meaningful way Jewish culture in the authentic environment of Prague synagogues. Employees of the museum did what they could to ensure that the exhibitions were representative and imposing. The exhibitions were intended not for the general public, but for a small circle of high-ranking Nazi officials. The exhibition of books in the High Synagogue met with official approval, but the Nazi authorities could not find the slightest trace of Nazi propaganda demonizing the Jewish enemy in the exhibition on Jewish customs and traditions in the Klausen Synagogue. This is why the Zentralstelle ordered the addition of effigies of praying Jews and illustrations showing the practice of koshering meat, which was a popular theme of anti-Semitic incitement. In the Old-New Synagogue, the Zentralstelle subsequently prohibited the part of the exhibition that emphasized the quality of the building in comparison with contemporary Roman Catholic sites.

In spite of such encroachments, there were never any propagandistic, anti-Semitic exhibitions in the Central Jewish Museum. As well as drawing upon traditional German sources, anti-Semitic propaganda in the Protectorate tried to make use of two books in particular with regard to the Czech context: ‘The Mystery of the Jewish Cemetery’ and ‘The Golem, the Scourge of the Czechs’, which were published in 1942. Both works, which exploited well-established
anti-Semitic stereotypes, were extremely simplistic and primitive. It was clear, however, that the collections of the Jewish Museum could not be manipulated in a similarly crude way. It therefore seems unlikely that the Nazis intended to establish an ideologically based, anti-Jewish museum that would exploit the rich collections of Jewish artefacts. On the contrary, the above-mentioned German report from 1943 only states that ‘objects of the greatest value and historical interest’ should be displayed ‘at special exhibitions’. The Nazis in the Protectorate fully concentrated on the effective organization of the extermination system, in which anti-Jewish ideology and propaganda was by then of little significance.

If the exhibitions did not provide room for ideological manipulation, why was the museum established in Prague during the war? It is a fact that to date not a single Zentralstelle document has been found that shows that the Nazis were actively involved in the setting up and the operating of the Central Jewish Museum. All suggestions and proposals came from the Jewish community and were only approved or amended by the Zentralstelle in substantial matters. There is nothing, therefore, that supports the idea that a clearly formulated, resolute Nazi goal was behind the establishment and workings of the Central Jewish Museum during the war. In this context it seems even less probable that the Nazi authorities would have had any use for the museum after the war. On the contrary, everything points to the fact that the former Jewish Museum in Prague was extended during the war as a result of external pressure and through a number of ongoing makeshift measures, without anybody foreseeing the potential scale of the whole project.

The Nazis’ interest in the museum most probably developed from a number of practical problems that had to be resolved. The main reason is clear – the museum enabled the Nazis to gain in a short period of time in-depth knowledge about confiscated Jewish objects that were of particular value. Although there is a lack of Nazi documents from this period, we can still learn a lot about the Nazis’ intentions from the very nature of the tasks which they set for the museum management. It is clear that the Nazis had no experts for such specialist work as the registration and evaluation of confiscated Jewish artefacts that were of artistic or historical value. It is possible that the Nazis saw the museum as a special department of the Treuhandstelle with a different form of collection, documentation, storage and evaluation of confiscated Jewish property.

The Nazis really had no reason not to support the Jewish community’s proposal for the establishment of the museum. For them it meant quicker and more efficient organization of the confiscation of Jewish property from Bohemia and Moravia, a chance of substantial gain, illusory hope for the Jews, facilitating the process of liquidation of the Jewish population, and ambiguous ideas for exploitation in anti-Semitic propaganda. Nor can one rule out the
personal ambitions of the head of the Zentralstelle Günther – his superiors in Berlin did not know about the Prague museum.

I have already spoken about the aims of the Jewish employees at the museum. Their attempts at saving the Jewish cultural heritage from destruction were no doubt reinforced by their experience gained from other occupied countries. At the same time, they acted with the hope that after the war it would be possible to return all the objects to their original owners. For those who worked in the museum, however, there was another significant and personal aspect to the whole affair. Being ‘useful’ for the Nazis meant that transportation was delayed and that there was a chance of survival. This is also why the employees of the war-time Jewish Museum were so active: extending their activities, either in the collection of confiscated Jewish property or in the preparation of exhibitions signified a small victory in a desperate fight for time. The vast majority of museum staff lost this fight. The only specialist who survived was Hana Volavková, who after the war held the position of museum director for a certain time. I would like to end with the words she used to describe her colleagues at the war-time museum:

When they set about planning and then implementing the activities of the museum they had no illusions they were carrying out great work. They formed a very modest picture of their efforts and managed to see that it was an act of desperation that was nevertheless secretly underlined by an element of resistance and an element of free-will that stood up to a monstrous mechanism, which was heading in an unknown direction, but which was grinding them down … The establishment and existence of the Jewish Museum in Prague was paid for by the lives of nearly all those who worked there during the war. It was these people – people who were to die without burial – who documented most of the material. It was these people who laid the foundations for the post-war museum and its future programme.
A Working Model of a Sacred Place: Exhibits Appearing in Dreams and Other Miracles in a Small Museum at the Edge of the World

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Abstract: Based on materials from expeditions to the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug during 2006 and 2007, this article discusses the role of a small museum in the local society of a district administrative center. The article focuses on a specific class of sacred Nenets objects in the museum’s collection, called locally babushka (grandmother) and a “working model” of a sacred site that is itself a sacred site for local residents, both indigenous and Russian, to explore the social relationships forged by the museum and its collection among local residents of all ethnicities. The museum and its objects are not removed from social life and rendered dead and preserved under glass. They remain alive in a network of relationships between human and non-human persons.

Keywords: museums, Nenets, religion, sacred objects, Yamal

This article discusses several days in the operation of a small museum situated on the Yamal Peninsula (in the Nenets language “Yamal” means “the edge of the world”), a museum that resembles thousands of other local history museums in Russia. Along with the museum’s employees I spent my time there preparing a descriptive catalog of the museum’s sacred objects. The process I witnessed, as well as the explanations that accompanied it, were, on the one hand, quite ordinary. On the other hand, it allowed a departure from traditional models in the study of relations between museums and commu-
nities where they emerged, and whose history they represent. I believe it to be very useful to look at this small Siberian museum not so much as a colonial project or a collection of ideal cultural standards. Rather it should be understood in its local context, along with the degree of its integration into the local community and the functions it performs. Further discussion of specific situations may also help us understand the cultural milieu in which the museum emerged. This article focuses not so much on museum objects or ideas and concepts behind them, but on people, employees and visitors alike.

The Yamal District Museum

The museum is situated in the district center of Yar-Sale on Yamal Peninsula. It has everything a large museum would have: a curator, a director, a bookkeeper, displays in glass windows, a storeroom, registers, and unique objects. Officially it is the branch of the Okrug Museum (I. S. Shemanovsky Museum Exhibition Complex, Salekhard). There are even set working hours and an entrance fee. Among the distinctive features of the Yar-Sale museum that make it different from central museums is the virtual lack of tourists: the harsh climate, extremely high prices for transportation, and the lack of roads all result in the fact that very few people come to the museum from other places just out of curiosity. There are around 15,000 people living in the Yamal district of Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug; 10,000 of them are Nenetses, half of whom lead a nomadic life in the tundra.

Built in the 1930s, the settlement of Yar-Sale developed around the Yamal cultural center, which was conceived as a vehicle of culture and enlightenment for the peoples of the tundra. The essential difference between the museum and all other cultural facilities of the settlement is that it was created at the initiative of the settlement inhabitants rather than by order from authorities. This initiative was nurtured by the idea that the Yamal tundra and the settlement itself may and should be viewed as a respectful place with its own history and significance, a place worthy of its own museum. For the local dwellers the museum stressed the idea of belonging to their settlement as a “cultural place” (see Habeck 2005: 53, 2006).

The museum was organized at the beginning of the 1990s by a local enthusiast, a Russian school teacher who was born and grew up on Yamal Peninsula, and who, by his own definition, is a hereditary Don Cossack. The curator, who is also the museum’s tour guide, is a
Nenets woman, who was born and grew up in the Priural’skaya tundra, and who has a secondary school degree in library science. In 2007 the museum did not yet have a building of its own, and by that time had already moved from place to place several times. At the time I am describing here, the museum occupied a small hall in the district’s Department of Education building, thus all exhibitions were considered temporary.

Museum exhibits are dedicated to the local nature and to residents of the region (both Russians and indigenes). The museum exhibition may be conventionally divided into several thematic sections: local nature, the indigenous population (customs, religion), history of the settlement and its dwellers, as well as arts and crafts produced by its inhabitants. The borderlines of these sections are rather blurry as groups may merge with one another. For instance, the model of the Nenets sacred place is located in the “Nature” section, with the picture of Khadyta River among stuffed birds and animals of the tundra.

Examining the museum’s exhibition shows which settlement inhabitants were honored with a separate narrative and why, or which everyday objects were selected, which meaning they are endowed with, and how the region’s past and present are constructed through them. It is intriguing why the exhibition dedicated to the history of Yamal Peninsula features helmets and weapons that once belonged to Wehrmacht soldiers, or why the exhibit lacks ethnic clothing, although there are samples of it in the collection. However, this article discusses only several episodes related to the descriptive catalogs of the sacred objects.

Sacred Objects in the Museum: Work with Collections

During my 2007 expedition, among other formal research responsibilities I worked with a set of sacred objects that belonged to one of my female informants. Prior to that time I had been working as a research fellow at the Russian Ethnographic Museum in Saint Petersburg for almost five years, so that when I felt the need for comparative material, I asked my colleague, the curator of the Yamal district museum, to introduce me to museum’s collection of sacred objects. The curator, ZP, a friendly and well-educated Nenets woman, told me that they indeed had such a collection, but the descriptive catalogs had not yet been prepared. She herself had been employed at the museum for a short time, the collections transferred to her were insufficiently documented, and
many things were missing from registers altogether. She was trying to put everything in order, but had not yet gotten to objects that interested me, so I could investigate only those items that were placed in the public exhibition.

ZP, although she does not have a special museum or ethnographic education, had been working as a librarian for a long period of time, so she had good skills in systematizing objects and making registers. Eventually I succeeded in persuading her to show me the collection of sacred, and I promised to help her in preparing of their descriptive catalogs. Thus, I was rewarded with the possibility to observe the museum’s everyday internal life. I could see how it was functioning in the absence of organized groups of visitors, how people stopped as they passed by to chat with the curator or other employees, to discuss plans, to ask for help, to drink a cup of tea, and to look at the exhibition—to check whether there were any new objects on display, or to look at older things. Sometimes they would start telling stories related to the exhibition, or ask about various details and circumstances. Sometimes there were more than a dozen such visits in the course of a day.

The majority of museum collections are kept in separate repositories outside the museum. As already mentioned, the museum was in need of more space, so at first the curator suggested that I start sorting out the collection right in the museum yard, on the snow, without taking objects inside. She explained that this way the process would be “cleaner”: most of the sacred objects are made of reindeer fur, which falls out very quickly when it is warm; moreover, the moths that they may contain could jeopardize other exhibition objects. So we started our work outside.

These sacred objects are most often anthropomorphic figures clad in many layers of male or female ethnic clothes, made of either fur or broadcloth; they may be additionally wrapped into colored kerchiefs and bound by a large number of belts (usually woven, but sometimes made of leather). Sometimes a hard object (made of metal, stone, or wood) is placed into the middle of the figurine. I was primarily interested in the structure of these figures and the succession of layers on them. Examination and description included the “undressing” of the figurines, an exploration of each layer, and then “redressing.” Obviously, this process required a considerable amount of time. During our work my Nenets colleagues referred to the figurines as babushki (Russian for grandmothers), which seems to perfectly reflect people’s attitude to these objects: respectful and reverend, yet very personal and “homely.” In the morning we started working in the yard, right on the
snow, and although it was May, the temperature was below \(-10^\circ C\), so pretty soon my colleague and I were freezing. By noon she finally suggested bringing the figurines inside, where the exhibition was located (the only space where they could be placed), which we did before going to lunch. I could not fail to pay attention to the fact that although my colleague was doing everything very professionally and conscientiously, she did not like this work very much, and had not it been for my persistence and her politeness, she would not have started working with the collection.

When I came back from lunch, everything was prepared for the work to start, and the curator reminded me that the objects were not very clean, so that disinfection was necessary to make the work safe. I first did not grasp what she had in mind, but she pointed to the bottle of vodka standing nearby and required that we wash our hands with it. From this time on, we always washed our hands with vodka before and after touching the objects, and my colleague paid a lot of attention to this.

Very soon a third person joined us, another Nenets woman (NO), who worked as a museum janitor. The curator asked her to join us, and her help proved to be extremely important. First, it turned out that although I could “undress” the figurines without much difficulty, special skills were required to “redress” them, and our new helper could do this easily and quickly. Second, she was a Nenets herself, who grew up in the area and lived most of her life in the tundra, so she knew the purpose of every figurine much better than even the curator herself (in the Priural’skaya tundra, where the latter was born, babushkas are much rarer). Moreover, while working together, these two Nenets women were not only answering my questions, but also discussed certain details between themselves, commented on each other’s actions, shared their fears, and so on. Thus I received access to many details, which I would not have noticed without this dialogue. I also felt that with another Nenets woman joining us a certain strain that the main curator experienced at the beginning was over, and we started working quickly and accurately.

While preparing the catalogue, we also performed curatorial work (e.g., dried damp things, protected them against moths).\(^7\) By the end of the first day it turned out that in my colleagues’ opinion one more action had to be included into the range of prophylactic measures: all the figurines, including those that were standing in the showcases, were placed in a row to be offered vodka and slightly sprinkled with tobacco. This action was not discussed separately; my colleagues were
taking it for granted, as something that goes without saying, something as mundane as the drying. I was only told that this action was to be performed on that very day: “that’s what we should do since we took them out.” The most important thing was not to forget any of the figurines. I did not argue and readily joined this extremely picturesque procedure (it should be noted that even the symbolic imitation of our own drinking was not required in this case). When everything was done, we again washed our hands with vodka, and left the museum.

The next day as I was “undressing” one of the bigger figures, I found the cap of a vodka bottle behind its outer fur coat. Because I was registering all finds without exception, I started entering this one as well, yet the curator told me that this cap did not have any significance for my research, and that she herself had put it there so that it would be easier to offer vodka to the babushka. At this point I started asking her about the process in more detail. ZP told me that she had to offer vodka and tobacco to the figures time after time, and that she considered this procedure to be one of her direct curator’s responsibilities because she “has to deal with them anyway.”

The last time she gave them vodka and tobacco was on the night before January 7, and because it was cold and there was a lot of snow, her husband assisted her. (Incidentally, her husband was a Siberian Tatar and a Muslim, while ZP herself continuously stressed that she was Russian Orthodox, attended the local Orthodox Church on a regular basis, that all of her family members were baptized, and that she was not very knowledgeable about the customs and the religion of the local Nenetses.) I could not resist asking ZP why she had performed the feeding procedure on the night before January 7. She looked at me with surprise: “But this was Christmas night—a special night for all spirits, so it was absolutely necessary.” I could only agree: What can be more evident than that?

So the three of us worked for several days, starting and completing the day by washing our hands with vodka, and only once NO warned me that she could not touch one of the figures made of loon, for this was prohibited for women of her clan. When the description of this figurine was over NO joined us again. During the work it happened that some knots on the figurines’ bodies turned out to be very tight, or a sleeve of a fur coat would not easily come out of a sleeve of another one or something else of that type. I would often talk to a “recalcitrant” detail, as is my habit of talking to a computer or other things: “Please, come on, get undone!” My muttering was noticed by my colleagues and looked at favorably: “Correct, one has to ask her politely.” Later
the curator told me that she, too, whenever she had to bother the figures, excused herself in the Nenets language: “This is not my fault that I have to touch you; it’s the Russians’ fault.” When she suggested that I do the same, I laughed, as I myself was a Russian, which would render this phrase senseless. To which both of my Nenets colleagues very seriously observed that it was not for my personal fun that I had come there and started this work and because I was fulfilling somebody’s task I was entitled to this excuse. After a short deliberation they suggested a new formula for me: “This is not my fault, this is the fault of Narka lutse [the main Russian].” Needless to say, I spent the rest of the day smiling, as I was trying to find a proper candidate for this “main Russian,” personally culpable for my coming to the museum and working with its wonderful collection. When the work with the figurines was done, ZP recalled having one more unpacked suitcase with sacred objects and suggested that we do that one, too. So we did, and the description of all museum objects was soon completed.

A couple of days later I stopped at the museum, and ZP told me about a scary dream she had had. A huge woman appeared to her in this dream, and ZP could not comprehend what the woman wanted. When ZP woke up, she understood that it was one of the babushkas we had worked with, and froze with fear. She recalled seeing this particular babushka in the morning of the very first day of work, and then lost trace of her. ZP was in the museum no sooner than the day began—only to realize that this babushka was indeed forgotten in the snow in the museum yard. ZP brought her inside, gave her vodka, tied a new nice belt around her waist, and then decided it would be good to get new belts for all other figurines as well. Still she could not completely calm down, although she hoped that she had succeeded in placating the babushka.

Museum Visitors and the Model of a Sacred Place

As already mentioned, we were working right in the space where the exhibition was placed, so all museum visitors, mostly Nenets women, became our interlocutors and advisers. Friends and relatives would stop by. All of them were curious about our work, participated in the attribution of questionable details, helped in defining materials the objects were made of, shared their experience of dealing with similar objects, and told stories about their ancestral babushkas. Upon learning where I was from, they would bring their children to the museum so
that I could take pictures of them in their ethnic clothes next to stuffed bears or reindeer. By observing these people’s behavior in the museum, I noticed that the model of the sacred place was the most “attractive” locus for them. Museum employees told me that the purpose of this model was to acquaint people who live in the settlement and had never been to the tundra, with how Nenets sacred places looked.\textsuperscript{10}

At that time the model of a sacred place consisted of two idols wrapped in patches of cloth; Young Pioneer and Young Communist League pins were attached to one of them. Dry branches and a trunk of a dry tree with an Orthodox icon and metal bells were fastened behind the idols, with a reindeer head above and reindeer horns at the side. In front of the idols one could see a bowl and a sign explaining what sacred places mean for the Nenetses (see Figure 1). The model was in the part of the exhibition dedicated to the nature and fauna of the region, placed among stuffed tundra animals in front of a painted landscape background depicting the Khaduyta River. Whereas babushkas presented in the hall are exhibited in glass cases, the model of a sacred place is not separated from spectators by any barrier, which means anyone can touch it. The director of the museum told me that he his colleague, also a Russian, created this model and that in the previous premises of the museum it had occupied more space and looked different. He also shared with me his plans how he was going to set it in the new building.

Almost everybody who stopped at the museum would throw something in the bowl in front of the idol, including coins, small bills, candy. Although people were doing this quite openly, nobody wanted to attract too much attention to this act by turning it into a ceremony. Being an outsider and playing ignorant I several times asked why this was done. People calmly responded, “Just in case”; “That’s what one has to do”; “You always do this.”\textsuperscript{11}

A chance visit to the museum of a friend of mine, a young teacher, caused me to rethink my own attitude toward the model of a sacred place displayed in the museum. I knew this young teacher fairly well for a number of years; she grew up in the tundra, and her parents lived in the tundra. At some point her mother was paralyzed and moved in with her. My friend told me that she had an important thing to do: her mother asked her to put something near the “sacred place” to “ask for health.” Moreover, she herself “had many a bad things going on in the family,” and she wanted to attach her silver ring to the sacred place “so that everything would straighten up in the future.”

I wondered whether this would help. Prior to this episode I tended to see the sacred place primarily as a model, just as the sign in front of
Figure 1. Model of the sacred place in the Yamal District Museum.
it suggested—a model that one can assemble and disassemble. Yet the young woman responded, with surprise: “Of course it will!” She then added, “now that we live here in the settlement and cannot reach the tundra.” That is how I learned that some things placed on the branches and on the floor behind the idol (i.e., rags, metal badges, rings) are not exhibits representing votive objects, but real offerings brought to the place. Sure enough, the model was also getting its share of vodka and tobacco when those were offered to the babushkas.

On the last day of my work in the museum I discovered an empty cognac bottle near the idol that had not been there the day before. The curator who was accompanying me gathered that it must have been the museum director who had stopped by the night before to ask the spirits for good weather as for several days he could not leave the settlement for business purposes because of a heavy snowstorm. I tried, very cautiously, to ask both ZP and the director why it was the spirits that he chose to address.12 None of them understood my perplexity: it is perfectly clear that it is the local spirits that are responsible for the weather on Yamal, so one has to address them and not the Church, which does not have anything to do with this. The story seemed particularly fascinating because it was the director himself who initiated the construction of the sacred place in the museum, so as to inform the visitors about the ancient religion of the Nenetses.

All this undoubtedly pointed to the fact that even if it were a model of the sacred place, it was a “working” model, because people, including its creator, considered it capable of performing its sacred functions. The recognized presence of a “working” model of a sacred place in the museum, a clear understanding on the part of the curator that among other things she was responsible for feeding the babushkas, as well as the agreement on the part of the local community about these ideas—all this let me to ask questions: What is it I am dealing with here? What is it that I was lucky to observe? Why is all this happening in a museum? Why am I surprised at what is going on? What is so unexpected about the situation?

Analysis of the Situation:
The Life of an Object in a Museum13

Most likely these questions were the result of my personal experience of visiting museums in large European cities, as well as by my professional work in the Russian Ethnographic Museum, which was origi-
nally created in the country’s capital, and which accumulated exhibits from all over the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. It was customary for me that an object, when it becomes a museum exhibit, is separated from its former context, while acquiring new qualities and functions in its new milieu. People dealing with these exhibits related to them as to museum objects par excellence: they study them, classify, exhibit, restore, preserve. This perception and these practices are reflected in the language used by museum employees: they usually speak about an object’s “life” before it came to the museum as of its “natural environment,” and about the history of the object as a museum exhibit (history of acquiring, keeping, restoring, exhibiting). It would never occur to anybody to describe the existence of a museum object using the term “life.”

What I saw on Yamal while working with the collection of babushkas in no way fits into this customary scheme of relationships between a museum and the objects kept in it. There, after the objects were turned into museum exhibits, they acquired new qualities in due course. However, they did not cease “living,” they were not “alienated” from the Nenets culture, and they preserved the qualities that they had possessed before. The new qualities of these objects were superimposed on the previous ones, which retained their functionality. How was this possible?

It would seem that the first reason was related to the specificity of the museum itself. I already mentioned that it is situated in the district where the majority of population is Nenetses and Khants who had never lost their connection with the tundra life. On Yamal, unlike many other territories in Siberia, neither reindeer husbandry nor “traditional culture” is associated with a lost “golden past” as opposed to the contemporary life in settlements and towns. Tundra life on Yamal is something younger generations learn about not just through older people’s stories or in a museum. Nobody on Yamal has any doubts that even the small children of reindeer herders, fishermen, and hunters fully possess the knowledge of “traditional life” in the tundra.

Kosintseva (2009) made an accurate observation that one of the specificities of museums like the one described here is that those whose story they present are not separated, either by time or by space, from those who listen to the story. These are the same people. In our case, the person responsible for the exhibition, ZP, its curator and tour guide, is also Nenets. As a result, the museum, clearly being a new European phenomenon for Yamal tundras—organized in accordance with its own museum logic and rules—became immersed into the in-
digenuous milieu and developed inseparable ties with it. Without this circumstance the situation described above would be senseless. However, one cannot limit oneself to this observation. Undoubtedly, Nenetses’ views of sacred objects, their functions and specificities, also played an important role.

During my work at the museum I never observed any special attitude to clothes or everyday objects, so one can hardly speak about the museum “life” of fur coats, satchels for needle-work, souvenirs, or low tundra tables. All such objects share a traditional museum fate: they were taken away from their traditional environment, they are not used for their direct purposes, they are studied, classified, preserved, exhibited, they are endowed with new meanings. Yet with babushkas and the model of a sacred place the situation was different. Consequently, it is not only the nature of the museum space, but the specificities of the objects that should be taken into consideration. What are these specificities?

By and large, we are not very well informed about the particular aspects of the relations between the indigenous population of Yamal and their sacred objects; that is despite the fact that these relations are culturally significant, not hidden from outside observers, and extensively discussed in the scholarly literature.16 Certainly, these sacred objects may be very different as far as their provenance, appearance, or functions are concerned. It is outside the scope of this article to address these issues. Very superficially and conventionally, sacred objects may be divided into two categories: those situated on a sacred place (in the tundra) and those that accompany people in their everyday life (whether in the tundra or in the settlement) (Ivanov 1970; Khomich 1977: 21). The second type of objects may be kept in the chum or on a special sledge near it (the so-called sacred sledge or khekhengan); in the settlement they are kept in houses or apartments.

There are two common features of these objects that seem to be most important for the Nenetses. First, these objects are seen as living beings: they possess what my informants call a “soul” in Russian. They are capable of feeling, seeing, helping, being angry, inflicting harm. Second, these objects are mostly handmade. A person can inherit them from ancestors, they can be found or given by somebody (for instance, a shaman), or else made at one’s own initiative or at the instruction of older people. From the Nenets point of view, these two features do not contradict each other in the slightest, and I never heard anything about any special rites of “enlivening” or “animating” them (although I do not claim that my materials are exhaustive).17
The presence of these objects in the family secures its health and well-being. Conversely, the spirits—with which these object are connected,—may also inflict harm. In my view, most of the rules regulating interaction with the sacred objects of any kind aim at prohibiting excessive intrusion on the part of human beings—lest the sacred objects should be disturbed and get angry (Lar 1998). Even if people are not yet asking anything from the spirits, people “feed” them with a certain regularity (as far as I know spirits may receive reindeer blood, reindeer fat, vodka, tobacco), and give them presents (e.g., new clothes put on top of the old one, belts, rings, coins, paper money). When a person wants to address the sacred object with some request, he or she may do this directly, accompanying their request with an offering. When the spirit wants to pass some information to a person, it can use various channels of communication, the simplest and the most common of which is the appearance in a dream.18

The knowledge of spirits and sacred objects as well as the rules of behavior in relation to them is shared by everybody in the community. This is the background knowledge mastered by children roughly by the age of 10. This is not any special knowledge requiring any special abilities (for example, in contrast to the ability of initiating communication with spirits, asking them about the past or the future). In the Nenets culture both settlement and tundra dwellers possess this background knowledge, although nowadays it often exists in rather complex interrelations with some other religious ideas.19

Looked at through the prism of these ideas, the actions of the museum’s curator will cease to be surprising or unusual: they reflect the overlapping of museum specificities and the particular character of the objects preserved. Being a Nenets herself, although she considers herself Russian Orthodox and her family never had the sacred sledge, ZP fully possesses the background knowledge about what babushkas are and how they should be treated.

It should be noted that there is a figure of the “keeper of sacred objects” in the Nenets culture. Usually it is a man, “the master” of the family’s sacred sledge, responsible for its content.20 According to my field materials, under certain circumstances a woman also can fulfill the responsibilities of the keeper. The position of the museum curator is largely very similar to that of the keeper, only involving more specific duties related to the museum itself.

As a museum employee, ZP should treat babushkas as exhibits (preserve, describe, exhibit them), which she duly performs. The museum has a special department dedicated to the religion of the Nenetses,
with a short description of each object exhibited, as well as a longer and a more general description; some objects are even exhibited in glass windows; in other words, everything is done according to universal museum conventions. The curator thinks of her work as useful, necessary, and respected.

As a Nenets, ZP keeps treating museum objects as living beings, with their own characters and needs. For her, the fact that she works in a museum does not negate the rules of communication with babushkas. To breach these rules is as dangerous for her as for any other person—the most striking example of which is the case with the babushka forgotten in the snow. The situation is further compounded by the fact that the curator who is not a ritual specialist has to deal with babushkas not belonging to her own family and its sacred objects, but somebody else’s babushkas, often of unknown origin. This communication may consequently prove to be even more dangerous.

Her professional responsibilities make ZP deal with the babushkas and disturb them, yet she is trying to do everything to minimize this disturbance and to reconcile the contradictions between her two sets of responsibilities. This approach to the situation explains why ZP was not overly enthusiastic about my initial suggestion to put the collection of babushkas in order, and why she was reluctant to bring them inside the museum. Later she might have started treating my coming as a possibility to fulfill her professional duties, and to do so not at her own initiative, which would allow taking some blame off her shoulders ("It’s not my fault, it’s the Russians’ fault"). This may also be the reason why ZP later asked me to help with the additional portion of the sacred museum objects. It was precisely because of the superimposition of the previously existing Nenets rules of treating babushkas onto the professional responsibilities of a museum employee that the procedure of keeping of museum objects, apart from drying and moth prophylaxis, included feeding and tying new belts. It is interesting to observe that while tying the belts the curator arbitrarily changes the object of keeping, which does not correspond to the classical museum principal of keeping an exhibit unchanged. Despite this, another museum principle, that of the exhibit’s authenticity, is paradoxically preserved. Even the enigmatic procedure of washing hands with vodka, although I am not familiar with any of its analogies in the Nenets culture, may acquire a certain meaning within the frames of this approach. Here one can only make suggestions. Verbov (1936) mentions that the Nenetses wear metal rings around their fingers to prevent sacred objects that they touch from accidental defilement. Conversely,
from the Nenetses’ point of view it is those who wear metal that are protected from becoming “impure.” Several times I witnessed the functional substitution of the ritual purification by the hygienic procedures borrowed from the Russians. One may suggest that the medical procedure of hand disinfection with the use of medical spirit serves a similar purpose here: to protect both participants from possible negative consequences of their contact. In any case, the very fact of using vodka in this situation testifies that the “life” of the objects in the museum continues.

It would seem that apprehensions about the possible negative consequences that may occur through the contacts of museum employees with the sacred objects are rather widely spread in the North, and result in a number of apotropaic practices to help avert the danger for museum employees. Such practices were observed in other Siberian museums. For instance, in the catalogue of objects related to the shamanic cult in the Dudinka museum it is noted that in order to make their work safe, museum employees—following the local people’s advice—would tie threads made of reindeer tendons around their wrists (Simankova 2008: 5). The director of the Anadyr museum in Chukotka told American researchers Bloch and Kendall (2004) that Chukchi mother insisted on the careful washing of hands after working in the museum out of fear of baneful consequences from contacts with the spirits dwelling in it.

The Museum and the Nenets Culture: Specificities of Interaction

If one refers to the beginning of this article with regard to the specific nature of the museum itself, the objects preserved in it, the status of the curator, then the situation acquires a logical character. The museum is not separated from the culture it represents, and the sacred objects brought to the museum acquire new “museum” qualities without ceasing their traditional “life.” Such duality is characteristic not only of the sacred objects, but of the position of the curator herself, because she has to fulfill her museum function while remaining within the frames of the traditional model of interaction between a human being and the sacred objects. It is curious that the combination of these different approaches takes place not only in one museum but in the mind of one person: the curator of the museum does not realize the contradiction between these models. For her to make catalogs of the exhibits and to write scientific texts is an action of the same type as to talk to a
babushka in the dream and to let her drink vodka. It seems to be the most typical trait of indigenous curation in Yamal.21

All this clearly shows the process of mutual interpenetration, resulting not only in the fact that material objects of Nenets culture come to be preserved and exhibited in the museum, but in a certain drawing of museum space into the territory of this culture. The museum as a phenomenon new for the aboriginal environment starts functioning according to the norms, rules, and customs of the indigenous population of Yamal. This is the reason why objects kept or even created within the museum start being perceived in ways unusual for a traditional museum.

The most striking illustration of this thesis is the model of a sacred place. Kosintseva (2009) quotes from an interview with a person who actually made this model and then wondered at the changes happening to it:

I made a model of the sacred place, that is, piled up … made this idol, piled up all kinds of … as a heap, well … horns, something else. And people fell into the habit of throwing small coins there, of hanging pins, and all kinds of metal things. Matches and cigarettes, too, for sure … It’s not that they come to it [the sacred place] on purpose, they as if stop by, chat about this and that, and you take them [to the exhibition], show them things, and tell about them. Well, they will certainly throw something in. … A couple of times people would come, well, even to sit down and have a drink. “Hey, guys, tell me honestly, you can’t find a different place for drinking?” They say: “Come on! Don’t mess around! What, we can’t find a place to drink at? It’s just a special place of a sort.”

I myself never spoke to the person who made the sacred place, because when I came to Yar-Sale he had already quit working in the museum, yet my observations over the behavior of the museum visitors almost completely coincide with those of Kosintseva.

This story gives additional insights for understanding the status of sacred objects in the museum. The difference between this sacred place and babushkas is that museum employees created an imitation of a sacred place to serve as a “visual aid” to the visitors. Although the babushkas existed prior to getting to the museum, and then continued their “life” there, the sacred place never had any existence outside of the museum walls. Not a single part of the construction was removed from the traditional culture, nobody tried passing the idols made by the museum employees for the authentic ones, and from the point of view of the “Russian” museum employees this was nothing but a
model. Moreover, the model was many times assembled and disassembled, and taken from place to place as the museum relocated. This fact did not produce any influence on the local people’s attitude: for some reason they chose to treat the imitation as an authentic piece, started bringing their offerings to it, and the model turned into a living functioning sacred place.

What does this “coming to being as an authentic piece” mean? Why did this happen? It would seem that in this case we witnessed a laboratory experiment of a sort, a process that further clarifies not only a number of specificities of the museum space on Yamal and the statuses of the museum employees, but also the nature of the sacred places in the Nenets culture. A rich ethnographic material has been accumulated in relation to Nenets’s sacred places and the practices of their visitation.

In the words of a talented Nenets painter, L. A. Lar, himself a researcher of Yamal sacred places, these sites are places where a human being can communicate with the yonder world: “An idol is a door, through which one can get into the other world, connecting a person with a spirit or a deity. Offering at a sacred place is a key to the invisible door of the Universe. It is primarily a human being who needs this door, the container of the spirit. That is why to address an idol is the same as to open the door to the Universe, inhabited by spirits and deities” (2003: 74). In the museum we have idols made by employees and people who come to the idols with their offerings and requests. It would seem that from the Nenets point of view it is not so much important who makes an idol and for what purpose, or even where this idol is located, but whether it is possible to address the world of the spirits on this particular place. If it is possible, then the sacred place is “functioning”; consequently, it is a “true” and “authentic” one. The practice of using becomes the criterion of authenticity, and from this perspective it would not be completely accurate to speak about an imitation of a sacred place in the museum. At the very least, it is already a “working” model. The question of whether and how this model is different from the sacred places described in academic literature warrants additional research.

New Functions of a Museum

Events and practices taking place in a small district museum on Yamal allow us to observe a very noteworthy and important phenomenon. The museum not only describes and represents the culture of peoples
living on Yamal; it does not simply exist in the proximity of this culture, but not being separated from it by either time or space, creates a specific symbiosis with it. This pertains both to people and to objects.

From the point of view of this symbiosis the most basic and obvious museum oppositions are rendered meaningless. A person in charge of the descriptive catalogs of the sacred objects feeds the babushkas and has an immediate contact with them in her dreams. A person who signs museum financial documents and writes a dissertation on the museum work addresses the spirits of a sacred place, which he created. Here the position of a museum employee and a researcher is not radically different from that of a visitor or an informant, there is no opposition of past and present, of the traditional and the contemporary, or even of the Russians and the Nenetses.

As a result of this symbiosis, the museum, from the perspective of the Nenets culture, acquires functions that are not characteristic of a museum in the classical European sense. This becomes particularly noticeable with regard to the sacred objects. One of the most mysterious questions about them is how they got to the museum. This question puzzled not only me, but also the Nenets visitors of the museum. One informant summarized the problem in the following way: “to give these things to a museum is the same as to throw one’s kin to the garbage, with one’s own hands.” Yet the sacred objects are well represented in the museum. How did this come about? I wish I could have more accurate information about the provenance of these objects, but unfortunately this information is largely unavailable, and even the curator herself did not know much about the origin of these objects.

However, in several cases there was documentary evidence that the things were given to the museum by the relatives of their deceased owners. This was the case with the set of things belonging to a woman shaman, or with the suitcase of sacred objects once owned by an elderly man in Ports-Yakhe. What were their relatives’ motives to part with these things? In these two particular cases we do not know for sure. We can only compare them with other cases from our own experience or those described in the scholarly literature. What would happen in the Nenets culture with sacred objects after the death of their owner? As far as I can tell, there are two major possibilities: either family members keep the deceased relative’s objects, in which case they also assume the responsibility for taking care of them the same way as the previous owner; that is, keep all the relations with their “souls” or take these objects to the tundra and leave them there forever.
Now let us imagine the situation when none of these solutions is possible. Consider, for example, a story told by Gracheva (1990: 74–75) At the end of the 1970s two daughters of a shaman, both of whom lived in a settlement, inherited their father’s shamanic objects, the so-called *koika*. According to the local view, these objects were very powerful. The women could not leave them in the tundra because they could be “defiled or plundered.” One of the women put the objects into a sack and put it in the hallway of her apartment. She was very worried because of the proximity of this strong *koika* left without due care, so that when researchers from the Taimyr okrug museum in Dudinka came to the settlement, she readily gave these objects to the museum. Interestingly enough, the presence of *koika* in the apartment was bothering not only the woman herself, but also another Taimyr shaman who lived nearby. He himself informed the museum employees about these *koika*, thinking that they should be forcefully taken away from the woman and sent to the museum. He complained that while in the settlement, these objects interfered with his own shamanic practice “not leaving him in peace and confusing the road.” In other words, it seems that from the point of view of both the owner of these sacred objects and of the second Taimyr shaman, the museum was a certain sanctuary where these objects could be placed in order to neutralize the danger they were emitting.

In my own field practice I also came across similar situations. Owing to a number of family circumstances, one of my Nenets informants, a Protestant, became the keeper of a set of sacred objects. Following the tradition, she left them in the tundra, more than 50 kilometers (approximately 30 miles) away from where she lived. Yet the very existence of these objects was bothering her. From the Protestant point of view, which she largely shared, these objects were idols, and as such were to be burned. Conversely, she could not burn the babushkas, among other things because these objects were transferred from generation to generation in her family. The woman even ascribed her doubts to these babushkas’ influence: they were not leaving her alone, imposing their will on her. My informant lived in this contradictory state for almost 10 years, not being able to take care of the babushkas in a proper way, to forget about them, or to burn them. So when I offered to take them to the museum, the woman quite easily gave her consent and readily assisted me in drying and describing them. This proved to be the best solution for her rather difficult situation: she was getting rid of her possession without destroying it.
In these cases the museum acquires new functions—it turns into a sanctuary, insulating dangerous objects that the owner could not get rid of, and thus severing this undesirable connection. By placing these objects into a museum a person hopes that their spirits will not take offence and will leave him or her in peace. It is quite possible that similar reasons prompted the inheritors of Yar-Sale sacred objects to give them to the museum.

Conclusions

Summarizing my argument, I want to stress that the situation in the Yar-Sale museum is such that one cannot draw a clear division between the “life” of sacred objects and the “keeping” of them in the museum. Even such a cornerstone of museum work as the opposition “authentic” vs. “non-authentic” started losing its meaning here. In traditional museums employees are proud of the authenticity of things they keep, but visitors of the Yar-Sale museum themselves turn objects created by museum employees into authentic ones.

This museum not only tries to represent the culture of peoples living on Yamal Peninsula, not only exists side by side with their culture, but not being separated from it either by space or by time creates a specific symbiosis with it. This pertains to both people and things. As a result, the museum and its exhibits acquire new functions not characteristic to the traditional European museum model. Studying this symbiosis can allow for a better understanding of the role and place of the museum of Yamal, as well as its environment.

Most likely, the Yar-Sale case is not a unique one in Siberia. Everything that in central museums is seen as “curiosities” or “stories told by old curators,” and in regional museums is not even noticed as a part of everyday life, presents an important object for anthropological study. Such facts are worthy of being separated, systematized, and analyzed. For instance, it would be interesting to compare the cases described here with the situation of preserving Russian Orthodox icons in museums: how are they treated by curators if they happen to be believers, what is the visitors’ attitude toward, and so on. This kind of study, however, would be complicated by difficult relations between museums and the Russian Orthodox Church. On the one hand, this shifts our attention from the museum itself to the “people in the museum,” from objects to human beings, in whose minds and hands these objects acquire certain significations. On the other hand, this stresses
the dynamics of the process—and what can be more fascinating for an anthropologist than observing modifications of the allegedly unchangeable principles of museum work that happen in the course of human interaction.

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Notes

1. Sacred in this context describes the items which, according to my informants, are connected to the realm of the spirits and require specific rules of behavior.

2. Founded in 1906, the okrug museum is the largest and the oldest in the okrug.

3. In this context “Russians” is not an ethnic term; rather, it is used to denote everybody who does not belong to the indigenous population of the North. In a number of cases the “Russians” have been living in the North for
such a long time, or even were born there, that it would hardly be correct to refer to them as “those who came from the outside.”

4. It is not a museum founded by Russians and dedicated to the Native and not a museum founded by Native and dedicated to Native. It is dedicated to ALL residents of the region, both Russians and indigenous. This is different, for example, from the two museums in Alaska described by Molly Lee (1998).

5. Schoolchildren make up 99 percent of the visitors who come to the museum as organized groups.

6. This is a collective term used for all figures of the collection despite the fact that it contained a number of male anthropomorphic images. Most probably, the word babushka corresponds to the word khada (grandmother) used in the Nenets language for such figurines. I will use the term “babushka” throughout this article.

7. Drying is a routine practice for conserving items made of fur, leather, and fabric both in tundra and in Yamal museum at regular intervals such items are aired and dried to get rid of accumulated dampness and to avoid rot.

8. I met the requirement of such imitation when I was visiting the settlement cemetery with my informants.

9. Russian Orthodox Christmas is celebrated according to Julian calendar not on 25 December, but on 7 January.

10. The vast majority of villagers who have never been to the tundra are Russian.

11. When my colleague and I first came to the museum and saw the bowl with coins, we asked what it meant, and after the explanation said that we also wanted to throw in coins. However, it turned out that the woman who brought us to the museum had already done this for us—“just in case.”

12. The museum director continuously stresses that he is a Russian Orthodox Cossack; there is a Russian Orthodox Church in the settlement.

13. Translator’s note: What we translate here as “life” is rendered in the original text by the word bytovanie; this term reflects the role that the object plays in the original context it belongs to, as well as the nature of its usage in practices for which it is functionally intended.

14. For example, see the instruction for writing of official descriptions of ethnographic monuments from the most authoritative Russian reference recommended by the Russian Federation Ministry of Culture for museums in Russia (Sistema Nauchnogo Opisaniia 2003: 36–40). Description of the “life” of the object is supposed to reflect its history before it was acquired by the museum.

15. The situation when the “traditional culture” of Evenkis is represented, including museum representations, as the lost “Golden past” has been described and thoroughly analyzed by Bloch (2000 in the settlement of Tura, the center of Evenkya.

teresting data on similar objects may be found in Popov (1976) and Gracheva (1976; N’ganasans), and Baulo (2005; Khants).

17. Cf. Lar’s description (2003: 74): “The last strokes are applied, and the work over the statue of a spirit or deity is completed. The artisan brings the offering. The first mug of blood of the offertory reindeer is given to the idol. The first partaking of food takes place. The first offering is brought to the deity so that it could be stronger and benevolent, and capable of rendering the necessary service.” In other words, the artisan is feeding the image to impart strength to it, yet it is not said anywhere that he or she is inserting any soul into the image.

18. This process was reflected in the film A Bride of the Seventh Heaven (A. Lapsui, V. Lekhmuskallio, 2004).

19. I never came across the fact that people who consider themselves Russian Orthodox or Muslims would experiences any difficulties with the recognition of “living” babushkas. Yet for Nenets-Protestants, this is quite a difficult question. Protestantism came to Yamal only during the last decade; Protestant pastors require unconditional disavowal from babushkas as man-made idols, incompatible with the faith in one god, which creates rather complex problems for people on the level of practice. As far as I can tell, in most cases people would consider babushkas “wrong” or “evil” gods rather than cease believing that they are alive and may influence people’s lives (cf. V. Vaté’s observations on Chukotka [2009: 46]).

20. Sacred sledge is a special sledge for keeping and transportation of those sacred objects that are accompany the indigenous people in their everyday life rather than being placed in a certain sacred location.

21. Recently many works have been dedicated to the problem of indigenous curation in the world (see, e.g., Grabun 1998; Karp and Lavine 1991; Kreps 1998, 2003; Lee 1998; Rosoff 1998). It would be useful to compare the reasons of appearing of indigenous curation and the practice of its realization in Yamal with the same in other regions.

22. Although we do not know much about the system of interaction of the Nenetses and the spirits, a rather detailed bibliographical review on the topic may be found in Lar (2003) and Khariuchi (2001, 2003).

23. According to Nenets beliefs every person and every family as a whole is connected with the “souls” of these figurines, depending on them for health and well-being for all family members. To throw them away means to sever relations with them. By depriving them of due care one jeopardizes not only oneself, but all of his or her family members.

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ABSTRACT
Hunting is an important basis for conservation, but hunters are surprisingly scarce in global networks of environmental advocacy and governance, and hunting management systems are not given the attention they should receive. This article reveals the messages promoted by hunting advocates through an analysis of museum representations and interviews in order to understand the limitations of and basis upon which further integration of hunters into conservation advocacy circles worldwide could occur. Museums feature representations that reflect the cultural elucidations of their host organization. This article will show how the International Wildlife Museum—maintained by Safari Club International—produces messages of the inseparability of humans from nature, purposive management of nature, dependence upon global capitalism and predation, and the neutrality of scientific knowledge. Through these messages a narrative space for the management of wildlife is produced that attempts to unite the commodification and conservation of nature, namely, “sustainable hunting”. This article concludes by identifying contradictions among the messages of sustainable hunting that may limit hunting advocates’ ability to work with other stakeholders to further improve hunting management systems.

KEYWORDS
conservation, global civil society, hunting, museums, sustainable use

This article examines a substantive topic in the management of nature: hunting. Hunting has been an integral part of conservation since before the progressive era in the United States and abroad (Adams 2004). While there is ample scholarship on environmentalists and environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), there is limited focus on hunting in that research, largely because hunters and hunting are marginalized among those groups (Paulson 2012). Hunters are often seen as adversarial to environmentalism. However, hunting is a vital mechanism in the United States and around the world for environmental conservation (Dickson et al. 2009). In fact, Peterson (2004) shows that the antihunting movement has taken such a strong foot-
hold in conservation advocacy that the marginalization of hunting for ethical concerns may hurt wildlife management systems worldwide. It is important to further understand the logic and advocacy of hunters and hunting organizations in order to gain insight into the challenges and opportunities to more successfully integrate hunting into environmental advocacy and create more effective and sustainable wildlife management around the world. One way to better understand these actors’ positions vis-à-vis contemporary environmentalism is by studying hunters’ own representations of humans and nature. A venue intended to convey the perspectives of the hunting community to the broader public is the International Wildlife Museum, analyzed here.

Museums are not simply places for engaging human history and scientific findings about our planet; they are also immersive environments that represent particular human ideas about and material relationships with nature. As Donna Haraway (1989) argues, museums construct scientific narratives through dioramas that are representations of society itself. This article seeks to shed light on hunting NGOs in contemporary environmentalism by examining how one museum (the International Wildlife Museum [IWM] in Tucson, Arizona) represents a global hunting advocacy organization’s (Safari Club International [SCI]) views on nature and our management of it.

**Museums and Society**

The inquiry for this article is informed by Haraway’s analytic position offered in a chapter from her seminal book *Primate Visions* titled “The Teddy Bear Hierarchy” (1989). Haraway argues that museums are a medium for science, and science is “above all a story-telling practice in the sense of historically specific practices of interpretation and testimony” (ibid.: 4). Specifically, the dioramas in a museum are “meaning-machines … machines are maps of power, arrested moments of social relations that in turn threaten to govern the living” (ibid.: 54). In researching the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, Haraway analyzed the dioramas and the people who helped create them. Haraway noted that the typical specimens reflected views that Carl Akeley (the principal constructor of the museum) and those working with Akeley (primarily wealthy white males) had toward the notion of perfection. Perfection was dependent on a large “properly proportioned” animal, specifically male, being hunted and killed, and
hunted in a “sportsmanlike” manner (ibid.: 41). Part of the logic of harvesting a large animal was that such an animal would be a reflection of the strength of the hunter. A cowardly or weak animal would demonstrate the shortcomings of the hunter’s dominance. This was illustrated through the overriding presence of large animals, taxidermied into menacing positions.

Haraway was able to illustrate that the museum, “relatively unbuffered from intimate reliance on the personal beneficence of a few wealthy men, is a peephole for spying on the wealthy in their ideal incarnation” (ibid.: 56). Haraway’s conclusions make the study of a more recently constructed museum by similar elites in conservation advocacy important to pursue. In fact, Haraway (ibid.: 14) suggests that “reconstructions of nature in the context of decolonization” in the 1970s changed some of the messages that were produced by the American Museum of Natural History, encouraging a re-evaluation of messages in postcolonially constructed places like the International Wildlife Museum.

Other museum studies scholars have similarly shown that in museums, narratives of reality frame purposes of humanity, structures of social order, and desirable relationships between humans and nature. Museums express culture and cultural heritage, and there are several patterns on which to project an analytic gaze. Coombe (2009) argues that human rights claims upon cultural grounds (both in terms of intangible cultural heritage and territory) are expanding with patterns of late modernity and decolonization. Museums are increasingly expressing an idea of postcolonial culture that promotes human rights and inclusivity to all museum activity (Sandell 2002). For example, Jokilehto (2012) argues that there has been a growth in the number of international conventions to protect human rights, and these inform how heritage conservation is achieved. Similarly, there is a growing interest in the preservation and enjoyment of diverse types of cultural property as a consequence of the actions of UNESCO and other influential institutions (Merryman 2005). A common world vision is generally expected of museums (Dibley 2011).

The challenge to projecting those cosmopolitan visions is that conservation organizations follow codes of ethics that are often difficult to adhere to (Sease 1998). Particularly challenging are codes of ethics regarding cultural sensitivity and the antiquities trade. Therefore, space exists for very particular visions of the world to get produced within specific museums, even in adhering to presumably
universal expectations for museum representation. This means that the messages promoted by a museum can, in cases like the IWM investigated here, shape the extent to which representations of different ways of managing nature are promoted. Waterton and Smith (2010) argue that there are restrictive assumptions concerning nostalgia, consensus, and homogeneity in expressions of culture. These restrictions limit opportunities for different community groups to assert alternative understandings of heritage (Smith 2007). According to Harvey (2001), modern developments in the heritage concept treat heritage as simply a set of problems to be solved rather than as an opportunity to engage in debates about the production of identity, power, and authority throughout society. Taken together, museums today are expected to promote cosmopolitanism and universal human rights, but doing so in practice often comes through the filter of a museum’s governing body. This article will add to this rich literature on museums to illustrate how exogenous cosmopolitan visions of culture are constrained by the mission and interests of endogenous organizing firms. The IWM offers a case study to investigate how presumably universal conceptions of human rights and sustainable management of nature are mediated through the filter of hunting rights advocates.

This article will show how the IWM produces messages of the inseparability of humans from nature, purposeful management of nature, dependence upon global capitalism and predation, and the neutrality of scientific knowledge. Through these messages a narrative space for the governance of nature is produced that attempts to unite the commodification and conservation of nature. However, according to the findings in this article, the narrative of “sustainable hunting” could limit hunting advocates’ ability to work with other stakeholders to further improve sustainable hunting systems. If hunting advocates or other stakeholders in the management of nature at any scale are to work together, then the conditions for collaboration must be recognized. The messages in the museum offer insight into such conditions. While the story produced within the IWM argues that trophy hunting produces revenue to reduce poverty, increase species survival, and improve ecosystem stability, that story does not reflexively consider how the inseparability of humans from nature, predation, purposive management through global capitalism, and the neutrality of scientific knowledge may contradict one another. This article presents this argument in what follows with a review of literature on sustainable hunting, research methods used, presentation of findings, and a brief discussion of those findings.
Sustainable Hunting

The foundational idea promoted by the IWM and hunting advocates is that of “sustainable hunting”. Hunting advocates generally propose that through sustainable hunting “win-win” scenarios are achieved where species survival, economic growth, indigenous rights, and hunting as a right are mutually supportive (Paulson 2012). Sustainable hunting endorses privatized trophy hunting with limits on game animals taken, selling hunts globally with money (and even meat) going to “local” people, and is predominately legitimated and promoted by hunting advocates in the United States (as well as elsewhere in both the Global North and South). However, while sustainable hunting is promoted by most hunting advocates as the best strategy for conservation to work in a global market, outcomes vary due to problems surrounding power relationships and issues with externalized costs within that market.

Before offering details about those problems, it must be recognized that much of the time sustainable hunting is very successful, especially regarding the improvement of species survival and ecosystems for a wide variety of animals and places (e.g., Craigie et al. 2010; Dickson et al. 2009; Harris 2007; Jenks et al. 2002; Leader-Williams et al. 2001; Lewis and Alpert 1996; Loveridge et al. 2007; Mincher 2002; Nickerson 1990). So where do problems emerge? Gibson and Marks (1995: 941) found that sustainable hunting programs in eastern and southern Africa protected some larger mammals due to “increased enforcement levels,” but they did not fairly distribute socioeconomic benefits. In their analysis of hunting in Zambia, they found that local hunters often disregarded new laws on poaching when they saw no strong economic, social, or resource benefits to following sustainable hunting programs.

In considering the source of problems with sustainable hunting that Gibson and Marks describe, Kenneth MacDonald (2005) offers an even more critical analysis in northern Pakistan. In his analysis of the rural Pakistani ecosystem management program, he notes that sport trophy hunting was promoted in an interest of privatization to achieve goals of “biodiversity protection and ‘development’” (ibid.: 259). According to MacDonald, representations of local people as backward and ignorant local savages were used to develop a system whereby locals could no longer hunt for subsistence interests. Instead, outside global citizens could purchase rights to hunt ibex (among other trophy animals with different symbolic values for locals and outsiders),
while a majority of the money would supposedly be distributed to local communities and the state of Pakistan. Within this rhetoric of “conservation as development” a neocolonial production of meaning was promoted, a pattern found to exist elsewhere in the Global South (Steinhart 1989), and, more importantly, an idea of an “allegedly scientifically and ethically superior force” was stressed, further integrating both Pakistani locals and environmental groups into the global market (MacDonald 2005: 259). Schroeder (1999: 367) echoes MacDonald’s findings of sustainable hunting models of management in that they merely promote a neoliberal “commodification of nature” that neither necessarily manages biodiversity better nor benefits local socioeconomic standards in places like Zimbabwe (see also Dzingirai [2003] for similar findings and Duffy [2001] for a more comprehensive analysis of conservation and hunting in Zimbabwe). Furthermore, John MacKenzie (1997) successfully showed how similar processes historically were the basis for the expansion of inequalities and imperialism in Africa and India by Europeans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

To look at a different region of the world, in China, argali sheep were found to have benefited from global trophy hunting management, but local people were not. Money was channeled away from people living closest to sheep populations, people for whom the incentive to manage for trophy hunting is most important (Harris 2007). The ineffectiveness in addressing distribution of funds is a defining challenge for many sustainable hunting management systems (Lewis and Jackson 2005), even though it has been addressed in others (e.g., Jones and Weaver 2009; Taylor 2009). These funds are meant to benefit the “local” population by providing economic growth and incentives to manage their environment for trophy hunting. Who the local population is that benefits is not always clear, nor is the amount of relative benefit compared to what they would otherwise gain from subsistence hunting and poaching. That is, contradictions between global commodification and conservation of nature as a benefit to local people exist within sustainable hunting. If contradictions in sustainable hunting are not reflected upon and addressed, advocates of sustainable hunting will find that reconciliation of the commodification and conservation of nature is not fully tenable. They must work with other stakeholders to reconcile those contradictions, but that work can only occur by understanding the nuanced logic and visions of trophy hunting advocates. One main goal of this article is to provide such an understanding.
Research Methods

The case study selected for analysis was Safari Club International and the International Wildlife Museum situated in its headquarters. SCI is based in Washington, DC, and Tucson, Arizona. SCI is an intercontinental membership organization, with members and chapters in 21 countries around the world. More than 200 relatively autonomous SCI chapters operate throughout the United States and elsewhere in the world. These form at different scales, including the city (e.g., SCI-Phoenix), substate (e.g., SCI-Arizona), and nation-state (e.g., SCI-Argentina). SCI was established in 1971 as an organization concerned with the rights to hunt globally, and its philosophy of “Hunters First” has been central since its inception. SCI varies from other international conservation NGOs in that most others are dedicated to conservation first. This “hunters first” motto is a point of pride in the organization. Most members prefer SCI to be seen as a voice for hunters’ rights, and typically members join to advocate for hunters and to congregate with hunters at organizational events and conventions. SCI has an annual budget of around $23 million, making it a relatively small international NGO. Even so, it has been influential in the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and in the establishment of conservation programs and national-level policies regarding game animals and game animal habitats globally. There are other organizations with similar interests in advocating for hunters, and some even larger in size (e.g., Ducks Unlimited); however, SCI offers perhaps the broadest-reaching international advocacy for hunting in the world today.

The International Wildlife Museum in Tucson, Arizona, is a central feature of SCI’s headquarters and is also known as “Tucson’s Natural History Museum”. SCI’s offices are almost entirely above the museum, with windows from those offices overlooking the large artificial mountain full of game animal taxidermies, located in the center of the IWM. Meant to be a symbolic representation of the organization’s hunting advocacy and scientific expertise, the IWM was originally constructed by a former carpet salesman, SCI’s founder, C. J. McElroy. “Mac”, as people referred to him, had a large trophy room in his home in Tucson, and wanted SCI and the museum to produce the same sort of meaning he offered through his home’s taxidermied representation of his identity. The story of the museum and the story of its scientific representation is a reflection of Mac’s story and the story of SCI, as both a hunting advocacy organization and a conservation NGO.
working within world society and the global capitalist economy. The museum was originally constructed in the late 1980s after a series of fund-raisers, including wildlife “film festivals” (as one might see in Venice or Sundance annually). In addition, Mac took a deep financial investment in the museum’s success, believing that it would mirror the success of SCI as an organization (Quimby 2006). Going through several iterations in the past 20 years, the IWM reflects the current ideas of trophy hunting advocates as well as any one cultural edifice (i.e., museums or other institutions that try to publically produce hunters’ meanings of wildlife management) in the world today.

Key actors from SCI and the IWM were interviewed to understand the logic behind the museum, sustainable hunting, and the advocacy of the organization in general. In total, fourteen individuals were interviewed. High-ranking professional members in the organization were interviewed formally, and informal discussions with less-high-ranking members were also insightful in reconstructing questions from the interview schedule. Observations involved visiting SCI’s offices in Tucson and the IWM six times, attending the SCI convention in Reno, Nevada, and visiting SCI’s offices in Washington, DC. These observations began in January 2008 and continued through May 2009. As typical with participant observation, conversations with other museum visitors, SCI workers, or convention participants were part of the observation data. Findings are reported in a manner to ensure confidentiality. Informed consent was utilized with every participant in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) expectations, and university IRB approval was obtained for this project. Interviews were transcribed personally to “stay close” to the data. After reviewing the observation notes and interview transcripts, a protocol was developed to distill categories for “transforming this collection of materials into writings that speak to wider, outside audiences” (Emerson et al. 1995: 142). Essentially, memos were compiled in reviewing the observation notes and interview transcripts to eventually decide upon which themes were the most dominant meanings of nature and humans in the IWM. These memos were typically linked to previous research of the representation of nature or hunting management, and the memos also dynamically altered in the process of category distillment to reflect what categorizations were both abstract enough to be generalized to much of the museum and specific enough to be considered clear messages. In the end, five categories were designated as the most accurate, dominant IWM messages. As in any research, such categorization is subject to the lens of the researcher. However, the researcher
in this project made every attempt at maintaining an objective orientation, which included referencing other pertinent research and following established qualitative research analysis processes. This research was part of a larger project exploring the role of trophy hunting and hunters in conservation advocacy and environmental governance.

Results

This article argues that trophy hunting advocates construct and reinforce a narrative regarding the governance of nature, sustainable hunting, through five messages: (1) humans are inseparable from nature, (2) all animals are naturally predatory, (3) there is a specific purpose to the management of nature, (4) hunting by those with the most capital is important to the improvement of conservation, and (5) neutrality is essential to scientific representation. These are discussed in turn below. Without the promotion of these messages about nature and humans, sustainable hunting may not have a viable and legitimate basis in world society. However, these messages also frame—and may in fact limit—the conditions of meaningful collaborations for conservation and wildlife management globally.

First, the IWM largely shows that humans are inseparable from nature. This is different from the perspective held by many that nature is “out there” and humans live separately from it. A more accepted perspective in many academic and conservation circles is that humans are part of nature. Humans shape ecosystems and live within them, and plants, animals, minerals, and landscapes within those ecosystems in turn shape human behaviors and perceptions. This is demonstrated in several ways in the IWM. First, detailed descriptions of the hunting of animals are given in the signage around the IWM, offering a clear story of the inevitable coexisting of humans and animals. Second, many of the exhibits require one to walk among the dioramas, causing one to feel part of the displays. One particular section of the museum is the Nocturnal Room, where visitors are expected to experience walking through the Sonoran Desert at night (figure 1). Third, this message is relayed in SCI’s Sensory Safari service, an extension of the IWM’s Hands-on Exhibits in the museum. These Hands-on Exhibits are shown in figure 2. The IWM sends out Sensory Safari kits to schools, Boy Scout troops, and other youth groups in the United States. In these kits are animal hides, bones, and other things people can touch and feel. The objective is to give children the feeling of being more con-
nected to animals physically; diminished youth participation in hunting in the United States also offers additional justification for these kits by the IWM.5

However, the inseparability from nature is not necessarily presented as people working in harmony with nature. Instead, the aspect of human connection with nature that Mac emphasized from the

Figure 1  A scene within the International Wildlife Museum’s Nocturnal Room.
IWM’s inception stems from the second message of the IWM: animals are naturally predatory. Mac believed himself to be a self-made man via his predatory instincts. He took pride in targeting people to sell ideas or products to and convincing them of their merit. He also took pride in learning how to hunt on his own in the process of essentially raising himself in the early twentieth century (Quimby 2006). Mac saw himself as the grand predator and conqueror, and this message that nature and society should reward those most successful predators is clear in many of the dioramas commissioned in the IWM by Mac and others. While this predatory message is certainly not offered in every aspect of the museum, it is prevalent enough to be noteworthy. Two examples of how the dominance of the predator is central to the function of the natural world, and thus by extension society, are offered in figures 3 and 4.

Clearly, the IWM reflects the perspective that nature is not managed just to keep trees and zebras and landscapes in some sort of pristine form. Instead, the IWM says in its third message that there is a specific purpose of management. That purpose is to enable predation by trophy hunting in order to sustainably utilize natural resources. This reflects other scholarship on current patterns of representing na-
ture. For example, Loulanski (2006) argues that the focus on cultural heritage has shifted conceptually from monuments to people, from objects to functions, and from preservation to sustainable use. In essence, current representations of society tend to show culture as a dynamic practice rather than a static state of being. One interesting point about this message in support of hunting is that it was not originally an overt message. It only became overt when the IWM was no longer able to exist without reflecting the views of nature and society that SCI desired. Early on, the curator of the museum was antihunting, and the museum reflected that with no promotion of hunting in conservation and no advertisement for SCI anywhere in the museum. The message was vague and static; there was no specific purpose to managing nature. Eventually, many of the members of SCI’s board of directors wanted to eliminate the museum completely due to the lack of a specific purpose to the management of nature message, in spite of (or more than likely unaware of) the tax exemption utility of the IWM for SCI. SCI discovered that it needed to keep the museum to maintain the economic viability of the organization, but it also needed to provide a pro–trophy hunting message in order to justify the museum at all to its members. Interestingly, SCI as an organization could only

Figure 3 ■ The International Wildlife Museum’s scene of a cougar chasing a pronghorn.
exist at all if the IWM produced a pro-hunting message. One IWM/SCI representative described this in more depth:

The museum is the major part of why Safari Club Foundation is a 501(c)(3). Without the museum, you would be hard-pressed to argue that we have a mission that serves the public. That is worth more than a million dollars a

Figure 4 | The International Wildlife Museum’s scene of a bobcat chasing a Gambel’s quail.
year to the Foundation. If they didn’t have a 501(c)(3), the convention income would be taxable, and that tax would be about a million and a half a year. So for a $175,000 a year investment they make a million and a half. That’s real easy to communicate to them [SCI’s board of directors]. But it’s funny—that was never communicated to them until recent years.

The turnover of staff was gradual, but eventually the specific purpose to the management of nature message became standardized by the IWM. One interview participant described how in “our employment applications … there’s a section in there about somebody’s attitude toward hunting. They don’t have to be a hunter; they have to be able to articulate the place of hunting in wildlife management.” The message is also produced through the section of the museum titled Bringing Back Wildlife, which offers the stories of previous charismatic Western figures who hunted (Aldo Leopold, Teddy Roosevelt, etc.). Those biographies tell the story that hunting saved not only animals, but also wild places in general for humans to enjoy.” Such a message makes clear that a particular process (i.e., laws and regulations) of hunting and harvesting animals is required. If one does not follow that process (i.e., when “poaching” occurs) then wildlife is not managed according to its purpose. An example of these messages is seen in figure 5.

![Figure 5](image-url) The International Wildlife Museum’s exhibit addressing poaching.
Various SCI-funded initiatives are listed on the wall labeled Stealing Wildlife. These initiatives include funding for research, wildlife intervention, and community-building efforts that try to decrease poaching problems worldwide. This message is evidently intended to be related to the fourth message of the IWM: hunting by particular people saves nature.

In short, the fourth message is that those who have the most financial and cultural capital (i.e., they have the money and follow the rules of trophy hunting, such as not “poaching” by shooting an animal out of season) should be given the priority to hunt and harvest animals—otherwise, the animals and ecosystems will not benefit. The IWM emphasizes in their signage how important hunting revenue is in providing incentives and resources for conservation. In addition to the signage, many parts of the museum have a distinct commoditized sporting life feeling to them. For example, the Sheep Mountain (figure 6) in the middle of the IWM resembles the mountains that one would find in large retail hunting stores like Cabela’s or Bass Pro Shops. In these big box stores, outdoor merchandise from camping to hunting to fishing is sold, but the additional draw for consumers are large artificial mountains adorned by taxidermied trophy animals who would ordinarily live in mountain habitats.

Even more explicit is the McElroy Hall, named after the founder of SCI, C. J. McElroy. There is also a large bronze sculpture of Mac that stands in front of the IWM to emphasize the importance of SCI’s founder to the design of the museum. The McElroy Hall was constructed to resemble Mac’s own trophy room in his home in Tucson (that home is the reason why SCI’s main headquarters is in Arizona and its subsidiary office is in Washington, DC—the opposite of most other environmental NGOs). The room has a feeling of an elite trophy room, with most of the taxidermy in the room not displayed in dioramas, but rather with heads of animals arranged on the walls and full taxidermies of animals situated at the front of the room (see figures 7 and 8). In a sense, it seems like a hunting bank, where trophy prey is the capital accumulated.

Finally, the fifth message of the IWM is that scientific knowledge about hunting and wildlife must be interpreted and represented objectively. This concept evolved gradually for the IWM since its inception as a way to emphasize the conservation component of sustainable hunting. For example, initially the IWM repeated displays of the same animals. These were eliminated after the first few years of the museum (apparently against the desires of Mac) out of concerns that the
museum would send the overt message that ego matters more than neutrality to representations of wildlife and nature. In addition, the museum currently attaches many conditions to donated animals, even if doing so means the IWM fails to acquire significant donations:

Figure 6: The International Wildlife Museum’s Sheep Mountain at the center of the museum, with office windows for SCI surrounding the top.
We’re very clear that when you donate your animals, they are ours to use, and we may use them in our Sensory Safari, we may display them, we may not. In other words, we try to get our donations without restrictions. There are people who like to donate and say, “You need to keep these one hundred animals together and my name has to be on every one.” And we say, “Sorry, we can’t do that.” … [It] happens half a dozen times a year … people who wanted to donate things to get an IRS write-off and they were trying to donate endangered species; they can’t do that … you’re not allowed to commercialize on endangered species, and getting a tax write-off is commercialization under the IRS … And usually those people will go somewhere else. But most people who want to donate their animals want to take a write-off on the things that are legal to take a write-off on, and we’ll help them out a little bit in determining which those are, and some people who have had endangered species end up gifting them to us, which is legal … it can fit into our mission because we can use it in our educational programs, or in the museum or whatever, or we can turn it to cash and use that cash in our programs.

This conditionality to donations of animals is meant to legitimate the IWM’s neutrality, even though the IWM is not neutral (nor, arguably, is any museum). IWM clearly promotes commodifying nature within its message. In this way it can clearly be seen how universal standards for representing nature and society are filtered by the foundational tenets of the host institution. In this case, complexity in sustainable

Figure 7 ■ The International Wildlife Museum’s McElroy Hall.
hunting is not offered as a message, nor is the complexity of how the global market may affect the conservation of nature or the equity of social relationships, through hunting or other mechanisms. In fact, the global market *produces* scientific messages that the museum can represent. By having the dioramas determined by what is donated, whatever animals are valued by the market (i.e., what trophies are

*Figure 8* The International Wildlife Museum’s McElroy Hall.
pursued by those with the most capital to pursue them) will determine the kinds of scientific messages offered in the IWM:

We do most of our dioramas and our education programs backward from the way that museums with [large] amounts of money do. They come up with, “You know, we'd really like to teach a unit about X. To do that we need these animals—we should have two males, a female, and three young.” We don't do it that way. It's OK. We've got available to us these animals, what can we teach with them? Well, if we put them in together this way, we can teach about this, we can use this for an education program. It's sort of done backward. But, you know, our budget is very, very small compared to most museums for exhibits. We do it on a shoestring.

Therefore, scientific messages in the IWM come from specific material constraints, as is the case with all museums, and those constraints are never completely apolitical. Even so, the IWM promotes the message of neutrality in specific ways to maintain legitimacy with the conservation community and within world society (Drori et al. 2003). This is done with professionalism of signage, conditions on donations, and relationships with universities and other sources of scientific legitimacy (e.g., one IWM/SCI representative discussed how a temporary dung exhibit was shown in the IWM because of the relationship between the IWM and the Arizona Museum of Natural History in Mesa, Arizona). As will be elaborated below, this appearance of neutrality is integral to the legitimacy of scientific knowledge claims, and is of particular import to anyone using scientific practice to represent and tell narratives about society (Ezrahi 1990; Shapin 1994).

**Discussion**

Museums offer important spaces for seeing representations of society, elucidations of culture, and perceptions of nature. In the end, this article is not about one single museum, nor should it be seen as a direct criticism of the IWM itself. The IWM is a professional, responsible, and well-managed space for learning about nature. Those managing and working within it are some of the most venerable museum workers one could desire. Instead, this paper is an opportunity to tease out some of the challenges in how sustainable hunting is promoted and envisioned broadly by investigating a microcosm of those general patterns in the space of the IWM. This is done in an effort to push for better (and more) conversations among diverse stakeholders to expand the use and effectiveness of sustainable hunting management
systems. Taken as a whole, the framing from the IWM’s messages not only promotes the sustainable hunting narrative for SCI, it also limits the legitimacy of other values, norms, and knowledge systems that might be otherwise entertained in discussions with other conservation stakeholders. The IWM does so through interrelated messages that utilize and support the legitimacy of the commodification of nature to conserve it. By producing these messages, contradictions exist that may limit collaborations between hunters and other stakeholders to improve sustainable hunting systems.

An overriding theme from the IWM is that species, ecosystems, and human livelihoods would all be destroyed if not for careful management of nature, specifically through protecting the right to hunt by particular people. This is where precarious contradictions exist in messages. If those who live within nature are the most tied into the rhythms and carrying capacities of their ecosystems, then it would seem contradictory to suggest that those who can dominate local residents from outside those ecosystems (e.g., wealthy Western hunters in southern Africa) should be prioritized in hunting animals within those ecosystems. In fact, the logic of local users being closest to the animals harvested (and their ecosystems) is the basis for the philosophical and ecological work of Paul Shepard, an important contributor to the deep ecology paradigm in environmental studies and a supporter of hunting as a mechanism for the conservation of nature. Shepard (1998) argued that a hunting and gathering lifestyle facilitates the ability for humans to more closely know the natural world they inhabit and utilize. The sustainability of that natural world, however, is only possible for Shepard through humans’ meaningful connections with their most local ecosystems. If local resource users’ norms, values, and knowledge systems are not prioritized, then why would one inherently expect ecosystems to thrive in the long term? Furthermore, why would one expect impoverished local people to benefit from the sales of hunts if those with more capital (and no direct connection to the local environment) determine conditions of the wildlife management?

Key to the sustainable hunting narrative offered by the IWM is that incentives from trophy hunting enable monitoring of trophy animals and their habitats. The incentives vary slightly in different parts of the world. In the United States, for example, revenue from hunting is taxed and earmarked specifically for conservation efforts, and hunts are largely marketed to local people living near or within ecosystems where trophy animals reside. However, in many African countries rev-
In addition, the presentation of animals as trophies contradicts the first message of humans being inseparable from nature. In fact, humans and animals are separated from nature by the IWM in a very overt way here: humans have dominated animals in such a way that the animals' most redeeming features are presented as literal trophies. “Redeeming features” in many of these cases are the heads of animals. While some displays within and outside the McElroy Hall provide murals depicting animals in their natural habitat, positioned behaving as they would in that habitat, the rest of the displays in the McElroy Hall offer a celebration of man's dominance over nature and over other humans unable to harvest trophy animals. It is certainly easy to justify primacy of control and domination over resources by those with more capital (wealthy Western hunters) when first implicitly producing messages about superiority through displaying large animals in an ostentatious manner. This is problematic for the same reasons discussed above—it encourages resource use from humans who are not connected to the natural environments in which they hunt. This disconnect is much more likely to occur in developing countries than in the United States; not surprisingly, these are the places with the largest challenges in achieving all the outcomes sustainable hunting purports to deliver. SCI does work with local governments through its African Consultative Forums each year to determine the best practices for hunting management, but one wonders who is included for collaborations in these forums and whose interests are met. African states have a history of postcolonial problems with corruption among policy makers and resource exploitation by external stakeholders. Is SCI truly attempting to circumvent and overcome those power structures...
if there are no clear messages that prioritize local, inclusive decision making within the IWM?

Third, if science is driven by reflexivity, which is one of the central tenets to its underlying epistemology, then one would expect recognition of contradictions between the commodification and conservation of nature message to occur within the IWM. However, the IWM does not reflect on such things. This is perhaps out of fear of damaging its commitment to other messages, such as the importance of predation and purposefully managing nature through trophy hunting, and that hunting by those with the most capital improves conservation. In a practical sense, this article offers a view into contradictions among sustainable hunting discourses that could be useful to hunting advocates and other relevant stakeholders in reconciling practical policy making globally. However, this article primarily illustrates an underlying and not easily reconciled problem. Rationalistic, science-oriented NGOs—from whom one might assume reflexivity—are responsive to their donors in the global market. According to Mathews (1997), these donors often think about their investments in NGOs in much the same way that they think of other forms of consumption, and any identified contradictions may very likely be ignored (e.g., with organizations like SCI, donors are typically wealthy trophy hunters with little interest in more holistic visions of hunting governance—many only want their own hunts to remain accessible). In addition, discourses often become so central to framing problems and solutions that it “makes unthinking them very hard indeed, since it is difficult to imagine outside the categories already at your disposal” (Peet et al. 2011: 35).

Given these above limitations, this article encourages future research on the reflexivity of different trophy hunting and conservation stakeholders on contradictions within their own discourses and practices. For example, a more in-depth study of SCI’s African Consultative Forums would be particularly informative. Are these truly inclusive? If so, what outcomes emerge from such inclusivity? Do other conservation stakeholders like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which engages in a similar program in Namibia called the LIFE program, make sustainable hunting work better? Can the WWF be more effective by working with SCI? Under what conditions is this more likely to occur? SCI and hunting advocates certainly should make the case that sustainable hunting is incredibly valuable to conservation in North America and beyond. There is considerable scholarship that documents this reality, as reviewed above. Given the vital role trophy hunting currently plays for sustaining ecosystems and communities, it is necessary to target
places where sustainable hunting is not working as well as it could and find ways to make it work. However, the future of trophy hunting may be constrained as contradictions illustrated in this article become increasingly visible. In the long run, those contradictions will need to be addressed in order for trophy hunting to approximate the ideals of sustainable hunting.

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Notes

1. Museums certainly offer more than just dioramas, as this article illustrates. The reference to Haraway’s analysis of dioramas is meant to connect this article to her perspective on museums—that they are “meaning machines”—not to any strict focus on dioramas.

2. This article focuses on trophy hunting over other types of animal harvest (subsistence, culling, etc.) because trophy hunting is the focus of SCI. Trophy hunting emphasizes the symbolic import of specific attributes of particular animals (antlers of deer, for example), although trophy hunters can also focus on hunting for subsistence purposes (although subsistence is emphasized by SCI and its donors much less).

3. Externalized costs in this market means that at times those people who live closest to the habitat where trophy animals exist do not reside within the supply and demand curves of the market. This means the price of hunts do not include the costs internalized by those who need to receive the incentive to monitor and protect trophy animals and their habitats, or what economists would call a negative market externality.

4. It is important to note here that SCI has two distinctive organizational divisions, Safari Club International (SCI) and Safari Club International Foundation (SCIF), largely for bureaucratic and logistical purposes. Most actual conservation efforts go through SCIF. In addition, SCI has several local chapters that operate fairly autonomously.

5. Youth hunting has declined for decades with the expansion of urbanization and suburbanization, substitution of other forms of entertainment, and other aspects of modernization (Robison and Ridenour 2012).
6. 501(c)(3) is a tax-exempt status code from the Internal Revenue Service for nonprofit organizations in the United States. It is a designation for not-for-profit organizations that are religious, educational, charitable, scientific, or literary in orientation, test for public safety, foster national or international amateur sports competition, or prevent cruelty to children or animals.

7. Ironically enough, much of Aldo Leopold’s contributions to environmentalism in the United States were in opposition to Roosevelt’s idea that conservation should be based on the usefulness of natural resources according to societal desires. Leopold was one of the first charismatic Western figures to push for limitations on managing nature for hunting and hunters. He argued instead to focus on valuing and protecting the diversity of nature over valuing hunting for the sake of hunting (Meine 1988).

8. An example of this could be seen in a recently cancelled television program on trophy hunting titled *Under Wild Skies*, produced by the National Rifle Association (NRA). It was picked up by NBC, but in an episode that included hunting in Botswana, NRA strategist Tony Makris shot an elephant in the face at a range of 20 feet, and toasted champagne with his white guide over the elephant’s body. The shot was with a .577 rifle Makris described as “made to shoot ivory”. When a petition signed by over 10,000 people emerged in reaction to that episode, Makris compared the petitioners to Adolf Hitler. This show could very well have been an avenue for further productive discussions of how to expand and improve sustainable hunting, but without the spokesperson for the show reflecting upon contradictions in his messages there was no space for it to do so (Gabbatt 2013).

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References


The Porsche museum, opened in January 2009, was a “fast second” in the wave of new museums of German car companies. BMW in Munich, Mercedes Benz in Stuttgart and Audi in Ingolstadt set the pace with extraordinarily lavish and costly museum projects planned and financed by car companies. They were following Volkswagen’s “Autostadt” which initiated in 2000 a new type of cultural positioning of self-confident car companies by complex architecture set in a car-based theme park, thus creating a company-based universe of car culture. This could be, oddly, a surviving feature of the symbolic representation of industrialization of the nineteenth century when factories and city-like production environments were presented as impressive, large or aesthetically charged edifices and spaces. Krupp’s works in Essen always were more than a big factory. They were always seen as a symbol of an industrial sector, and visitors were given a tour of this symbol of itself. The new architectural symbolism after 2000 is mostly de-coupled from industrial production, though. Today’s

Figure 1. Porsche Museum entrance.

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museums are instead purified factories for the production of significance of a key industry.

The new Porsche museum is a technologically complex building which, as the story goes, almost did not get built when it was designed by the Viennese office of Delugan Meissel. A complete re-engineering had to be employed in order to build it, and many engineering difficulties were encountered and overcome. This was a theme in the German press when it was debated far beyond specialist discussions by architecture buffs. To transform the Delugan Meissel design and its aesthetic claim into a building proper is a “master story” in itself, which has been communicated by the company and spread by the media. This origins story of the museum comes with a moral: making the impossible real, finding technological solutions for complex problems is linked with Porsche and the Porsche spirit. Thus, even before looking at the museum or at the exhibition, or at cars at all, significance has been generated yet again.

What significance? I will abstain from criticizing the building itself, or reproducing or dismantling some of the “architect’s poetry,” an aesthetically charged style of arguing which apparently has to go along with any ambitious office of architecture.\textsuperscript{1} The permanent exhibition is quite another matter. I am not sure whether this museum is an anachronism or a pioneer of future car museums. Either it is very advanced, showing the shape of things to come; or it is a throwback, far removed from the changing car culture of 2010. For both positions there are viable arguments.

The main feature and the most baffling fact is the absence of any trace of the social discourses that abound around cars. It is a museum for car buffs, for enthusiasts of sports cars. The individual themes of the exhibition are predictable: racing, feats of engineering, driving experiences, visual aesthetics. The presentation is remarkably detached from all debates and discourses about mobility. There is no mentioning whatsoever of the social debates about automobile security, environmental impact, or resource problems, apart from the presentation of technologies that are reactions to them.

The visitors can take two paths: either they can follow the chronology of the company history before 1948, or they can begin with the main part of the exhibition, a chronology of the products with “islands” of special technological subjects. The main exhibition contents of both paths unfolds around cars of course. And these are presented according to the established conventions of car museums. The Porsche is introduced in terms of its highly polished outer shells. As usual, visitors can only glimpse their interior, and only seldom bonnets are opened to reveal their technological innards. For the stress car buffs usually put on the driving experience, on the symbolism of speed and dynamics, and on the technology, this adhering to the rules and norms of displaying cars as
beautiful but static sculptured bodies seems to be highly paradoxical. The new Porsche museum hews close to the path of what the historian Barton Hacker has termed pornotechnics—a lust-orientated, de-functionalized, and mainly de-rationalized approach towards technology.\(^2\) It produces pornotechnics in a very advanced, very compelling and most stylish way.

Apart from cars, there is a loose chain of showcases, forming small islands, to exhibit specific high-tech solutions—turbocharging, for instance, or axle technology. Here, the exhibits are presented as strange aesthetic objects, like specimens of fossils or as organs of living beings. Visitors with views formatted not only by automobility but by other museum types can only ponder. A parallel to a natural history museum forces itself on the visitor. There are the smooth, crouched, dangerous predators with their beautiful skins and shining armor, and on the side we see the miracles of their highly adapted entrails, evolved in generations of successful quasi-natural evolution. The small, precious looking turbocharger, the secrets of the ultralight bone structure of a front axle link are revealed as the secrets of a predator’s evolutionary success. This mode of display fits with the recent trend of crossover museum aesthetics. Art exhibitions borrow from the aesthetics of anthropological museums, whereas cultural history exhibitions are curated or designed by artists.

All these features—the pornotechnics approach, the quasi-natural or purely aesthetic displays, the cutting out of social debates and a conventional but highly perfectionistic static presentation of large attractive artifacts—blatantly disregard what automobile historians want car museums to be. There is a tradition of critical views of the mainstream of motor museums: sophisticated scholars like Clay Mc Shane, Lawrence Fitzgerald, and Jennifer Clark have been criticizing car exhibitions with excellent reasons as puerile, simplistic, reductionist, deluded, or outright dangerous. Of course I share their well-argued and highly plausible position, and I admire them for the points they made and the ways they put them.

But academic criticism seems to have no consequences on the social standing and the reputation of museums whatsoever. Visitors love these museums deeply. For car buffs, Porsche fans, and automobile enthusiasts of all ages this museum does its job perfectly. The exhibition is exactly the way they long to see their erotic objects. This, of course, indicates that car buffs are escapists, and it confirms that cars baulk at any form of enlightenment, as I tried to argue elsewhere.\(^3\) But the target group proper does not care for these criticisms at all.

There is a profound irony: the more cars get into social debates, the more car museums succeed in offering an idyllic and aesthetic view on car history. Obviously, they need not reproduce debates; on the contrary, they are the antidote to any debate. They assure car buffs of the cultural
traditions and values of their love objects. Thus, the Porsche museum looks anachronistic only to academic skeptics. For the core target group of visitors it is the epitome of the future of cars. The Porsche museum is a prototype of the self-assured, self-confident German automobile museums created by car manufacturers. Its impact on society is much more successful than any critical attempt made by academic mobility research and by automobile museums linked with research. And the numbers of visitors are convincingly high.

That mobility historians generally object to this type of museum presentation—is it of any relevance? Probably not. The presentation of historic mobility is clearly dominated by company museums, who cater to the expectations of the public much better than academic automobile historians. But it pays to look into them closely, since museums of this type have powers to shape contemporary automobility, by constructing and confirming the image of cars as objects of desire. This power goes far beyond any role of confirming company images or any function of “historic public relations,” which may have been the first purpose for car companies to put money in them. It can be argued that any analysis of the collective fascination with cars must bear deep research into car museums as important shaping tools.

Notes


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The rolling opening began on the twentieth of June in the presence of President Jacques Chirac. The museum was his idea and will someday bear his name. Also invited were: from the UN and Ghana, Kofi Annan; the Australian foreign minister, Alexander Downer; the Secretary-General of the International Organization for Francophonie, Abdou Diouf; and from Vanuatu, Chief Laukalbi. But I only managed an invitation for the twenty-second—apparently the date for museum professionals and academics—, which was the day before the museum was to open to the public. As I waited outside the two-story glass screen that architect Jean Nouvel had erected to protect the museum from the urban busyness of the roadway and the Seine river traffic, I could study the building's quai-side elevation. The street-level view is anarchic. As if dropped by an inattentive giant, in no apparent order, several buildings lie close to the bigger main one. I would learn that they are the offices, some studios, a café, and the bookstore-giftshop.

The big structure is elevated above the ground, Corbusier-like, by columns. On the second story a glass facade covers the display hall. This glass curtain is decorated with a continuous silk-screened green forest image, creating the effect of a long barrier of dense foliage. The glass jungle is punctuated along its length with different-sized yellow, orange, brown, grey, and aubergine-colored boxes, perched like tree houses, on the glass verdure. Once inside, I could see these as spaces punched out along the wall of the main hall for smaller thematic displays. In postmodern fashion Nouvel had given the façade so many angles and facets that it was hard for the eye to gain a “commanding” perspective of the structure. And then, precisely at 3:00 p.m., the holders of invitations could enter.

We walked twisty paths towards the big building. The walkway is bordered by still young plantings of grasses, bushes, and trees, which, with time, will
create lush vegetation quoting the flora of the lands whose treasures are on
display inside. Eventually, during the leafy seasons, the museum will just peep
out here and there from behind the forest. But even now the entrance door is
hard to find. Not because of the foliage, as most plants are not even knee-high
yet, but rather Nouvel’s demotion of the idea of a grand entranceway made me
take a wrong turn. I found an entry to the building through an external door
of the Lévi-Strauss Auditorium, a handsome pitched hemicycle with seats
upholstered in blood-red plush. Once inside, after some more wandering, I
arrived at the entrance lobby of the collection.

There I came upon a familiar face, or actually several faces: the three-
story-tall Northwest coast totem pole that had stood at the entrance to the
Musée de l’Homme. Facing the pole, protected in a glass cylinder that
extended to the top floor of the museum, was the stored collection of musical
instruments. The visitor could walk the New York Guggenheim-like ramp from
bottom to top to see more of the collection than what could be displayed in
the main exhibition hall. The first exit off of the steep ramp led through a
white walkway with an installation of images and words projected on the
floor. Walking further we arrived at the entrance to a dark tunnel leading to
the permanent exhibitions.

Tunnels usually end in blessed light. On emerging from this one, we were
plunged into the yet darker world of the exhibition plateau. Music with a
strong drum beat was playing faintly. I heard it almost subliminally. I did not
recognize it, but it was the kind I associate with Tarzan movies. The music and
the “primitive” objects vaguely visible from a distance in the obscurity of the
hall made me think—and, as I read in the reviews afterwards, made others
think—of Joseph Conrad’s story of African savagery.²

The low light both drew the eye more imperatively to the displays stand-
ing under cones of brighter illumination and at the same time seemed to
intensify the surrounding gloom. The ambient light was just enough to read
the little bit of identifying text that each case posted.

After my visit, I had asked several art historians and museum people about
the conservationist considerations in lighting organic objects, especially
things made of paper, textiles, and other light-sensitive materials. “Well, we
have to be careful . . .” was the normative opinion of two who hadn’t yet seen
the exhibition. One who had seen it scoffed at the theatrical effect of the
lighting scheme.³ But all the speculations of conservationist caution were
made irrelevant by Nouvel’s statement in press interviews that he lit the hall
to evoke the original settings, the mystery and spirituality, of the worlds of the
pieces on display.⁴

The exhibition area, one great hall, was divided into four zones: Asian,
Pacific, African, and American. But these areas were not clearly demarcated,
and I was never sure where I was or how to get to some other culture zone.
This wandering in the subduing darkness of primordial cultures, I learned, was
just the effect that Nouvel was looking for. It is responsible for the vagueness,
and even sadness, in my account about where I encountered the exhibits I
describe. Edward Said once pointed out that in Joseph Conrad’s tales in gen-
eral, and in *Heart of Darkness* especially, individuals’ efforts to “see a direct rela-
tion between the past and the present, to see past and present as a continuous
surface of interrelated events, is frustrated.” And if an event in the past was “an
episode of disaster…, one is made gloomy and sad. […] The result is that sadness
aims at eliminating the obligation to seek new ways.”

What initial sens de la visite we could find had us follow routes defined by
two thick brown mound-like walls, shapes suggesting the mud construction of
pre-cement civilizations. Varying in height from something like five to more
than seven feet, they ran nearly the length of the great hall, which itself was
some 160 feet long. But on touching the material, it turned out not to be mud,
but leather. Given all the blatant “dark continent” imagery I had already
encountered, the leather wall felt creepy to my touch.

Television screens playing loops of rituals or dances were inserted here
and there along the way. In little bends or cut outs, perhaps two people could
sit and, using a touch screen monitor, also imbedded in the wall, more deeply
explore some cultural question pertinent to that area. There weren’t many of
these interactive screens, and people spent a lot of time at them. I had to wan-
der and wait my turn before I found one free.

Finally, somewhere in Africa, I could access a few layers on a monitor.
What I saw seemed to me well-done, interesting and—as far down as I
went—as culturally informative as one might want. The intelligent touch
screens in that setting made me feel even more intensely the unresolved ten-
sions both at Quai Branly and in our thinking about whether we should look
at striking objects from non-urban, non-literate societies as artifacts of their
lives, as anthropologists might, or as works of art, as an art historian would.
But as I continued my tour, the innocent dilemma dissolved in my mind. Jean
Nouvel’s museum has transcended that simple dichotomy.

Quai Branly has not successfully solved the thorny problem—which,
admittedly, may not have an ideal resolution—of how in the West to show the
objects collected by conquest, swindle, and purchase during the colonial era.
The ancestors of this sort of museum, cabinets of curiosities of princes, or shows
of war trophies captured from urban societies, gave way in the course of the
imperial nineteenth century to more systematically-organized museums dedi-
cated to displaying things—including human remains—collected from defeated
and colonized cultures. Nineteenth-century overseas anthropology got its start
here: non-European societies, it seemed logical, could be understood in the
manner of archeologists, by studying specimens of their material culture.
Explorers, missionaries, naval officers, or even purposeful collecting expedi-
tions would bring back objects from the subdued peoples to be catalogued,
studied, and shown to the public. And so was born what became in 1878 the
Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro and its successor, renamed in 1938 the
Musée de l’Homme. This museum’s Mission Dakar-Djibouti (1931-33) was
France’s last great artifact-gathering expedition, and the Dogon pieces it collected in Mali are on display at the Quai Branly.6

In more than one way, World War II put an end to this kind of artifact-based anthropology. Not only was fieldwork made impossible by war and enemy occupation, but nationalist voices both in the colonies and metropole began to demand the very European rights of nationhood, of the values of 1789, and even of socialism.7 Studying ceremonial figures or masks would give little evidence of the societies that had provided perhaps half of France’s army of liberation and whose members were now demanding their rights as full citizens of France, or, failing that, independence.

Claude Lévi-Strauss returned from New York exile with a new model of “social anthropology.” But this was not yet the Lévi-Strauss of structuralist myths. Working in the New York Public Library, he had authored the great study Elementary Structures of Kinship. Every culture had kinship systems, and since they manifested similarities one with another, there was nothing invidious about studying how these patterned ties contributed to social organization. Creating the Laboratory of Social Anthropology in Paris, and then named to a chair at the Collège de France, he championed a refounded discipline that largely broke free of reading cultures from their things. The tight bond of anthropologists with museums was severed.8

So, from the 1970s on, the big question the museums of society all over the West were asking themselves was, what to do with all this accumulated cultural stuff? Conceptually—this second time—these foreign cultural objects lay there for the taking. Following a long process initiated at the turn of the twentieth century—largely by Paris artists and surrealists—in the postwar years in New York they were increasingly “taken” for art.

In February 1988 Susan Vogel, then director of the Center for African Art in New York, opened a show called “Art/Artifact.”9 Various African objects were presented in different rooms and settings. For example, a piece of heavy handmade white rope was tied to a fishing boat, with the appropriate locally made nets and other artifacts placed near to hand. A label explained the tools of fishing on display. Next to this display the visitor could see another length of the same dazzling white rope handsomely coiled and arranged in the center of a well-lit white-backgrounded installation. The simple label named the society and the rope’s material. Tool? Art? Susan Vogel’s innovative idea was that the meaning of displayed objects came from the ways in which we framed their observation. The meaning did not come from the object but from us, or more precisely from the dialectic of what the curator did and what the visitor saw.10

So despite the fears expressed (including my own) before the opening—that Quai Branly would be an art museum—, it is not quite that, nor is it a museum of societies. Nouvel’s scenography—yes, he decided that, too—situates pieces collected willy-nilly in colonial times, displaying most neither in aesthetically dramatic fashion, as is the case in the Louvre’s Pavillon des
Sessions, nor historically or ethnographically contextualized, as many unhappy ethnologists had wanted.

To be sure, aestheticizing is done. Objects from widely varied cultures are all shown in homogenizing, elegantly shaped, adequately lit glass cases. Here and there particularly handsome pieces were isolated in dramatically highlighted cases to emphasize their qualities as great art. Through there is a minimum of text; a typical identifier reads, “Haida mask, wood, gift of heirs of André Breton.” The names of the Western/French collectors who donated pieces are given, but never information about how pieces “from the collection of the Musée de l’Homme,” for example, came to France. Often the older records are poor on this score, but more modern collecting expeditions for the Musée, like that of Marcel Griaule in 1931 to the Dogon region in Mali, kept better accounts. In any case, whether the information exists or not, we are not told anything about the first, decisive, move in the acquisition stories of any piece. So, we see cultural objects whose history begins only in the West.

Unlike Frank Gehry, who inserts his structures in place with little regard for the surrounding milieu, Jean Nouvel wanted to contextualize the Musée du Quai Branly in his idea of the civilizations it will represent. Hence the village layout of the site, the choice of exotic landscaping, the vegetal walls, the mostly earth colors and décor, the lighting as it might be experienced under a dense forest canopy, and so on.
In particular, the main building and the pieces it contains once more recapitulate the affinities of aesthetic modernist formalism with the _imaginaire_ _primitif._¹⁴ In a simpler era all these qualities would have put the museum on the art side of Susan Vogel’s art/artifact dualism.

But today a third term would serve us better: this powerful architectural visionary has given us a _spectacle_. The diversity, contradictions, and complexities of the worlds the museum contains appear to us, to take Guy Debord’s words, as an “affirmation of appearance”; the lives lived in the cultures on display register “as mere appearance.” Nouvel’s is a spectacle made of the cultural capital of peoples of the southern hemisphere accumulated, turned into commodities of the culture industry, and bombastically displayed. In his museum, objects are transformed into images, or rather, into one grand horizon-filling persuasion-image of the global South. This approach differs from a classical modernist one. Modernists are well aware of themes, context, biography, and history, but they choose to valorize form and formal innovation in the arts.¹⁵

Stéphane Martin, the museum’s president, and the French government want the museum to be an important sign of France’s special friendship for the once-colonized. For Martin, Quai Branly represents France’s postcolonial turn. Trophies of conquest are now to be seen as objects of mysterious beauty. Of course, the slippery nature of the term confuses what is at stake in present-day French “postcoloniality.” It is true that since the end of World War II the major European powers have largely withdrawn their direct political control over the lands of the southern hemisphere. As a result of that distance of space and time, we can see much more clearly what the colonial era was about. But I think it premature, if measured in international power-political, military, cultural, and economic terms, to speak of a successful postcolonial move. Nor, as the fall 2005 riots so dramatically exhibited, is France yet postcolonial in its domestic social relations.¹⁶

Why the Quai Branly might nevertheless justly be seen today as a successful postcolonial museum lies precisely in its being a spectacle. Here is a museum apparently honoring objects gathered during a less honorable colonial past. It serves, to adapt Debord’s words, “as the visible _negation_ of life, as a negation of [colonial] life which _has become visible._”¹⁷

Postcolonial spectacle doesn’t come off without people. But Western publics have caught on to the cultural framing of the apparently decontextualized works displayed in modern art museums. It is the same for “primitive” art; museum visitors know that there is an untold story behind the striking work standing alone in the well-lit display case. Like shows on the History Channel, spectacle also takes on the guise of technical information. Accordingly, here and there at Quai Branly we discover islands of anthropology.¹⁸

Let me mention the three most important ethnographic displays. First, in most of the museum’s four areas we see one or more arrangements of variations of a same object. Examples of the painted skins of Plains Indians, the varieties of ceremonial masks of the Pacific Northwest, and, from the Pacific,
war clubs of similar design are displayed side by side in a case. At first look the effect is a little like the old nineteenth-century ethnographic museums that organized displays on diffusionist or evolutionary principles. But here the intent is more to show how the makers and their societies, even in the case of utilitarian objects, were interested in—often subtle—formal nuance.

Second, to both demonstrate the specificity and myth-creating unity of the peoples of the Americas, anthropologist Emmanuel Désveaux has curated an exhibition of diverse objects from all over the Americas organized according to the dichotomies of structuralism. Between 1964 and 1971 Lévi-Strauss published four volumes titled collectively, *Mythologies*, proposing the mythic connections that inform this exhibit.19 I have always had trouble appreciating the naked-dressed, honey-ashes, and raw-cooked of the Lévi-Strauss school, or when I did—sort of, kind of, perhaps—understand, I have always been baffled when I tried myself to draw such affinities and oppositions. To me it’s a very mysterious way to show the intellectual unity of humanity, of the convergence of myth-making about our shared world.20

The great multiplicity from pole to pole of the economies, social organizations, gender relations, and mythologies of indigenous America are captured in a few dualities of speech in this structuralist scheme. If we knew the specifics of every case under investigation, we would not need science to sort out a complicated world. But when the sorting device has such a large mesh as this, I fear we lose too much information important both for understanding and for action in the world.

The third and most fascinating anthropological display is called “African Heritage” in the English signage, “Herencia Africana” in the Spanish version, but, curiously, “Les Amériques noires” in French. I found its display case facing backward from the entrance at the far end of the walk through the cultural areas. The printed matter in the English version reads as follows:

It is impossible to dissociate the colonization of the Americas from the slave trade that brought millions of Africans to work on New World plantations between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. These deported slaves duly created Afro-American cultures throughout the Caribbean, Brazil, and the southern United States. African slaves adapted musical, artistic, and spiritual traditions to their new American surroundings. In the sphere of religion, Haitian Voodoo and the Candomblé cult in Brazil became essential factors of national identity. Each deity of African origin, with its own special attributes, has a double among Christian saints.21

“Les Amériques noires” is the most culturally sophisticated display I encountered. But its themes of empire, slavery, black skins, cultural *métissage*, and even nation-building are not picked up anywhere else on the exhibition plateau. The exhibit was largely the initiative of the specialist on Mexican cultural mixing (*métissage*), anthropologist/historian Serge Gruzinski. It displays the striking red, black-dotted, and stuffed with a don’t-ask-what’s-inside cloth globe contained in a metal armature surmounted by a crucifix, which was the image used on the poster for a conference Gruzinski had organized on cultural métissage in April 2004.
A banner decorated with sewn patterns and sequins in the Haitian Voodoo manner shows Saint James Major—like Saint George, important to many of the traditional religions of the Americas—sitting astride a horse. A naïve painting from the colonies shows mixed artifacts and rituals. Wrought-iron figures, tridents, and not-quite-Christian crosses all give evidence of the mixing of African and Christian belief practices caused by the transportation of the slaves to work in the new world.

But these are three ethnographic displays of a new kind. In the first example we are shown multiple versions of often utilitarian objects as variations in an art form. The second, the Lévi-Strauss-structuralist display, proposes a kind of idealistic unity of humanity abstracted from real lives.

And the third presents artifacts evidencing cultural mixing, or to be specific, showing the result of the equation, “indigenous religions + Christianity + ongoing invention.” Although easily missed because of its bad location, the exhibit proposes a valuable additional dimension to the museum’s displays. But by its uniqueness on the exhibition floor, “Les Amériques noires” suggests that métissage is unique in history, rather than demonstrating the basic truism that cultures have always borrowed, traded, and mixed. The two transverse paths across the museum’s long axis suggest cultural contact of neighboring zones. But that’s ancient history. And it is misleading as well. The contacts
were often from very far away: Pacific cowry shells are found in all four areas, as are European trade beads. What we see sometimes as the “golden age” of the art of a non-European society usually happens once the artists get Western tools—which they never refuse—to make elegant versions of what they made before contact. So even the much prized early contact pieces are in fact products of long-distance commerce. Our knowledge of today’s dense global cultural networks puts the museum’s simple depiction of cultural vectors—as local neighboring contacts—in a way that has the unintended effect of primitivizing the description of how the cultures on display were, early on, systematically connected to the elaborating world system. The resulting, relatively static, vision of the societies of the South is where modernist aesthetics and classical anthropology converge: we are shown locally unique objects existing in an ethnographic and aesthetic now, or more accurately a spectral timelessness.

If the museum’s spectacle removes it from both the movements of historical time and changes of place, its insistent contemporaneity puts into relief a nagging question I had about what we were seeing: are these cultures we are viewing dead, changed, still creative, or just part of the swelling mixture of cultural flotsam and jetsam that defines our global era? “The Black Americas” exhibit seems to me an attempt to explain cultural persistence-and-change today, at least in the realm of religious mixing. But, I would like to put the theme of the new American Indian museum in Washington as a question for Quai Branly; with regard to the people who created these things and had these beliefs, “Are they still here?”

Two interrogations nest in that simple phrase. First, it should be noted that it is impossible today to mount an exhibition of indigenous cultural objects in the United States or Canada without the full cooperation and participation of artists, elders, and community leaders from that society. As far as I know, that was not the case with Quai Branly. What might still be a living or remembered cultural tradition in the area on display is ignored. From the museum’s perspective, at this point at least, they “are no longer here.” Second, the question, Are they still here?, also wants to know: are the artists of the cultures on display still making pieces in the societies’ traditions, quoting from tradition, making “airport art,” or refusing the traditional styles, but proudly wearing their ethnic identities nevertheless, making art like their confreres in New York, London, Paris, and Berlin? What is Quai Branly’s relation with contemporary art?

Jean Nouvel invited eight members of an Australian aboriginal artists’ cooperative to paint the corridors and window frames of the office building on the rue de l’Université side. From the sidewalk one can see the lintels and the sills of the windows covered systematically with regularly repeated pattern of black and white, and sometimes red and yellow abstract designs.
These paintings are continuations of the same patterns that cover the ceilings and sidewalls inside. Moreover, one of the artists, Judy Watson, has painted the outside wall of the same building with what, to my inexperienced eye, looked like ranks of fat grey caterpillars climbing a steep hill. So, there is contemporary art in the Musée du Quai Branly, if for the moment only from other nations’ former empires—and as decor. But also on this rue de l’Université side, close to where the Australians painted, there is a hall for temporary exhibitions, including a promised show of the contemporary art of the South. The first one, “Jardin d’Amour,” an installation by Yinka Shonibare, a Nigerian-born Londoner, is scheduled to open in spring 2007.

After a brief tour of the rather uninteresting gift shop (with an Aboriginal-painted ceiling), which is a smaller, simpler, white building next to the grand “government house” of this little colonial village, I left the site and found a cafe away from the museum—where would Western energy be without the African coffee plant?—and tried to digest the mystical-religious mise-en-scène that I had just experienced.
Museum-tired, I fell into reverie. My anticlerical unconscious took me first to the old Paris Musée des Arts et Métiers, which had been created during the positivist, science-hungry Third Republic by hollowing out a church building and filling it with machines and symbols of secular freedom and technological progress. I remembered the frisson of transgression on my first visit a long time ago at the militantly secular spirit it proclaimed. I let go of that image and now found myself in a room in the Louvre.

A dark, cool place. Its ceiling is supported by magnificent Romanesque columns, their capitals showing wonderfully strange animal and human figures. An altar stands at one end with a beautiful triptych on it. It is Mathias Grünewald’s Issenheim alterpiece (which is in Colmar, but in imagination one can redecorate, no?). Beautiful carved wooden screens border the triptych. The magnificent organ is playing churcchy music, incense fills the air, and actors dressed as priests scurry about doing priestly things. There are staffed confessionals along the sides that bear a sign that offers “fun penances” for good confessions. Another sign points to monks’ cells in the basement where interesting religious experiences are promised to visitors. A notice announces masses on the hour, each time following different rites. To enrich the visit, tourphones— with the voice of Pope John Paul II speaking to you in any language you want—and religious garb (with a choice of Orders) are both offered for rent. I suppose having seen The Truman Show and Wag the Dog long before I visited Quai Branly had made my critical unconscious sensitive to the fictions of contemporary sociopolitical life.

Now, my reverie was not art, although many of the things I imagined were splendid. Nor was my fantasy ethnography, although in my church visit there was music, costumes, priests, rituals, and mystery. I had imagined a spectacle. And Jean Nouvel’s dark museum of the primitive evokes endless new ideas for similar spectacles: recreations of the Paris of 1789, of 1830 (bigger than Les Misérables, the musical), of the bittersweet city of Edith Piaf, or, perhaps most inviting to the tourists who are the target audience for the Musée du Quai Branly, a theme-park Paris with three-star fast-food stands.

In Jean Nouvel’s museum, we see, in a most disturbing form, the danger at the heart of Debord’s complaint that cultural life was being transformed into a commodity by the agency of spectacle. It is true that today museums everywhere need the money that large publics bring and that they compete with television, high-tech films, and Disney. So I am not engaged in the great American sport for dummies, French-bashing. Many American museums are already far along the path to becoming venues for commoditized-spectacle. Recall the 1998 Guggenheim “Art of the Motorcycle” exhibition or its 2000-01 show of Giorgio Armani clothes.

Indeed—unfortunate distinction though it may be—French museums are moving to the forefront of the museology of the spectacle. Last summer, timed for the opening of the Da Vinci Code in Paris movie houses, the Louvre was offering both maps and recorded guides for a Da Vinci Code tour. At the same
time, the bookstore displayed piles of the novel for sale. But how far along the road to cultural capital commodified as spectacle can France go before the French “exception” becomes only a marketing strategy?

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Notes

1. Vanuatu, the former Hebrides Islands, which in colonial times the French had administered with the British at a certain moment, had become a target for Presbyterian missionaries who frowned on the continuation of the local pagan beliefs and practices. The French had intervened to save the indigenous culture—at least in Chief Laukalbi’s account—by driving out the missionaries. In gratitude the people of Vanuatu had sent a representative, along with a pole carved in the local way, to the museum’s inauguration. Among the other dignitaries in the audience were Eliane Toledo, wife of the newly-elected Indian president of Peru, and of course, Claude Lévi-Strauss.

2. I felt these Conradian vibrations and wrote my impressions before I had read Michael Kimmelman’s scathing review, “A Heart of Darkness in the City of Light” (New York Times, 2 July 2006). So here for once the findings of both auteur and reception theories—Nouvel wanted what Kimmelman saw and disliked—harmoniously, if negatively, converge.

3. Let me thank my consultants: Aldona Jonaitis, director of the University of Alaska Museum; my son, Ethan Lebovics, of the Science Museum of Minnesota, who works as an exhibition installation manager; and Patricia Mainardi, former executive officer of the CUNY Graduate Center program in Art History, who twice visited the exhibition.

4. See, for example, Nouvel’s interview on Arte TV, which has been cut to brief video excerpts for transmission on their Internet site: www.arte-tv.com/connaissance-decouverte/quaibranly (accessed August 2006). He speaks of the lighting in the first of the three vignettes from the telecast. Unfortunately, Marlon Brando is no longer available to recreate his role of Mr. Kurtz.


7. Actually, it was more complicated than I can relate in the text. To the degree that they could, Vichy’s overseas administrators encouraged indigenous peoples to take pride in their cultures. In part a reaction of the Right to the totalizing republican-ism they had replaced and in part to keep their colonials from falling for the blandishments of the Japanese Greater Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, Vichy’s colonial policy inadvertently fuelled the postwar growth of independence movements. See Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain’s National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

8. Of course, this is not entirely true, as, for example, his structuralist reading of Northwest Coast Indian masks, *Way of the Masks*, suggests. But, since Lévi-Strauss’s reorientation of the profession, it is hard to name works by anthropologists that rely primarily on collected cultural objects as evidence for statements on how societies are organized. Hence, the anthropologists left the door ajar for art historians to enter.


10. Back in the 1980s this viewer-constructs-the-thing-viewed was a radical, but compelling, new idea. A few sophisticated museum thinkers translated it into provocative permanent exhibits. From 1980 until his recent (2006) retirement, Jacques Hainard directed the ethnographic museum of Neufchatel, Switzerland. He organized his exhibitions as moments in the history of Western museum representations of objects from nonurban societies: ranging from a room set up like a cabinet of curiosities, through various anthropological takes from the nineteenth century, to the model of the museum of “primitive” art, and then finally to the postmodern room, with objects from many cultures, including those of the West, cluttering a banquet table.

11. As art historian Thomas Beachdel pointed out to me in a personal communication, the clear glass exhibition cases, while nicely transparent, at the same time sow visual confusion as it is difficult to concentrate one’s view on the contents of a case because of the ocular noise coming from the very closely-spaced neighboring cases. Imagine looking at a Russian doll made of glass figures still nested together.

12. With our foretaste of the recent increase in demands for improperly taken artworks to be returned (the Getty Museum Italian scandal, objects now voluntarily to be returned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Greeks’ renewal of their older outstanding claim for the Parthenon pieces at the British Museum), we will continue to see a worldwide increase in claims for restitution of all cultural goods. And of course, one day, not long from now, either French people whose ancestors lived in the former colonial empire or, more likely, heads of the states created after decolonization will arrive at the Musée du Quai Branly to request the return of their cultural treasures. When in the course of a conference on the eve of the museum’s opening (“France and Its Others: New Museums, New Identities”, sponsored by the University of Chicago Center in Paris, 1-2 June 2006) Abaubakar Sanogo, a francophone African graduate student studying film at the University of Southern California, asked the French museum administrator participants about returning
cultural articles, we heard a marvelous baroque discourse on what a complicated
question that was, but no answer to the question.
13. Nebahat Avcioglu (architectural historian, Columbia University Institute for Schol-
14. See Chapter Four, “France’s Black Venus,” on the affinities between empire and aes-
thetic modernism, in my Imperialism and the Corruption of Democracies (Durham,
15. Following Marx, Debord is decrying capitalist societies’ making all use values into
exchange values, and then—his contribution—presenting the resulting cultural
world of commodities as a kind of theater of the real.
16. See my Imperialism and the Corruption of Democracies, Chapters One and Two, and
my “Two Paths to Postcoloniality: The Musée du Quai Branly and the National
Museum of the American Indian” (paper presented at the conference “France and
Its Others: New Museums, New Identities,” sponsored by the University of Chicago
Center in Paris, 1 June 2006).
17. Taken from Chapter One, paragraph 10 of the Black & Red’s 1977 English-language
translation of Debord’s La Société du Spectacle (Paris: Champs Libre, 1971), as posted
on a Debordian website and found at http://library.nothingness.org/articles/all/
all/display/16; italics indicate the author’s emphasis; the text in brackets is mine.
Somewhat differently, Michael Kimmelman concluded in his harsh review that
“Quai Branly’s story is the spectacle of its own environment.” Still captivated by the
aesthetic moderns’ claim of the universal applicability of their canons, he held up
the totally decontextualized art exhibit at the Pavillon des Sessions in the Louvre as
the way to go (Kimmelman, “Heart of Darkness”).
18. The anthropologist Maurice Godelier, the original research director, was literally
locked out early in the planning process and was replaced by Lévi-Strauss’s former
student Emmanuel Désveaux, who, in less than a year, gave way to Anne-Christine
Taylor. She is interested in the “process by which ordinary or industrial objects
become works of art.” See the interview with her by Nicolas Journet, “Retour à l’ob-
jet de l’art,” Sciences Humaines 3 (June-August 2006), 18. I detail what Godelier told
me in an interview about his coming back from vacation and finding the lock
changed in his office in the planning building in my Bringing the Empire Back Home
(Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 154-57. Soon after his departure from
the Quai Branly planning team, Godelier received from Roger-Gérard Schwartzen-
berg, research minister, the Centre national de la recherche scientifique’s highest
honor, the Médaille d’or.
19. The four volumes of Claude Lévi-Strauss Mythologiques I-IV are (with the titles and
dates of their English-language translations by John Weightman and Doreen
Weightman in brackets): Le Cru et le Cuit (1964 [The Raw and the Cooked, 1969]); Du
miel aux cendres (1966, [From Honey to Ashes, 1973]); L’Origine des manières de table
(1968 [The Origin of Table Manners, 1978]); and L’Homme nu (1971 [The Naked Man,
1981]).
20. That was my feeling after trying carefully to read Lévi-Strauss’s handsome celebra-
tion of the masks of his fetish peoples of the Pacific Northwest, The Way of the
Masks.
21. I have not altered the rather infelicitous English text but include here the original
French version for the reader to compare: “Les Amériques noires: La colonisation de
l’Amérique est indissociable de la traite de millions d’Africains vers les plantations
du Nouveau Monde entre les seizième et dix-neuvième siècles. Cette déportation a
donné naissance à des cultures afro-américaines dans l’ensemble géographique con-
stitué des Caraïbes, du Brésil et du sud des États-Unis. Les esclaves africains ont
adapté les traditions musicales, graphiques et spirituelles à leur nouvel environ-
nement américain. Dans le domaine religieux, le Vaudou de Haïti ou le Candomblé
22. Lebovics, “Two Paths to Postcoloniality.”
23. In North America, at least, the Indian myths collected and published by Franz Boas, for example, are regularly replaced in exhibition information by the often differing stories that contemporary elders tell the curators.
24. Three of the eight Aboriginal artists came to Paris for the opening: Judy Watson, Yunupingu—whose younger brothers Galarrwuy and Mandawuy sing in the rock band Yothu Yindi—, and John Mawurndjul from Maningrida in Arnhem Land. The museum’s currently slim acquisitions budget is being used mostly to fill holes in the collection. There is no policy of which I am aware to systematically acquire contemporary art from the four areas on display. For more on the larger strategies and divisions of labor regarding acquisitions and exhibitions in the French national museum system. See my “Two Paths to Postcoloniality.”
25. According to the museum’s web announcement, the exhibition was inspired by “des jardins à la française.” Amidst the growing things and the fountains of her installation, the artist “poursuit ici sa réflexion sur l’identité et l’histoire, au croisement de ses deux cultures d’appartenance” (http://www.quaibranly.fr/index.php?id=816, accessed August 2006).
26. Nor have I found much merit in the mourning rites of those attached to that old coffin of colonialism, the Musée de l’Homme. For an instant book, which came out the day the Musée du Quai Branly opened, see the history of its creation from its beginnings in the minds of Jacques Kerchache and Jacques Chirac to just before the formal opening in June 2006, written by the anthropologist Bernard Dupaigne, Le Scandale des arts premiers: Le véritable histoire du musée du quai Branly (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2006). From 1991 to 1998 Dupaigne had served as director of the Ethnology Laboratory of the Musée de l’Homme. His book is understandably quite critical of the dissolution of the older institution in order to create Quai Branly.
27. The Guggenheim’s website hyped the show in the language of a fanzine: “Giorgio Armani, with an innovative design by Robert Wilson, presents Armani’s work and celebrates his legendary career.”