Introduction
Memory, Community and the New Museum

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Abstract
Over the last decades, in response to feminist, postmodern and postcolonial critiques of the modern museum, objects, collections and processes of musealization have been radically re-signified and re-posited in the cultural arena. The new museums emerging from this shift have redefined their functions in and for communities not simply by changing their narratives but by renegotiating the processes of narration and the museal codes of communication with the public. They define themselves now not as disciplinary spaces of academic history but as places of memory, exemplifying the postmodern shift from authoritative master discourses to the horizontal, practice-related notions of memory, place, and community. The key feature of these new museums is that they deploy strategies of applied theatrics to invite emotional responses from visitors: to make them empathize and identify with individual sufferers and victims, or with their own contemporaries inhabiting alternative modernities in distant places. This dossier seeks to probe these new museographic and curatorial discourses, focusing in particular on the memory museum as an emergent global form of (counter)monumentality. Drawing on different geographical and historical contexts, it argues that the new museums' apparently global aesthetics implies a danger of surrendering the very specificity of historical experiences the memorial 'site' offers its visitors.

Key words
community ■ inclusiveness ■ memory ■ museums

THE MUSEUM is constantly tottering on the edge between obsolescence and rebirth – as indeed one might expect from such a crucial cultural apparatus of modernity. Just as art itself, with which museums have been most closely associated, it has been serially proclaimed dead right from the outset of the modern age, at the same time as it was being hailed as finally coming into its own (Didi-Huberman, 2005: 42–4). From its inception in the late 18th and early 19th century, the museum has alternatively been entrusted with the fashioning of public culture and been accused of killing it off (Maleuvre, 1999: 20). While supposedly bestowing permanent, consented value judgements on the objects passing into its realm (which had thus so to speak 'completed' their commodity careers), the museum also constantly had to respond to external pressures and challenges by re-accommodating its modes of selection and display – the very grounds, that is, on which such attributions of 'cultural' value were being made. Yet if, then, a paradoxical relation between permanence and constant renewal, between authority and its questioning and reformulation, has always been at the core of the museum's cultural logic, the proliferation over the last two decades of claims that we have either reached 'the end of the museum age' (Groys, 1997) or are in fact on the threshold of a 'new museology' (Vergo, 1989) amounts to yet another updating of the same dynamic that has always accompanied the museum. Yet this time, we are told, something truly new and different is in the making.

Over the last two decades, in response to feminist, postmodern and postcolonial critiques, objects, collections and processes of musealization have been radically re-signified and re-posited in the cultural arena. These changes have resulted in a new type of museum that has made its appearance in diverse geographical and political settings. The stated aim of many of these is to invite reflection on the representational and mediated quality of histories and geographies, and on memory as a complex aesthetic and rhetorical artifice. Rather than as ruins of a lost past, certifying its demise, museum objects have turned into the material hinges of a potential recovery of shared meanings, by means of narrativization and performativity. By granting a voice to what has been left out of the dominant discourses of history, diversified and sometimes even incompatible narratives have supposedly been granted a locus in a museal space that seems no longer to aspire to any totalizing synthesis. Indeed, these shifts in modes of display and in the remit of materials and areas of collecting ensuing not just from large-scale ventures such as Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao or Yoshio Taniguchi's comprehensive redesigning of MoMA, completed in 2004, but also from the exponential spread of local, 'communitarian' and 'memorial' museums and 'heritage sites', as well as of immaterial forms of collecting and display over the internet, also lend weight to Andreas Huyssen's claim that the centrality of the museum in cultural debates, activity, and capital investment represents an anxiety peculiar to our own time: 'The popularity of the museum is . . . a major cultural symptom of the crisis of the Western faith in modernization as panacea' (1995: 34).

There is, Kylie Message has argued, at one and the same time an ongoing thread linking the self-proclaimed 'new museums' that have emerged in the decades before and after the millennium to 'the teleological desire for a continual newness'. This refers to a modernity ostensibly left behind by them, *and* to the introduction of a different, 'postmodern' idea of the new as self-conscious belatedness – *Nachträglichkeit* – 'questioning the very possibility of newness itself, which is more likely to be presented as a form of mimicry or pastiche' (Message, 2006: 65). The shift from 'art' to 'culture' as the buzzword of innovation in curatorial discourses (including a long tail of related notions, foremost among them 'inclusivity', 'openness' and 'reciprocity') is but the most noticeable aspect of this changing conception of the museum as a harbinger of the new: whereas high-profile art museums such as the ones mentioned above remain among the highest-grossing venues, critics have complained that despite – or because of – their spectacular architectural repackaging the high-modernist institutional space itself has remained relatively untouched, compared to other fields of museology: in the field of art, 'the notion of the museum as a sacred space, dedicated to the timeless and universal values of art, has persisted in the face of the many mutations that art institutions have undergone in recent years' (Barker, 1999: 253).

By contrast, academic museum theory, starting with Vergo's *New Museology* anthology (which included contributions from museum critics and professionals inspired by Situationism and civil rights activism in their exposure of the museum's politics of representation), has emerged over the same period as an interdisciplinary configuration largely deriving its very *raison d'être* from the transformation of the institutional status quo. In Janet Marstine's words, new museum theory harks its bets on 'the transformation of the museum from a site of worship and awe to one of discourse and critical reflection that is committed to examining unsettling histories with sensitivity to all parties, [looking towards] a museum that is transparent in its decision-making and willing to share power. New museum theory is about decolonizing, giving those represented control of their cultural heritage' (Marstine, 2006: 5). Unlike in the attacks on the museum waged by the modern avant-gardes, there is now a relation of inter-implicatedness between museum theory and curatorial practice, made possible largely by the 'textualization' of museums themselves. Under the regime of the linguistic turn across late 20th-century humanities, museum theory and practice have been placed on a shared plane of linguistic self-reflexivity and metatextual self-consciousness, in 'a very real rupture with past paradigms of representation, categorization and definition according to new and interdisciplinary models' (Message, 2006: 24). Although holding fast to classical modern notions of the museum as a public educator and as a catalyst of social reform, the new museology redefines curatorial and outreach practice as extending far beyond the selection and display of instructive samples of knowledge, and now incorporating dimensions such as entertainment, empowerment, experience, ethics, and narrative endeavour

(figured in a dialogical encounter between 'visitor narratives' and 'museum narratives') (Roberts, 1997).

Thus, the hierarchies built into the modern triadic relation between exhibitor, spectator and object have now supposedly been overcome by installing the 'community' as both addressee and facilitator of the 'museum experience'. The latter aims to replace a binary model of showing and seeing by the more inclusive notion of performance, and the monologue of the label by a dialogue generated through constant feedback loops in which narrative authority is passed back and forth between museum professionals and their audience. The museum becomes an 'instrument of self-knowledge and a place to learn and regularly practice the skills and attitudes for community problem-solving' (Fuller, 1992: 361), to the point of becoming – in Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's (2000: 8) coinage – a *post*-museum that, 'instead of transmitting knowledge to an essentialized mass audience . . . , listens and responds sensitively as it encourages diverse groups to become active participants in museum discourse. . . . Most importantly, the post-museum is a site from which to redress social inequalities' (Marstine, 2006: 19). Museums, then, are entrusted with a new mission of community formation, making individual and collective audiences recognize themselves as subjects of rights and, thus, contributing to the democratization of culture and society. Against traditional museums' 'desire for autonomy, resistance to change, and disengagement from societal concerns', the new museums actively contribute to 'enhanced community self-determination and increased participation in decision-making processes and democratic structures' (Sandell, 2002: 7).

Such multiculturalist newspeak unsurprisingly enraged the more vocal defenders of occidental values, especially in the 'culture wars' raging through the US during the Clinton and Bush years. Conservative spokeswoman and vice-presidential spouse Lynne Cheney complained that, whereas once 'museums used to be places that invited visitors to learn about great works of art, to understand their society, and to know more about the course of history', they nowadays 'appear to be instead in the business of debunking greatness, Western society, and even history itself' (Cheney, 1995: 144). But from more critical perspectives such as Foucaultian and Marxist cultural theory, the democratizing and community-empowering claims of postmodern museology have likewise met with less-than-enthusiastic assessments. Among the former, art historians and theorists such as Douglas Crimp, Donald Preziosi and Carol Duncan have asked whether, in shedding their inherited, high-modernist 'technologies of the subject' (eloquently analysed in Tony Bennett's (1988, 1995) work on modernity's 'exhibitionary complex'), the post-museum may not be catering all the more efficiently to those of a late-capitalist society founded on affective labour and the blurring of boundaries between work and leisure, discipline and freedom. As Matthew Jackson puts it, '"flexible structures" and "de-institutionalized institutions" make not only for accessible, commercialized art spaces but . . . for smoothly operating workspaces as well' (Jackson, 2005: 115). Indeed, these critics

suggest, what has changed since the late 19th-century's museum rituals of public self-fashioning in the image of bourgeois cultivation and sobriety might be not so much the museum's status as an ideological apparatus reproducing hegemonic social and cultural norms but the very content of these norms, which are no longer the ones of disciplinary society.

Moreover, as neoliberalism has hinged (cultural) citizenship on consumers' activity in the marketplace, the much-lauded opening-up of former highbrow temples to mass audiences through the incorporation of shops, restaurants and cafés in order to provide comprehensive experiences of leisure could be seen less as a 'democratization of culture' and more as an extension into previously untapped markets (García Canclini, 2001: 15–36). Marxist critics insist that the post-museum did not succeed in unfastening established notions of aesthetic value and critical authority or in facilitating horizontal and dialogical spaces for the controversial exchange of ideas. It merely accommodated its curatorial idiom to the discourse of diversity and community as the hegemonic (because inconsequential) idiom of cultural criticism in societies simultaneously caught in neo-conservative political conjunctures. As Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago put it, 'it is supremely disingenuous to proclaim that radical changes in scenography – whether under the rubrique of a "new" museology or not – constitute effective social critique. A major problem with such evaluations is that as long as the aesthetic ideology of "originality" determines the "value" of social critique, the critique itself operates at a symbolic level, displaced from the actual social conditions that the critique aims to reform' (2004: 234).

The present collection of essays attempts to probe the political and aesthetic claims of 'new museologies' in one of the main areas of curatorial and critical attention: the shifts in collecting and exhibiting practices associated with the transformation of traditional history museums into 'spaces of memory'. Many 'new museums' redefine their functions in and for communities as spaces of memory, exemplifying the postmodern shift from authoritative master discourses to the horizontal, practice-related notions of memory, place and community. 'The long-established habit of imagining memory as a storehouse has been transmuted into the reverse suggestion that storage systems [such as the museum] might be understood as forms of memory' (Cubitt, 2007: 8). In these spaces individual life-stories are attributed significance beyond the purely private: autobiographical story-telling is part of the museum's newly perceived function of giving voice to the individual fate and transforming bystanders and later generations into 'secondary witnesses'. In order to do so, the museum cannot simply rely on the aura of the authentic object as a window onto the past, but deploys multi-medial technologies and performance as strategies of narrativization associated with art forms such as literature or film. The stated aim is to facilitate experiential learning, to invite emotional responses from visitors and to make them empathize and identify with people from the past or with their living contemporaries inhabiting alternative modernities in distant places, as if 'reliving' their experience, in order to thus develop more

personal and immediate forms of affective engagement and imaginative investment.

Both Jan and Aleida Assmann's concept of 'social' or 'comunicative memory' (Assmann, 2004: 22ff.) as well as Marianne Hirsch's 'postmemory' acknowledge – albeit in very different ways – that memories, especially embodied experience of public trauma, are passed on to the next generation(s), even if only in a mediated and belated form. Given that the traumatic nature of horrific experiences defies its own witnessing and cognition, the responsibility to work through trauma and its symptoms falls onto the 'secondary witnesses' and the next generation(s). But whereas the Assmanns argue that one needs to distinguish between communicative memory which is passed on through a living connection between proximate generations and the mediated accounts of cultural memory which reaches later generations who are further removed from the experience, Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory' and Alison Landsberg's term 'prosthetic memory' challenge this distinction between 'communicative' and 'cultural memory'. Hirsch has broadened the application of her concept to a more general cultural inheritance that can transcend the immediate family group, but holds on to a distinction between 'familial' and 'affiliative' postmemory. In that sense 'postmemory' is 'defined through an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by an unbridgeable distance that separates the participant from the one born after. . . . Postmemory would thus be retrospective witnessing by adoption. It is a question of adopting the traumatic experiences – and thus also the memories – of others as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one's own life story' (Hirsch, 2001: 10). Whereas Hirsch privileges photography as the medium by which traumatic memory is transmitted across generations, Landsberg considers cinemas and museums as experiential sites which enable spectators and visitors to adopt memories of events as 'prosthetic memories': in such a process 'the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics' (Landsberg, 2004: 2).

This investment in memory media is motivated by the conviction that mere knowledge about the past might not suffice to prevent violent histories from happening again. Furthermore, historiography's ideals of disinterested objectivity, detachedness and clear distinction between past and present appear heartless, like a betrayal of the dead and especially of the victims of traumatic events. To relegate something completely to the realm of historical knowledge seems nothing short of shying away from our moral responsibility. So the obligation to remember is taken to its literal extreme: visitors are asked to adopt memories in order to be able to respond emotionally to the past and museums take on the role of facilitators in that process by providing experientially oriented encounters with memory media and technologies. The main problem with this mission is the assumption that feelings

of empathy produce new memory communities and political alliances across the divides of gender, race, ethnicity and nationality and that this empathy fosters ethical thinking which is then transferred to topical conflicts for which it elicits tolerance and deeper understanding. In this process the role of historical contextualization, analytical examination and critical reflection in our understanding of past and current events is at least sidelined if not depreciated. Another concern is that identification must 'resist appropriation and incorporation, resist annihilating the difference between self and other, the otherness of the other' (Hirsch, 2001: 11). Clearly, then, a more thorough investigation of empathy and its limits in the museum context is needed, not least because of the implicit assumption that empathy can only be triggered by letting the visitors experience a glimpse or a heavily sanitized version of people's sufferings. In various of the critical responses to 'memorial museums' worldwide, such display aesthetics have begged the question of whether we are in fact still talking about empathy here or if the response is more self-centred. It has also raised concerns regarding the banalization of the often horrific events and experiences which are evoked.

Despite these criticisms, the museum has undoubtedly become one of the vital social institutions responsible for transforming living memory into institutionally constructed and sustained commemorative practices which enact and give substance to a group identity. By adopting this role the institution of the museum aims to reinvent itself in redeeming its own past: the idea is to democratize authoritative master narratives and prescriptive vantage points of historiography by including the episodic narratives of formerly marginalized memory communities. By trying to integrate diversified and sometimes even incompatible narratives, they aim for a mode of representation that has so far been the domain of art and specifically literature. But the rhetoric of good intentions veils the twin dangers of commodification on the one hand and political instrumentalization on the other. As Didier Maleuvre (2010) reminds us, museums – especially but not exclusively those privately funded – need their paying customers to approve of the exhibition rather than feel challenged beyond their comfort zone. Where memories are acquired and consumed the museum becomes less a 'moral institution' ('*moralische Anstalt*', Friedrich Schiller) than a theme-park. State-funded museums perform a public role of remembrance in which they are expected to represent a broad social or at least a political consensus, producing narratives which form an integral part of national identity politics. According to Peter Burke, the social role of the historian is to remind people (and nations) of what they would have liked to forget (Burke, 1989: 110). In contrast, many museums perform memories which foster a positive self-image or at least act as a cohesive force for the (local) memory communities they cater for.

Paul Williams, in his book on 'memorial museums', claims that during the last 20 years a large number of museums commemorating violent histories which led to mass suffering such as genocides, wars, dictatorships and

displacements have defied the distinction between a museum and a memorial, by focusing on the suffering of the victims of those events (Williams, 2007: 8). Museums that document trauma and conflict have proliferated across the globe, so much so that in 2001 the International Council of Museums established IC-MEMO, the International Committee of Memorial Museums in Remembrance of the Victims of Public Crimes. These museums form part of an international debate about human rights, restitution, and justice. However, the popularity of so-called 'dark tourisms' means that countries can actually turn the sites of their bloody and unsavoury history into money-spinning enterprises or at least into attractions for international tourists: 'evidence suggests that contemporary tourists are increasingly travelling to destinations associated with death and suffering' (Sharpley, 2009: 5ff.).

For many of these museums the exhibition practices established by Holocaust museums and memorials provide a pervading but often only implicitly referred to frame of reverence: their iconography and their modes of remembrance are used as a template, but the museums usually do not reflect on this genrefication and its implications. Andreas Huyssen weighs up the chances and the dangers of this development:

> In the transnational movement of memory discourses, the Holocaust loses its quality as index of the specific historical event and begins to function as metaphor for other traumatic histories and memories. The Holocaust as a universal trope is a prerequisite for its decentering and its use as a powerful prism through which we may look at other instances of genocide . . . While the comparison with the Holocaust may rhetorically energize some discourses of traumatic memory, it may also serve as a screen memory or simply block insights into specific local histories. (Huyssen, 2003: 14)

Moreover, and somewhat at odds with this global impact of Holocaust memorialization, museal representations of suffering are often framed through religious paradigms and Christian iconography which invoke concepts such as martyrdom and sacrifice which are highly problematic, especially in contexts where there was never an element of choice and victims did not 'die for a cause'. Conversely, there is a trend in the global remembrance culture to use abstract modernist designs for memorial museums and memorials alike, because figurative representations are considered incapable of conveying the true horrors. The search for new modes of representation opens up contests between different technologies of memory such as literature, film, photography and the museum, but also between the memorial and the museum.

One such example of intermedial resonances is the one discussed by Silke Arnold-de Simine comparing the hybrid, transmedial nature of the Jewish Museum in Berlin (opened in 2001) with that of W.G. Sebald's text *Austerlitz*, published in the same year. Sebald's writing as well as Libeskind's architecture, she suggests, reframe and rework the conventions

of their respective media by drawing attention of viewers and readers to the limits and dead ends of various technologies of memory.

In the following contribution Patrizia Violi sets out to differentiate Williams's definition of the 'memorial museum' which is based solely on its 'content' of mass suffering by focusing on presentational features and by distinguishing the site-specific museum from those created *ex novo*. She explores the indexical character of three different sites of suffering which have been turned into *trauma sites*: Tuel Sleng Museum of the Crimes of Genocide in Phnom Penh (Cambodia), Villa Grimaldi in Santiago (Chile) and The Ustica Memorial Museum in Bologna (Italy). Violi shows that these sites are used for very different political aims: in Cambodia the museum brushes over the complexities of the events it commemorates, but not least because of this simplification it manages to present a narrative which stabilizes Cambodian national identity. In contrast, the Chilean Park for Peace is a place characterized by abstract formal vocabulary which encourages silence and contemplation and therefore remains marginal to the symbolic representation of Chilean national identity. The exhibition of the Ustica Memorial Museum encourages its visitors to read a historically and politically specific massacre as a universalized human experience of suffering and loss.

Jens Andermann's article focuses on the recent handover of the Naval School of Mechanics (ESMA), Argentina's most notorious clandestine torture centre under the dictatorship of 1976–83, to the city of Buenos Aires, in order to create on the premises a 'Space for Memory'. In the ensuing debates, it has become clear that there is currently no consensus among human rights organizations, let alone Argentine society at large, as to how the former sites of state terrorism can be adequately 'recovered', or what their purpose and function in the present might be. Rather than as a shortcoming, Andermann argues, this impossibility of monumentalizing a social consensus about the past in museal forms offers an opportunity for problematizing some of the politics and material poetics underpinning the contemporary 'memorial museum' as such. The article analyses the principal arguments and positions voiced in the debate about ESMA with a view to their attitudes towards the museum-form, and the conclusions that might be derived from these in the context of contemporary memory studies debates.

Whereas, then, the contributors to this dossier do not necessarily come down on the same side of the fence as regarding the effectiveness, political consequences and desirability of a 'new museology', what they do agree on is a need to open the dominant lexicon of museum theory and curatorial practice to critical scrutiny, both in terms of the museum's own institutional history and critical traditions and those of the wider political landscape into which it intervenes today. In times in which public spaces have been eroded and commodified under the onslaught of neoliberalism, the museum institution has been a remarkable exception and success story, returning over the last two or three decades to play a central role in the

production of cultural meanings. This very success, however, also imposes on museum practice and theory an exceptional degree of responsibility for avoiding the temptation of self-indulgence: only constant and radical self-evaluation and critique can keep museum curatorship and theory from coalescing into the commodified gloss that decorates contemporary capitalism's instrumentalizations of history, culture and art as realms of the interpellation of subjects as consumers.

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