

## The Cosmopolitan Museum (of Art)

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The museum (of art) is a part of wider social and political concerns. It can work to reproduce ideologies and confirm the existing order of things, or become an instrument of social reform and change. It is a powerful ideological institution and it is and it could be a tool for the shaping of identity (ethnic, national, gender, sexual, religious, local, cosmopolitan and so on). The principal idea of this paper is the conviction that there is a relationship between the historical and the social formation of society and a specific type of museum. I was inspired by the political and sociological project of the new cosmopolitanism as it was presented by Ulrich Beck to reformulate the idea of the museum of our time and for the future.<sup>1</sup>

### The Cross-Cultural Turn

Traditional culture (according to Wolfgang Welsch) is characterised by social homogenisation, ethnic consolidation and intercultural delimitation.<sup>2</sup>

This concept of culture has become untenable today. Contemporary societies in many cases encompass a multitude of varying lifestyles and life forms. Accelerated globalisation on the one hand confronts hitherto relatively isolated cultures, while at the same time cultures are more interpenetrated, interdependent and interactive. Some people see a danger of cultural unification, others celebrate growing cultural variability, new diversity and the possibility of mutual understanding. We can observe new forms of transnational and cross-cultural identities. There are traders, businessmen, artists, intellectuals, students, tourists, people living in diaspora, working-class immigrants and refugees who represent different social and ethnic groups and different interests. Their identity is formed in space that goes beyond the frame of one national state or one culture.

If traditional cultures were defined by a static set of characteristics, the dominant feature of cross-culturality (or transculturality) is intermixing and a

dynamic character. We speak about creolisation, cultural hybridisation, post-hybridisation, flexible citizenship<sup>3</sup> or flexible acculturation as concepts that are able to adequately express contemporary life forms that are shaped in transnational space. In the global population there are nations where their majority live outside the national state. For example ‘seventy-three million people of Irish descent worldwide dwarf the four million living in the Irish Republic; out of almost fifteen million Jewish people worldwide, about five million live in Israel; and similar equations apply to Greeks, Lebanese, and Armenians’.<sup>4</sup> Revision of an old national conception of borders enables us to see and appraise the cultures of others. This paradigmatic shift could be called the cross-cultural turn.

If we leave the old paradigm of national cultures as cultures institutionalised in the space of the nation-state we need to accept a new reference space—an open, more flexible and dynamically changing space of transnational networks. Global transformations are related to mobility and the impact of new technologies. They form a new historical situation and radically change the cultural framework. Culture is now characterised by flows of information, images and goods in transnational space. However, on the opposite side there are restrictions on freedom of movement for billions of people such as possible immigrants from ‘developing countries’, often former colonies. In the process of globalisation, cultural differences mediated by power relations confront each other. In interactions and confrontations the differences and specificity of each culture are shown but at the same time cultures are transformed into new forms. There is a need to create new models for intercultural or transcultural dialogue (or polylogue) and overcome Westcentrism, which is based on formation of knowledge that legitimates the superiority of the West. We should create new concepts because many existing concepts are losing and have already lost validity. There is

an emphatic need to reconceptualise the human, social and political disciplines to create a new transdisciplinary field incorporating cultural and visual studies, museum studies, political philosophy, cultural sociology, anthropology, ethnology and other relevant disciplines.

## The New Cosmopolitanism

In the last decade there has been a revival of interests in cosmopolitanism. There are many interpretations of historical and contemporary cosmopolitanism. The term ‘cosmopolis’ refers to the relationship between *cosmos*—the universe—and *polis*—the human society.<sup>5</sup> Cosmopolitanism was active in history in times of great historical shifts, and the idea of new cosmopolitanism is discussed now—at a time of crisis for the process of European integration. I will focus on one of the new forms of contemporary cosmopolitanism, as presented by German sociologist Ulrich Beck published in several articles and books and most recently in his *Cosmopolitan Vision* and *Cosmopolitan Europe*. He formulates a cosmopolitan sociology as a new appropriate discipline that takes us beyond the limitations of ‘methodological nationalism’ (as he defines it) and beyond its exclusion of ‘the otherness of the others’.<sup>6</sup> A cosmopolitan sociology has to move beyond the dualism between nation-state and the inter-national reference space because traditional concepts are becoming empty ‘zombie’ categories.

The central characteristic of cosmopolitanism is the ‘*dialogic* imagination’ that is according to Beck ‘a capacity to creatively explore the contradictions within and between cultures’. It means ‘the clash of cultures and rationalities within one’s own life, the “*internalized* other”. The dialogic imagination corresponds to the coexistence of rival ways of life in the individual experience, which makes it a matter of fate to compare, reflect, criticize, understand, combine contradictory certainties’.<sup>7</sup> We face a new situation that allows transnational forms of life, the formation of new identities and non-state actors to emerge. There is a need to create new cosmopolitan institutions. ‘In a world of global dangers produced by civilization, the old differentiation between “us” and “them”, internal and external, national and international, lose validity and cosmopolitanism seems to be essential to survive.’ Instead of the practice of exclusive differentiation, that is the principle of human and social sciences, political theory and for the sphere of culture, is offered the principle of inclusivity, connected with cosmopolitan empathy and perspective-taking: ‘local, national, ethnic,

religious and cosmopolitan cultures and traditions interpenetrate, interconnect and intermingle’. Separate worlds and identities that dominated the first modernity of nationally organised societies can be overcome with the inclusive differentiation. Debates about the new cosmopolitanism have shown that the dichotomy: universalism–pluralism (relativism) is false.<sup>8</sup>

## Different Historical Types of Museums and the Cosmopolitan Museum

The museum and library represent key institutions of Western culture. They are both places of concentration of knowledge, able to shape ‘our’ understanding and interpretation of the world. The museum is also a space where power gains legitimisation. It could be a place of control and exclusion. The majority of museums around the world are formed by two paradigmatic views: national and modern Westcentric. Those models of the museum prefer one self-centric perspective (national or cultural) and exclude ‘others’ or place them in an inferior position. The national or Westcentric museum is based on the presentation of a static canon in the international configuration—the space to demarcate borders between ‘us’ and ‘them’. From this essentialistic view we cannot see and articulate many phenomena and problems that we should identify from the transnational perspective (cultural flux, cultures in between, nomadic art and so on).

I would like to characterise and compare historically different types of museums (of art) that are connected with a particular historical and cultural context. Because the national and modern museum have been extensively theorised I will focus on the main characteristics and differentiation of the postmodern and cosmopolitan museum (see figure). The postmodern museum is connected with the era of decolonisation that changed the interpretations of images and objects within the museum as well as their role (postcolonial critique). Cultural decentralisation has opened up the intellectual development outside the European and North American centres.

A special model of a new museum—the post-museum—was introduced by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill. It represents a new concept of the museum which ‘will hold and care for objects, but will concentrate more on their use rather than on future accumulation. In addition, the post-museum will be equally interested in intangible heritage’.<sup>9</sup> In the post-museum the exhibition is one among many forms of communication with the public. There are many events at different places outside

**Postmodern Museum**

Decolonisation of museum (narrative, images, objects).  
 Cultural decentralisation—the intellectual development will take place outside of European and North American centres.  
 Multiple histories.  
 ‘Pre-posterous’ history.<sup>1</sup>  
 The world is understood like transnational space unlike the international space of the first modernity.  
 Multiple identities.<sup>2</sup>  
 Pluralism.  
 Feminisation.  
 Multiculturalism—exoticising (difference) or assimilating (sameness) others, representation of others as separate cultures—postmodern particularism, relativism.  
 Antielitism.  
 Incorporation of pop-culture.  
 Dematerialisation—new artistic expressions like performance, action art, videoart, net art and so on.  
 Growing commercialisation and commodification: the museum as a shop window of capitalism.  
 Post-museum<sup>3</sup> is more concentrated on the use of artefacts than their accumulation and at the same time is much more open for different cultures, subcultures, social, ethnical and other minority groups—multivocal, multiperspective view.  
 More intensive participation of visitors (especially social, ethnic, sexual groups and subcultures). Post-museum is imagined as a process or an experience and it is not limited to its own walls.

**Cosmopolitan Museum**

Unlike the first modernity associated with the idea of progress we face the civilisational limits (global dangers—ecological, limited resources, global terrorism, world war—a new strategy to survive, to live together).  
 Acceleration of globalisation.  
 Coexistence of different cultures is essential and necessary condition to survive.  
 An imagined future, ‘globally shared collective future’.<sup>4</sup>  
 Cross-cultural turn, cross-cultural polylogue, the dichotomy of self and others is destabilised—others are part of us. Contradictory cultural experiences are negotiated. Alternative modernities.  
 Global multiculturalism<sup>5</sup>—cultural flux, cultures in between.  
 Nomadic knowledge.  
 Minimal universalism is not set down a priori but must be negotiated.  
 Interdependence—‘the world as a whole’.<sup>6</sup>  
 Museums as ‘laboratories of social reflexivity and transformation’<sup>7</sup>—the most effective ways to communicate cross-culturally.

- 1 Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1999.
- 2 Stuart Hall, ‘Political Belonging in a World of Multiple Identities’, in Steven Vertovec & Robin Cohen (eds), *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, pp. 25–31.
- 3 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, p. 152–3.
- 4 Ulrich Beck, ‘The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 19, 2002, p. 27.

- 5 Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Ethnicities and Global Multiculture: Pants for an Octopus*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto and Plymouth, 2007, pp. 177–94.
- 6 Roland Robertson, ‘Mapping the Global Condition: Globalization as the Central Concept’, in Mike Featherstone (ed), *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, Sage Publications, London, Newbury Park and New Delhi, 1990, p. 18.
- 7 Nederveen Pieterse, pp. 177–94.

### Comparison of the postmodern and the cosmopolitan museum

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of the museum that take place before and after the display is presented that involve and attract specific community groups and subcultures that use the museum in their own way. A number of diverse interpretive communities share the museum and the voice of the museum is one among them. The

production of events enables the incorporation ‘of many voices and many perspectives. Knowledge is no longer unified and monolithic; it becomes fragmented and multivocal’. The post-museum does not represent a

unified perspective—rather a cacophony of voices. Where the modernist museum was (and is) imagined as a building, the museum in the future may be imagined as a process or an experience. The post-museum ... is ... not limited to its own walls, but moves as a set

of processes into the spaces, the concerns and the ambitions of communities.<sup>10</sup>

The post-museum also represents a feminisation and the impact of gender and queer studies.

The cosmopolitan museum retains some of the characteristics of the previous types of museum but also reshapes these and creates new ones. Some taboos must be overcome. One of them is the orientation towards history. 'Methodological nationalism is about the future implications of nationally shared past, an imagined past. Methodological cosmopolitanism is about the present implications of a globally shared future, an imagined future.'<sup>11</sup> The cosmopolitan museum is open to the history as well as to the future and their relation is more balanced. If the history is a narrative construction, we can interpret our present time and we are able to project and imagine our 'globally shared collective future'.<sup>12</sup> Time is multiplicity and does not have a linear character. History is always open to be reinterpreted, rewritten, reshaped. The concept of the cosmopolitan museum of art could represent a new strategy of exhibiting and collecting. If certainty of modernity was based on (never-ending) scientific and technical progress, there are significant risks, threats, dangers and limitations for our age (ecology, global warming, limited natural resources, terrorism and so on). Awareness of our common fate and planetary concerns produces a need for minimal universalism that is not defined *a priori* as in the Enlightenment but must be negotiated in an open global cross-cultural polylogue in which the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' is thrown aside because others became a part of us.<sup>13</sup> The cosmopolitan museum should represent nomadic knowledge and local, and at the same time global, concerns (it means 'glocal'). It demands new curatorial strategies. Revision of Westcentrism is a primary assumption for recognition of others. Investigation of non-Western concepts of identity and non-Western curatorial and museological practices create the basis for an open cross-cultural polylogue. The polylogue is necessary for people 'to be moved' and be able to accept different cultural perspectives and simultaneously to be changed. In the cosmopolitan museum different identities and ethnic groups should not be presented separately but as interactive and interdependent. Cross-cultural mixing is an exhibiting strategy.

There is an important question: Who should establish the cosmopolitan museum? It should be principally transnational actors and institutions like UNESCO or ICOM (the International Council of Museums). ICOM was founded within UNESCO in 1946 as an international museum organisation to

share its political obligations and objectives. One problem may be whether UNESCO and ICOM continue to represent the post-1945 world-order constellation. Another problem connected with UNESCO is its inclination to recover international paradigms and sustain exclusivity of nation-states. In recent years ICOM has supported the role of museums in the so-called 'Third World' 'to strengthen cultural identity and consciousness in the face of rapid world-wide cultural change; to strengthen national identity within an internationalised system of states'.<sup>14</sup> In this case the museums could never become 'laboratories of social reflexivity and transformation' as it should be and represent the most effective ways to communicate cross-culturally.<sup>15</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 I would like to point out especially: Ulrich Beck, 'The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 19, 2002, pp. 17–44; *Cosmopolitan Vision*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2006; and 'Cosmopolitanism: Europe's Way Out of Crisis', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 10, 2007, pp. 67–85.
- 2 Wolfgang Welsch, 'Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today', in Mike Featherstone & Scott Lash (eds), *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, Sage Publications, London, 1999, pp. 194–213.
- 3 Aihva Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logic of Transnationality*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, and London, 1999.
- 4 Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Ethnicities and Global Multiculture: Pants for an Octopus*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto and Plymouth, 2007, p. 179.
- 5 See, for example, Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1990; see also Mike Featherstone, 'Cosmopolis', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 19, 2002, pp. 1–16.
- 6 Beck, 'The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies', pp. 18–20.
- 7 *ibid.*, p. 18.
- 8 Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, pp. 57–9.
- 9 For example, the memories, songs and cultural traditions. See Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, p. 152.
- 10 All previous quotations: Hooper-Greenhill, pp. 152–3.
- 11 Beck, 'The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies', p. 27.
- 12 *ibid.*
- 13 Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, p. 49.
- 14 Prösler deduced this information from the UNESCO/ICOM periodical *Museum* for the period 1972–92. See Martin Prösler, 'Museums and Globalization', in Sharon Macdonald (ed.), *Theorising Museum*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1996, p. 22.
- 15 Nederveen Pieterse, p. 132.