

The art of sensing history ahead

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Prior to the 'Internationalization of museums', we should learn to embed the history of nation states with their defeats and failures, their vows and victories into a European context. History sometimes looks inevitable in retrospect, and knowledge is the best mean anyway to fight disinterest, ignorance, and worst, indifference or even hatred driven by exclusion or ethnic cleansing. To cultivate our collective memory in truly global proportions, the Berlin Museum Island is one of the best possible showcases.

To exhibit our identity in the context of a globalised world, curatorial choices need to be radically clear. I strongly believe in telling history in joint perspectives. Could one ever tell the history of any former part of Yugoslavia without questioning the influence of the Byzantines and the Greeks, the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian Empire? Any archeological sites or cemeteries in that area, any tomb stone will witness those shifts of migration due to different occupying regimes.

As our host this evening is the Museum of Byzantine Art, we should engage on an introspection of our collections by examining their impact on World Cultures for an archeology of our mind.

Therefore, we should exchange our tools beyond national borders and entrust foreign curators to choose from our collections. In Art museums, the practice of '*the artist's or the curator's choice*' is established since long. Why not in Historical museums? Are we afraid of being insulted, invaded, detected or deciphered by someone else's cultural perception? Any epoch would deliver sufficiently interesting material on who spied on whom for what.

Now that a Polish museum dedicated to WWII is to be opened in Gdansk, why not imagine a young Polish historian exhibiting the memory on the day of September 1st 1939, in the German Historical Museum? He or she might show us '*our*' history in *their* national retrospective. They will not deny the facts on the Hitler-Stalin alliance based on an ideological power play of mass murder strategies. Yet as Polish citizens, they would probably show the impact of those cynical tactics in a patriotic way.

When we conceive permanent or temporary exhibitions for regional, national or international museums, our task force is to cope with new challenges. Our museum displays must compete with digital communication. In spite of destruction by war and neglect, our legacy of buildings and images, of artifacts and primary sources can never be replaced by Internet sites.

Our present and our future visitors are addicted to social networks, typing search machines on their smart phones and tabloids for answers and chatting online while contemplating original exhibits without really looking at them. More and more, we have to translate random epochs to the *neet*, meaning *those not in education, employment or training* who often build their lives on social networks.

Therefore, we have to keep museums attractive. We might bewitch the visitor on his dive into the context of an archaic, religious, ideological past; we might tell him unknown stories of excavation, salvation or looting of artifacts on their often odd itineraries across sea and land, their fascinating biographies as well as those of their collectors and the circumstances that helped assemble them. We are to maintain that collective heritage preserved in our cultural legacy. Nevertheless, the visitor should not get *lost in translation* by too much education shed on his mind.

We engage our audience on itineraries - centuries, sometimes thousands of years old, with changing views and vistas in a diverse cultural alchemy for the perception of complex contexts. Since the Lisbon declaration that declared access to knowledge as a basic right for any EU citizen in 2010, the EU guide lines call for *unity in diversity*. They foster interregional cooperation beyond borders for a creative, sustainable communication of culture as a mean of territorial integration reaching far beyond the effects of cultural tourism.

All museum collections - it may be archeology, history, anthropology, contemporary, nature, science, art history, technique, traffic, hygiene, offer worlds of wonders to increase our knowledge. The random spectator should enjoy these magic gardens and experience learning by dialogue with the original to enrich his eyes *and* his mind. Certainly not by sticking to restricted didactics; rather enlarge his views in a clearly conceived presentation without covering the exhibits with explanative texts. Yet there is no general principle how to succeed in finding new ways of exhibiting artifacts.

Daniel Spoerri & me, a lucky merging of an artist's with a historian's perspective, seduced our visitors' mind for new perception with the

invention of a magic tool, the 'Musée Sentimental': after almost 30 years, this concept is still part of Museum's practice today, mainly with trivial objects. But how did we stress the public's response to such an extent of pleasure that the Korean artist Nam June Paik said from our Cologne Musée sentimental: '*I've never seen so many old women laughing?*' Because we offered revolving stories with stunning artifacts! Not all of them had a true pedigree. Yet all were based on primary sources with exhibits arranged in an intellectually stimulating artistic display. Our alphabetic encyclopedia, taken from Diderot & d'Alembert's scheme, made the spectator reflect on his own perception.

There is *one* major and simple rule to dialogue: the visitor must feel addressed! True to Marcel Duchamp's famous quote: *the spectator is the one that achieves the art work*, fill the gap between scholarly knowledge and the curators' practical needs by an attractive visual narration. Have the spectator experience the *art of sensing history ahead* in museums dedicated to recall the past for a less confusing present.

Show him the conflicts that have integrated Europeans by fighting each other for religion and territories, ideologies and equal rights, fending off enemies from abroad – the Turks, the Moors, the Huns, the French against the English, the Danes against Sweden, the Poles against Russia. Thus finding and gaining their own national identity: any visitor is an integral part of those genealogies, as he is still exposed to many the same shifting identities now!

Fighting each other in the mid 19hundreds in a Europe of diversified nation states, passionate ideas brought about the spring of people, based on the prospect of peace towards brotherhood and reconciliation. Victor Hugo dreamt in 1849 to exchange ideas and goods for battles, cannon balls and bombs.

Utopian thought in its epoch has always sensed history ahead. We should include positions of contemporary artists for today's encyclopedia in our museum displays. Visual artists certainly look into history with more freedom in mind than a scholar would ever admit.

The French Fluxus' artist Robert Filliou's dream project was to exchange national war monuments across Europe – this brilliant absurdity would show that they were composed, at least throughout the 19th century, on a normative heroic iconography of patriotism. So far, it has never been realized, even not in European city partnerships. Only the Latvian artist Leonids Laganovskis has exchanged inscriptions on fictive monuments. In the newly arranged Imperial Kunstkammer in Vienna there is a model series of equestrian monuments carved in silver from c. 1650, with exchangeable heads! They certainly mastered the art of sensing history

ahead! The same could be done with equestrian statues and monuments erected to the heroes of communism in the Soviet era.

Documents, images and artifacts in our collections witness those long and bloody processes to respect each other. While showing the art *and* the absurdity of warfare, we must use our museum's collections, rediscovered as tools to school the visitor's mind, with actual awareness, as a task force to instruct on the fragility to maintain peace. Yet before the internationalization of museums, priority should be given to create a transnational dialogue on Otherness. Any tourist will experience that necessary dialogue when travelling abroad.

The *European Transfer* explores the legacy of our common cultural heritage of war and peace. These conflicts made Europeans come closer. Therefore curators should visualize the context of conflicts around the globe, to penetrate prejudices, namely regarding ethnicities, purge, extermination, submission, crime and discrimination against faith, race, sex and gender, social groups and ethnic minorities. European knowledge put in power and extended to a world scale by colonialism and imperialism, by discoveries and trade, has created this organism of cohesion. Already in 1989, the Centre Pompidou entrusted the Nigerian Okwui Enwezor according to his cultural views and Jean Hubert Martin with their path breaking exhibition '*Les magiciens de la terre*' to arrange artifacts. The result became an excellent example to access different worlds as a nervous system of encounters with the other.

Globally shared memory enriches transnational cooperation to experience our roots. Museums as physical shrines for artifacts are a substantial part of this memory. Sometimes they even tend to replace the role of religious commitment. Our continent's topography is marked by different time lines as to the fight for Human and Civil rights, for freedom and mobility, based on a common past. If the mantra of the future Humboldt Forum will not meet this message, it will be oblivious. *The Art of sensing history ahead* should animate a network of curatorial transfer as an international fellowship of faith.

Such network of scholars and curators could lead to a *roadmap* for peace, based on mutual respect. Artists could help to implant this finality in our museums and communicate different religious and ethnic traditions. Since two decades, the *European itineraries of Culture* established by the European Council have successfully animated this scheme with local communities and regions concerned, on real sites across the continent.

This concept, based on topography, has created itineraries of trading goods, pilgrimages, saints, migrating peoples, cemeteries, natural resources, gardens, architectural styles and fortifications, ideas and

iconographies, stretching beyond the European continent. Topography is a lucky tool, as it combines local, regional and national with the European and the global dimension: like my exhibitions on the biographies on rivers and the Baltic Sea.

The *Elbe - a biography* was shown in Dresden, Hamburg and as the first German produced cultural event after the end of the Cold war, in 1991 in the National museum in Prague. People discovered the thematic sections in topographical order from the course of the river bed in a Tchech/ German version.

The exhibition *Mare balticum* held in the National museum in Copenhagen for Denmark's Presidency in the EU in 2002, likewise applied an archeological cut through local, regional and national topography embracing nine nation states. It was arranged as a promenade along the shores and cliffs. The focus dealt with naval fortresses along the Baltic Sea, stretching over a thousand years from first written sources of Christian mission onto the Cold war. Some exhibits came as a surprise, also for Queen Margret II of Denmark. As the show's first visitor, she was thoroughly amazed by the iron toll box for money to be paid by every ship not sailing under a Danish flag, collected from the Baltic sound between Denmark and Sweden near Hamlet's castle of Kronborg. Since the Middle Ages, this imposed passage enriched considerably the Danish crown throughout ages, until it was abolished in 1857 by an international convention. Impressed, the Queen whispered to me: "*Better not talk about it!*"

Transnational topics and objects such as the iron toll box, mark the nerves and scars of this continent: The Europe of markets, stock exchange and trading goods, the revolutionary invention of Gutenberg's printing press, the Republic of scholars in the Renaissance and the Age of reason, the import of new ideas and schemes across the Alps and along the highways of rivers to perceive and measure the world with humanistic views; the implantation of colonialism and the conquest of unknown continents by sea to extend and establish new Empires: the image of Versailles imposing glamour on residential courts from Cologne to St Petersburg; Young *dillettanti* aristocrats, to the manner born, were educated on their *Grand Tour* to show off their taste at home with collections of Roman and Greek antiquities; artisans helped erect and embellish churches and castles, to palaces, spas and residential areas in a transnational migration from Copenhagen to Paris via Vienna to Riga, from Budapest via Minsk to Odessa; the European quest for cast iron from Schinkel to Eiffel, by steel and glass from the London Crystal Palace to the Grand Palais in Paris, steamed by competitive world fairs

according to new rapidity of communication and media; infrastructure improved by means of transport on rivers, railways, linking axes of culture, military and trade; capitalized urbanization and industrialization, regulation of river beds and deforestation; ideologies to improve working conditions for Human rights, for unity and freedom to overcome imperialism, ideological wars and fascism, to oppose totalitarian regimes and their aftermath: all this has formed our globalized identity.

The Eurozone is not the legacy of bureaucrats, but, according to the historian Edgar Morin, a community bound to form citizens of nation states to become Europeans, that is: world citizens of today. Would we be better off without boundaries? Beyond the age of fighting each other, 500 million citizens of 28 EU member states will discover their national economies as *intercultural* scopes. A sound installation with all EU languages extended into the world, a room of maps simulating changing borders throughout epochs could show the territorial *shift of* European inlands until the present day.

Museums should value their items as to those significant pedigrees. To do away with Eurocentric views, we have to put creative task force at work. We dispose of topics, platforms, collections. Yet there is a lack of illuminators: Give us more means to realize conceptual ideas to shape the *European Transfer*. The program initiated by the 'Kulturstiftung des Bundes' mobile academy reaches necessary future tasks: namely to generate multilateral missions in museums displays by constituting a narrative of European people's genealogy.

Find a way to present complex contexts. I refer to my exhibition on the political, military and diplomatic role of Prince Eugene of Savoy held in the Vienna Belvedere castle in 2010. Born in Paris in 1663, he died from pneumonia in his Vienna winter palace at the age of 73 in 1736, after having directed European warfare during 50 years and mainly feared for his defeating the Turks' advancement towards Vienna. Due to his cultural heritage, for which he is rather little known outside Austria, especially in France, the show was subtitled: General, philosopher and art lover.

In Versailles, the young Prince was famed for his flirting with pages rather than with ladies at court. Not yet 20, he was rejected to enter Louis XIV's Army: Disguised in women's clothes and penniless, he fled in a carriage from Paris to try his luck at the service of Emperor Leopold I. Within another two decades serving Habsburg interests, Eugene ascended to the highest ranks. Louis XIV learnt by military failures that he had largely misjudged the strategic talent of his dismissed subject.

Forthcoming conquests under Eugene's command were to change the map of European powers defeating the French allies. The Prince remained faithful to his Habsburg Emperors Leopold I, Joseph I and Charles VI., although he was to succeed to the Spanish throne and to the Polish throne. The exhibition followed his military achievements, his architectural creations set in the richest interiors, embedded in elaborate gardens in Vienna. A passionate hunter and keeper of wild animals and exotic plants, the Prince relaxed in the plains of the Danube near Budapest and off Bratislava.

Eugene's strategic mind favored commercial treaties negotiated with the Sublime Porte, the Vatican and the Republic of Venice in order to enforce peace. Admired by Montesquieu, Leibniz and Voltaire, he received friends and foes in his palaces.

Eugene knew he *owed everything I have to my soldiers*, constantly claiming his superiors to improve his army's outfit and condition. The Habsburg Emperors' supreme general met Louis XIV's armies in Italy, in Flanders, in Bavaria or in the Rhineland and defended their territories in the Spanish Netherlands. His career reached beyond the norms of "noble" warfare, executed by multilingual armies of underfed, almost naked soldiers, barely armed and equipped for battle and hired to be killed for the fame of their leaders. Apart from prisoners of the Ottoman campaigns, they came from Flanders, Bavaria, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Austria, Slovakia, Lombardy or Spain.

The Belvedere had to employ a triple number of guides to meet the demand of advance bookings, especially from Turkey and the Balkans, Italy and Hungary.

To communicate the exhibits in their context, I quoted the Prince's achievements in primary sources to reveal the empathy of each document and artwork. How did he practically master the creation of his castles and collections from the battlefield, without an I-phone or a tablet? By advise of experts and professionals acting on the market for art and rare books from Madrid to Milan, from Lisbon to London via Amsterdam, Antwerp or Paris.

Eugene's immense cultural heritage, presented in his own interiors, with a reconstructed baroque hanging of his picture gallery, became a highlight in true dimensions. Until today, his cultural legacy feeds a vast cultural tourism in Vienna and in Austria. His niece Vittoria di Savoia became his single heiress: she initiated immediate sales right after his death; his sumptuous collections of art, tapestries and furniture were dispersed across the courts of Europe: Carlo Emanuel king of Sicily, his

Savoy cousin, bought the paintings for his residences in Turin. They were scattered again with Napoleon besieging Lombardy; Emperor Charles VI acquired and installed Eugene's books in the cupola of Fischer von Erlach's new imperial library in Vienna, where they are kept until now; his excellent collection of prints and drawings became the founding stock of the famous Albertina. Empress Maria-Theresia purchased his castles in the 1750ies. These days, his winter palace will be rearranged in his old splendor, but only with temporary loans.

Whatever the straits and sites in museum collections, buildings, landscapes and cities, this mental legacy has mapped the grand design of European cultural itineraries. Our museum's agendas should reflect Europe's inherent creative diversity of cultures, thus embracing historical contexts as well as the future.

At last, share a lucky encounter between past & present: I explained the Morse telegraph, a pioneering innovation for the London conference in 1858, in my Victoria&Albert show in 2011 in the Bonn Kunsthalle to two press girls sent by Facebook. To get them on the hook, I told them: this is the "*ice age start*" of today's social media communication, 150 years ago. And suddenly their faces started to shine with *Understanding*. That is our mission *to sense the Art of History ahead*: make people understand complex contexts of the past and not lose them in stupidity of disinterest, indifference nor ignorance. As Museums are no supermarkets for consumerism, do not submit to simplifying branding! And do not provoke a shutdown of cultural institutions like in the US!

Maybe, as the architect Rem Koolhaas recently suggested, museums will be abolished when art, in recycled versions, will go public as part of the ever accelerated public space? Do we want to renounce on our memory kept in the context of museums? A good reason to keep them attractive.

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