

## **The One, the Many and the Other: Revisiting Cultural Diversity in Museums of Cultural History**

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This article is about modes of exhibition in museums of cultural history in western Europe from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to today. I begin by considering some of the challenges national museums are facing today and then go briefly back in time to the evolutionary mode and what I call the didactic descriptive museology with its galleries of objects-witnesses and trophies that was prevalent until the end of the 1970s. Next, I discuss the polyphonic narrative turn and the museology of intersecting gazes that developed during the 1980s and which is still applied in European museums today. Thereafter, I probe the aesthetic mode which is a favourite strategy of display when treating themes pertaining to cultural diversity and otherness since the 1990s. To conclude, I present some thoughts about what I describe as the nomadic turn and the aesthetics of transience that have become the trend since the turn of our millennium. Before going on I want to emphasize that these different museological approaches do not follow a strict chronology. Their paths are often juxtaposed and overlapping.

## Introduction

In his book *Régimes d'historicité* the French historian François Hartog notes that we are in an era where the heritage wave has taken such proportions that it has reached what he calls 'le tout-patrimoine', meaning that almost everything becomes part of a common heritage worldwide. This inflation of heritage and the museification of daily life signifies that we are no more in the logic of the monument or unique *chef-d'œuvre*. Rather, we are now in the rationale of the multiple, polyvalent, decentralized and globalized heritage where the tangible, intangible and natural heritage of the Other has become part of ours.<sup>1</sup> Museums are privileged places where this heritage is kept and displayed. Sharon McDonald rightly reminds us that museums have always made connections between continents and between times. Their collections have always had the capacity to evade the rigid classifications and the narratives into which they were written because the artefacts can be displayed in different settings.<sup>2</sup> These institutions, especially national museums of cultural history, have played and still play a key role in the creation of images about 'self and other'<sup>3</sup> and in promoting what Carol Duncan has called 'rituals of citizenship' in the sense of establishing evidence of a state's engagement with culture and the good of people and, at the same time, stimulate a sense of belongingness to the nation-state.<sup>4</sup> Citizenship, however, is acquiring new meanings and in the process of becoming multiple, global, regional and local concurrently. In the age of globalization, transnationalism and renewed cosmopolitanism national museums have to develop new scopes so as not to end up as shrines of nostalgia.<sup>5</sup>

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## Challenging the One

Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner have argued that the concept of nation is an imagined realm constructed by various historical conjunctures. It is grounded in the idea of belonging defined by territory, language, ethnicity and religion.<sup>6</sup> These authors did not, as Manuel Castells points out, take into account the weight of shared experiences or, to use Arjun Appadurai's terminology the significance of the 'shared past', which have developed from 'a shared history and a shared project, and their historical narratives build on an experience, socially, ethnically, territorially and genderly diversified', but common to the people of the

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1 Hartog, 2003: 196f.

2 MacDonald, 2003: 11.

3 Karp, 1991a: 15

4 Duncan, 1991: 88.

5 Pieterse, 2005: 164

6 Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983.

same nation-state.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the shared past is made of manifold ‘collected memories’ rather than one collective memory. There are contradictory interpretations of the past and tensions between competing interest groups. New versions of the ‘shared past’ may for various reasons become official, replace older ones and claim authenticity until, in turn they are replaced by other ‘official’ versions of history. Hence, the Grand Narrative of the nation-state is regularly challenged by different and differing versions. Nevertheless, regardless of fluctuating power relations, collecting and displaying remain crucial to a museum’s existence and the history of collections and their use in exhibitions provide insights into the systems and processes that shape national identity and collected memories.<sup>8</sup> The ways difference is voiced or silenced may reflect and affect existing perceptions of identities within the national frame. The challenge today is how to reconcile and promote the One and the Many. How to incorporate the plurality and diversity of identities within a common national identity?

Museums have been used by nation-states to represent themselves to themselves, as well as to others. Defining ‘oneself’ and what constitutes national identity is not unchallenged or static and the dichotomy of self and other is undermined by accelerated globalization and in Europe by the expansion of the European Union. According to Jan Pieterse, the conventional view of a monolithic national identity is divided into multiple identities encompassing the local, the regional, the transnational and the global. The ‘other’ becomes ‘others’ which are not only differentiated by citizenship but also by ethnicity, religion, class, gender, age and lifestyle.<sup>9</sup> Further, the dichotomy of self and other is often juxtaposed with other opposing pairs like centre/periphery, Occident/Orient, North/South, colonizer/ colonized. For Pieterse the idea that representation of others must either be exoticizing or assimilating ignores other options – such as recognizing difference without exoticism, others as counterparts in dialogue, or I would add paraphrasing Ricoeur, oneself as an ‘other’. Just as ‘the self’ is not what it used to be, ‘the other’ is no longer a stable or even meaningful category. But if there is no other, who then is the self? The twin terms of the dichotomy are interdependent and if the one goes, so does the other.<sup>10</sup>

Olivier Roy argued that “*European identities are in a process of recasting and new terms such as ‘Englishness’, ‘Dutchness’, ‘Frenchness’ are emerging*”.<sup>11</sup> The need to have an ‘Other’ in order to define the self brings about the elaboration of new frontiers and the emergence of regionalism. In a recent article in *Le Monde*, the French professor of philosophy Yves-Charles Zarka (Université Paris 1), advocated the demolition of walls but the upkeep of frontiers by which he means the nation-states.<sup>12</sup> There are, he says, walls without frontiers and frontiers waiting for walls. Historically, walls were built to keep the ‘others’ out and stop invasions while frontiers have been spaces where others are acknowledged. Frontiers are pliable and they do not hinder circulation. For Zarka, a world with clear frontiers that are accepted by all parts involved is a world of coexistent interactive differences, of dialogues. The idea of flexible frontiers has had its repercussions on museums of cultural history and their representations of the nation-state. It brought them to question ideas of uniform national identities and to review the place of their country in the broader European and global perspective. This trend is well illustrated by the German Historical Museum in Berlin which was founded in 1987. Its museological approach offers, in my view, a post-nationalist view of German history as part of the wider regional European history. Thus, the country is represented as one of the many parts that form a bigger entity: Europe.

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7 Castells, 1998 [1997]: 29f.; Appadurai, 1981.

8 Davison, 2005: 186.

9 Pieterse, 2005: 165.

10 Pieterse, 2005: 172.

11 Roy, 2005: 7.

12 Zarka, 2007.

Since the 1980s, the discourses on multiculturalism in a number of European countries have prompted museums of cultural history to engage in matters related to inclusion vs. exclusion; assimilation vs. integration. In Europe, views on multiculturalism have usually been based on essentialist and territorial understandings of culture. Accordingly, multiculturalism is considered by many as a series of cohabitating ghettos and communities perceived as self-enclosed, living behind opaque walls and entrenched in their 'own' traditions.<sup>13</sup> For instance, in a country proud of its multicultural agenda like the Netherlands this has become an acute dilemma which for many Dutch citizens has been epitomized by the election of the politician Pim Fortyn (2002) and the murder of the film-maker, Theo van Gogh (November 2004). The latent scepticism about multiculturalism was blatantly expressed during the referendum to the European Constitution in France (May 29th, 2005) and the Netherlands (June 1st, 2005) and during the debates following the crises of the 'banlieues' in France (November 2005). Hence, we notice that in a number of western European countries there is a change of vocabulary and multicultural is steadily being replaced by the hazier and less controversial expressions cultural diversity and plural societies. Cultural diversity opens up for avenues of exploring and sharing similarities and differences within the framework of the nation-states. The motto is: *same* (as to civil rights and duties) *but not identical*. Further, cultural diversity highlights the benefits of cross-cultural contacts and hybridity, and is more directed towards dialogue. This implies exchange and reciprocity.

We observe today that a number of museums of cultural history are inserting other histories in the Grand Narrative of the nation-state. The voices of the various minorities are being heard, albeit within the same national frame of reference. Accordingly, cultural diversity is presented through a variety of lenses and perspectives that question the boundaries between the different groups. At the same time they underline the ways various types of knowledge are interrelated in producing novel understandings of the different communities. This was shown, for example, by the experiences at the Transcultural Galleries at Cartwright Hall in Bradford (opened in 1997), at the Världskulturmuseet (Museum of World Culture) in Gothenburg (opened in 2003), and, more recently, at the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration in Paris (CNHI) that was inaugurated on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2007.<sup>14</sup> In following this path museums of cultural history are establishing themselves as 'authorities of recognition' and arenas for experimentations, debates and for treating actual controversial social and political issues. Thus, they play an active role in trying to promote social cohesion in plural societies.<sup>15</sup> As shown by the traumatic events tied to the exhibition *Pour que la vie continue ... D'Isère au Magreb: Mémoires d'immigrés* held at the Musée dauphinois in Grenoble, this is not an easy task. The exhibition opened in 1999 and concerned the history of Grenoble's population of North African origin. It stayed open for over a year despite the fact that some of the persons involved in the project were attacked by members of the extreme right-wing and one was even tortured and raped.<sup>16</sup>

As Fiona McLean puts it: "narrating the nation in the museum increasingly becomes a task of narrating the diversity of the nation and for engaging in a politics of recognition. In an era of multiculturalism, women's movements, movements for recognition of homosexual men and lesbian women, respect for the environment as well as nationalist movements coupled with large scale movements of populations across the globe for travel, commerce or migration, the identity of the nation becomes increasingly fluid and contingent."<sup>17</sup>

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13 Pieterse, 2005: 167.

14 Naguib, 2008.

15 Feuchtwang 2003: 78; Stevens, 2007: 32f.

16 Stevens, 2007; Exhibition held from 1st October 1999 -31st December 2000.

17 McLean, 2005: 1.

## The Evolutionary Mode and Didactic Descriptive Museology

A common feature for museums housing cultural historical artefacts whether these are archaeological, ethnographic or art collections has been to ‘freeze time’ and to impart on the visitor a sense of wonder, of being in a time out of time. With the help of carefully selected samples, exhibitions endeavour to recreate complete pictures of different cultures and periods through representation, interpretation and explanation. Ancient civilizations and living cultures have been exhibited according to typologies inspired from the natural sciences, Linné’s classification in groups and sub-groups and paradigms derived from Darwin’s theories on evolution. The taxonomic methods of ordering cultures have corroborated to hierarchical stratifications of mankind, which have frequently been used to validate eugenics and racist explanations. Museums took pride in showing off most of their riches in permanent exhibitions. Galleries were lined up with showcases overcrowded with objects that were considered as documents about and witnesses of people from different epochs and places.<sup>18</sup> Usually, artefacts were categorized according to different criteria taking into account material, type, shape, size and age, and were often set up clustered around a prototype. During the 1930s, new methods of exhibition less congested with objects were introduced. Permanent exhibitions were arranged thematically. Didactics and authenticity were the main pillars on which they rested. The showcases applied either a diachronic or synchronic approach or, most often, a mixture of both. Museums of ethnology, ethnography and metropolitan museums adopted what became known as the nylon thread museology combined with the technique of diorama, situational exhibition methods and period rooms. This type of exhibitions is, in my opinion, better suited to represent historical themes than living cultures. They show a relation to otherness that is influenced by the theories of cultural relativism introduced by Franz Boas, especially when it comes to so-called ‘primitive’ cultures. Otherness is illustrated by using what Ivan Karp calls the perspectives of difference and similarity. By underlining difference exhibitions exoticize the Other. In the case of ‘primitive’ living cultures, considerations of content such as iconography, questions about intention such as religious purposes for which the objects were made or examination of contexts of production and use are most often omitted from the presentation. By applying this kind of approach, museums endeavour to reconstruct, interpret and explicate different cultures and civilizations and to recreate reality. However, Émmanuel Désveaux rightly points out that this kind of exhibition produces a world of pure fiction.<sup>19</sup> In fact, elements that do not belong together are often put together and one sees models dressed up in their finest clothes or even ritual costumes going about with their daily chores as planting, cutting wood, cooking or weaving.<sup>20</sup> The results are that such exhibitions convey images of idealised, a-historical societies. They produce representations of motionless cultures and endorse stereotypes about cultures untouched by modern times. It is my contention that these representations are shaped by the gaze and the experience of the foreign researcher at a certain moment of her or his life and work.<sup>21</sup>

## The Polyphonic Narrative Turn and a Museology of Intersecting Gazes

From a didactic descriptive museology the shift has during the 1980s gone over to what we may call the polyphonic narrative turn and a museology of intersecting gazes. This approach is popular because it juxtaposes different perspectives and connects research with education and entertainment. It finds its inspiration in the methods and techniques of film-making and motion pictures with montage, cutting, zooming, flashbacks, and those of the Internet with

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18 Naguib, 2004b, 2007a.

19 Désveaux, 2002: 222.

20 Karp, 1991b: 379.

21 Naguib, 2007.

hypertexts, links and sites. When applied to material culture the inert artefacts are transformed into animated beings which lead us into the description of socio-political structures and worldviews. Historical and cultural complexities become more comprehensible through the polyphonic narrative where texts, objects, pictures complement each other. Each artefact relates a number of stories (sometimes contradictory) within a larger one. Events are brought to light, not for their own sake, but for what they reveal about the political, economical, social and religious conditions of a certain period in history. The history of the nation-state is made of all the different interwoven histories and interpretations that together create the pattern of the larger tapestry. For example, let us take the embroidered Palestinian dresses that were used in an exhibition arranged by the Museum of Cultural History of the University of Oslo in 1995 (photo 1). By piecing together the different parts of their individual stories one may address the question of Palestine and create a broader picture of the country. This may be done by examining the kind of cloth the dresses are made of, weaving techniques and craftsmanship, who made them, who embroidered, what do the different patterns and colours represent, which part of Palestine and/or families do they originate from, who wore the dresses, when, what happened to these women and their families, who brought them to Norway and so forth. Polyphonic narrative exhibitions acknowledge the constructed nature of the knowledge presented. Thereby, the analytical and interpretative frameworks and the methods applied are made accessible to the public who learns that scientific knowledge is situated in time and that interpretations are not absolute but subject to continuous reconsiderations.<sup>22</sup>

Photo 1.



### The Aesthetic Turn

Aesthetics combined with the polyphonic narrative approach is today one of the favoured methods of display resorted to by museums of cultural history when dealing with the representations of cultural diversity and otherness, especially when treating non-western living cultures (photo 2). Supporters of aesthetics as a method of cognition argue that it leads

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22 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1991, Naguib, 2004b.

the beholders to resort to their accumulated knowledge, both learned and tacit. Art is seen as part of a network of social relations, as having agency.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, cultural artefacts exist in dialectical relationships with their historical and cultural contexts. Highlighting the beauty of objects, their properties, their forms and the technical precision of craftsmanship is a way of undermining prejudices and degrading stereotypes. Thus, the use of aesthetics in museums of cultural history goes beyond a Kantian meditation on the transcendental universality of beauty and the non-utilitarian pleasure objects give by the mere contemplation of their forms and materiality. Aesthetics applied in museums of cultural history is of a more pragmatic and phenomenological kind. It relies on experience and memory and the individual's relation to the world and pertains to an epistemological movement that puts on stage questions that are common for all societies together with their specific ways of resolving them. Critics of the aesthetic approach contest the validity of knowledge imparted by art. They argue that art cannot be scientifically tested and question what it tells us about a society, its history and cultural contexts. To them the individualisation of an object used in daily life and its transformation into an art object is part of a process of decontextualization and defunctionalization. But, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer so aptly remarks, this happened already at the moment the objects were taken out of the society that produced and used them. He reminds us that the common share of all artefacts is to eventually become outdated and old, namely, decontextualized and defunctionalized in their original society. In Western European museums of cultural history, especially those of former colonial powers, the problem resides in the fact that in the case of former colonies these processes happened rather abruptly and were usually imposed by foreign powers.<sup>24</sup>

The Sainsbury African galleries at the British Museum have opted for an aesthetic approach in order to dissolve the usual boundaries between the different African states by grouping the displayed artefacts according to material. Thus, it is through material, technology and functionality that the visitor perceives different aspects of African history, societies, cultures and worldviews.<sup>25</sup> Africa is presented in novel ways by including the works of known contemporary African artists into the exhibition and making them the pivot around which the exhibition evolves. Thus, Africa is no more viewed as a coarse bloc. Instead, it appears as a dynamic continent where traditions are “constantly invented and reinvented”; a continent with a diversified nature and geography, a plurality of histories, manifold cultures, worldviews and art forms.

A salient example of the aesthetic turn in museums of cultural history is the new Musée du Quai Branly in Paris which opened its doors to the public in June 2006. Germain Viatte and Emmanuel Desvaux who were responsible for organising the scientific framework of the project and the director of research at Quai Branly, Marie-Christine Taylor explained that a neat break from the museology of the Musée de l'Homme was necessary. Therefore, the stress is put on the aesthetics of the objects and their individuality. At the same time some showcases re-contextualize the objects thanks to texts and pictures and short audio-visual devices.<sup>26</sup> The Musée du Quai Branly has, in my view, to establish itself in the French and international museumscapes. Until now it is first and foremost a spectacular statement expressing an architectural vision and political power.

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23 Gell, 1998.

24 Schaeffer, 2004: 33.

25 Spring, 2001.

26 Personal communications. I am grateful to Germain Viatte, Emmanuel Desvaux and Marie-Christine Taylor for receiving me and taking time to discuss various issues tied to the Musée du Quai Branly.

Photo 2.



### The Occulted Other

Museums have, as Pieterse notes, often been described as places of collective memory. But selective memory may be a more accurate description. Through their exhibitions they, especially national museums, give concrete forms to authorized versions of the past. In time, these become institutionalized and part of a country's official memory. The process involves memory and amnesia, inclusion and exclusion. According to Dominique Poulot, the traditional history museum has been replaced by a museum of 'living memory' which is

exalted in accordance to the degree of recognition it offers a community and their engagement with re-shaping memory.<sup>27</sup> In line with the museum's culture of conventionality it is the decorous, edifying side of nation-state that is normally displayed rather than the shadier sides of its history and bloodstained records. Generally speaking, *controversial* exhibitions that provoke debates about a chosen theme, a museological approach and the objects on display are easier to set up than those known as *difficult* exhibitions. That is open-ended exhibitions that take up painful themes, provoke negative emotions, reminders of sufferings and grief and where the story remains unfinished and ambiguous.<sup>28</sup> Efforts have been made towards autochthonous minorities like Native Americans, the Inuit, the Maori and the Sami, or towards other minorities like the Blacks, the Armenians and the Romani people or Tateres, as well as religious groups like the Jews. To go into the details regarding the inclusion and/or exclusion of these groups in exhibitions, questions related to apartheid and slavery or discuss representations of the enemy, wars and genocides will largely exceed the limits of the present article. For this I refer to the special number of *Gradhiva* and to the studies of Sophie Wahnich where she discusses the contrasting strategies adopted by different European museums.<sup>29</sup> Instead, I will briefly mention representations of colonialism and civil wars.

Colonialism as a theme is more often than not avoided in countries with a colonial past. It is sometimes referred to metaphorically. It is easier to treat the topic in countries with no colonial past such as Switzerland and Norway and the exhibitions *Le musée cannibal* (2002) set up by Jacques Hainard at the Ethnographic museum in Neuchâtel, and the exhibition *Kongospor. Norden i Kongo – Kongo i Norden* (2007) arranged by the Museum of Cultural History of the University of Oslo.<sup>30</sup> However, the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale in Tervuren in Belgium took up the challenge in 2005 and chose to combine the polyphonic narrative with the contextual approach in its exhibition "*La Mémoire du Congo. Le temps colonial*."<sup>31</sup> The exhibition was conceived as a space of confrontation where conflicting and intersecting narratives about a same story were set against each other. The aim of the exhibition was to show different aspects of the colonial history of Belgium in the Congo until the independence of the latter in 1960. Through artefacts, documents, photographs, films, audio-visual devices and interviews the exhibition gave voice to protagonists from both sides. As for former colonies, they usually avoid the subject altogether or treat it in the context of the struggle for independence. Colonial times are always represented as the Dark Ages of a nation-state (photo 3).

Civil wars are occulted. In Spain, for example, the era of the *Convivencia* has been 'revisited' since the 1980s and the Arab-Islamic heritage is glorified and represented as the golden age of cultural diversity and the epitome of tolerance.<sup>32</sup> The Spanish civil war of 1936-1939 is, however, hushed down and is still not addressed in museums although newer Spanish literature as, for instance, Carlos Ruiz Zafón's *The Shadow of the Wind* (2001) and Javier Cercas' *Soldiers of Salamis* (2001), has begun treating this painful subject with precaution.

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27 Poulot, 2005: 75f.

28 Bonnell & Simon, 2007.

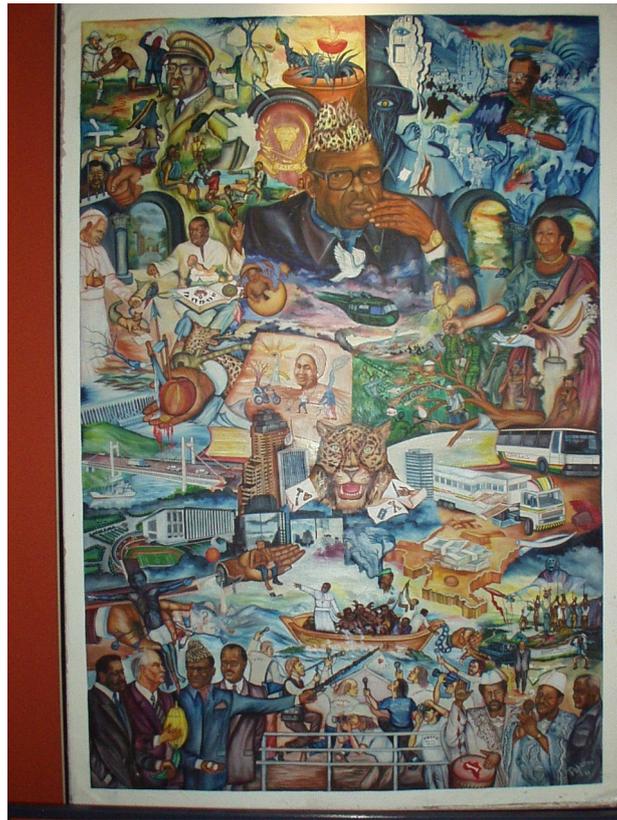
29 *Gradhiva* 2007/5; Wahnich, 2002.

30 *Kongospor. Norden i Kongo – Kongo i Norden*; KHM- 27. april - 18.november 2007

31 <http://www.africamuseum.be>. Exhibition held from February – October, 2005.

32 One of the reasons is due to the significant revenues gained from the cultural tourism targeting Arab visitors. The importance of Arab tourism and investments in Spain was clearly stated when King Fahd of Saudi Arabia died on August 1st, 2005. Spain declared then one day of national mourning, while the south of Anadalucia (the region of Malaga) where the king used to spend his summers had 3 days of mourning. The Spanish papers reported that king Fahd used to spend 42 000,- US\$ per day.

Photo 3.



There have been debates and expressions of mixed feelings about the pope's decision to beatify 498 clerics who were tortured and killed by the franquists during that period.<sup>33</sup> At the same time the Spanish parliament discussed the law on historic memory endorsing that atrocities were perpetrated by both sides.<sup>34</sup> In Libanon, the National Museum of Beirut has chosen not to follow the strategy of amnesia but instead that of healing.. This is symbolized by placing a statue of the ancient goddess of healing, Hygea, at the entrance of the museum.<sup>35</sup> We may ask ourselves which policies museums in Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia will adopt to address their civil wars in the future. Many years will pass before the wounds are healed. I think that the subject being too painful to acknowledge will remain 'forgotten' from exhibition projects for generations to come.

### The Nomadic Turn

Times are changing. The nomadic turn seems to be taking over. The wanderer swinging between freedom, displacement and exclusion is stepping in. Inspired by the perspectives elaborated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on deterritoriality, museums of cultural history opt to put mobility and nomads on the agenda. For Deleuze and Guattari the concept of deterritorialization denotes a process through which individuals and institutions are progressively freed from their territorial constraints. Deterritorialization has become one of the central forces of today's world. It entails movement, mobility of persons and goods and

33 The beatification took place on October 28th, 2007.

34 *L'Express*, nr. 2938, 25 octobre-1 nov. 2007, pp. 46-47.

35 Lina G. Tahan (Université de Cambridge-GB, CHSIM-EHESS), *Musées et guerre au Liban : l'indispensable oubli pour la réunification ?*, paper presented at the conference *Musées et Patrimoine*, Paris June 16th-17 th, 2005.

the creation of new markets. The concept challenges the idea of fixed roots and inherent stable identities because nomadism, according to Deleuze and Guattari, negates the sedentary and enduring nation-state. Nomadism is more attuned to the elaboration of networks and the connection between meaning and its different ways of expression.<sup>36</sup>

Among the repercussions to the nomadic turn in museums we find the production of ephemeral experiences and shaping values by using entertainment, or rather edutainment.<sup>37</sup> In line with the aesthetic turn, intersecting gazes and the polyphonic narrative approach exhibitions are more and more idea-oriented and centred towards the public. Design and spectacle are central to display. Exhibitions are temporary and they often travel. They are not so much demonstrations of scientific knowledge, but rather representations of processes and addressing actual problems of public concern. Moreover, the virtual world is a significant aspect of deterritorialization in museums. I argued elsewhere that the World Wide Web gives access to collections and museums' archives through digital representations of artefacts and their documentation, exhibitions, buildings and their surroundings. Virtual realities reproduce and reconstruct three-dimensional artefacts and monuments that are physically transformed as they alter from tangible material to digital pictures. Objects can be turned, moved, given different hues and lit from various angles without ever being touched. They are manipulated so that they can be studied in minute details. Fragments that are kept miles apart can be connected to each other in order to recreate the whole object. Documents can be retrieved, read, downloaded and stored elsewhere. This simplifies both research and dissemination procedures. Further, most museums have problems with overfilled storage rooms and the fact that the greater part of their collections are not on display. The new media provides the means of creating virtual museums and exhibitions, and making the hidden artefacts accessible not only to specialists but also to the wider public. Collections and archives are not fixed in one place but travel in cyberspace. This ubiquity and reciprocity not only facilitates the creation of networks of specialists but also the rapid retrieval and exchange of information. Scholarship is promoted in stimulating ways. It is accessible and reaches a large and varied audience. Linked together over networks, museums' databases are becoming both valuable cultural resources and information centres.<sup>38</sup>

The nomadic mode is also used to visualize fluctuating situations and the changing relations people have with their environments. It is today one of the strategies adopted to treat the question of immigration.

All immigration, whether voluntary or forced, is tied to narratives of journeys, departures, arrivals and processes of settling down. Although, in most cases, the documents exhibited are modest things that are easy to move and to carry along while travelling from one place to another, they have an archival value that is strongly laden with emotions. They consist mainly of personal belongings, mementoes and souvenirs of all sorts that could be transported in trunks and suitcases. These may be textiles, clothes and pieces of jewellery, carpets, religious books, pictures, letters, birth or marriage certificates, diplomas and travel documents. Because of the character and heterogeneity of the objects, exhibitions dealing with immigration are prone to rely on the aesthetics of polyphonic narratives and life history perspectives supplemented with interactive media and audio-visual devices. It is the beauty of the stories they tell that gives the artefacts displayed an added significance and conveys many layered meanings to the notion of belongingness, as well as they disclose various strategies of integration and exclusion. Rather than emphasizing the sense of otherness by playing the nostalgic tunes about remembered homelands museums have, since the 1990s explored

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36 Deleuze & Guattari, 2006 [1980]: 457.

37 Hein, 2000: 65-67.

38 Naguib, 2004a: 57f.

patterns of immigration and the motivations for settling abroad, whether these were caused by economical factors, employment and job opportunities, wars, persecutions, discriminations, the quest for adventure and the unknown or ‘simply’ for love and marriage. Immigrants and their descendants are portrayed as assets to the receiving country. The stress is put on the innovative contributions brought by immigrants to their new countries and how their presence played a decisive role in building up a dynamic plural society. These were the lines followed by the project ‘*The Peopling of London*’ held at the London Museum (1993), the exhibition “*Jeg er her.*” *Innvandringshistorie fra 1945 til i dag* (2005) at the Intercultural Museum in Oslo, and the permanent exhibition at the new Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration (CNHI; 2007) in Paris.<sup>39</sup>

The CNHI did not have a pre-existent collection and is in the process of constituting one. So far the bulk of this collection consists of a mixture of tangible, intangible and e-tangible heritage such as photographs, letters, objects and instruments used in daily life as well as oral testimonials, personal videos and digital self-presentations. These things are mostly acquired from private donations.

Photo 4.



In addition, the collection of the CNHI comprises installations by contemporary artists (photos 5). So far, there are few paintings or sculptures by renowned artists of foreign origin. The permanent exhibition at the CNHI is articulated around three major themes and nine sub-themes. The main themes are:

- a. Departure and arrival with symbolic objects and narratives.
- b. The French melting-pot (*le creuset français*) which takes up topics such as France land of opportunities, citizenship and naturalization, and also rejection.
- c. France as a mirror of diversity which deals with sports, languages and religions.

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39 Naguib, 2004b, 2008, and forthcoming.

Photo 5.



### Concluding remarks

It is too early to evaluate the cultural implications of deterritoriality for museums and how they affect ideas of nationhood and citizenship. It is also too early to assess the kind of experiences and knowledge the nomadic turn may provide in the future. The wave seems to have spread to a number of renown museums as shown by a movement that is challenging the notion of museums as icons of the nation-state and on which I have not delved upon here. The trend involves the branding and franchising of museums. For example, the Louvre has opened a branch in Lens, Atlanta and will soon inaugurate one in Abu Dhabi. The Centre Pompidou is in Shanghai, the Musée Rodin in Sao Paulo, the British Museum in Shanghai and Qatar. After Bilbao, Las Vegas, Venice and Berlin the Guggenheim museum is also opening a new branch in Abu Dhabi.

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