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METODICKÉ A INFORMAČNÍ TEXTY/METHODICAL AND INFORMATIVE TEXTS

FROM TESTIMONY TO VISUAL OBJECTS TO FAKE OBJECTS. CONCEPTUAL ART'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE EXHIBIT AND ITS REFLECTION ON MUSEUM WORK

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ABSTRACT/ABSTRAKT:

This essay explores how individual works of conceptual art relate to certain theoretical positions of museology in the process. If one takes the selected case studies as typical evidence of their respective historical surroundings, a clearly growing sharpness in the museum criticism becomes recognisable. The time series begins with a wilful, even ironic criticism of the selection and presentation of objects as evidence of the past (1979). The second case study offers a constructivist critique of the fixation of the museum exhibitions on exhibits and the museum visitors' belief in museums (1991). The most recent example (2022) is far removed from any museological theory. An elaborate exhibition installation is intended to familiarise museum visitors with a fictitious story that is linked to an object that is not on display. The clear moral appeal in this storytelling aims to persuade museum visitors to buy artistic multiples in order to pay off a historical debt that has been presented. In the three case studies, it is clear to see that originals fade into the background over time, becoming completely dispensable. At the same time, the exhibition texts become more important and more normative. It is logical that the clearer the change in attitude that the artists in question demand of their audience, the weaker the opportunities for participation become.

Od svědectví přes vizuální objekty až k falešným objektům. Vztah konceptuálního umění k výstavám a jeho reflexe v muzejnictví

Tato studie zkoumá, jak se jednotlivá díla konceptuálního umění vztahují k určitým teoretickým východiskům muzeologie v procesu vývoje. Pokud budeme vybrané případové studie považovat za typický doklad dějinných podmínek, za kterých vznikly, můžeme pozorovat, že kritika muzejní výstavní tvorby se postupně zřetelně vyostřuje. Časová řada začíná naléhavou, až ironickou kritikou výběru a prezentace předmětů jako důkazů minulosti (1979). Druhá případová studie nabízí konstruktivistickou kritiku přílišného zaměření muzejních výstav na exponáty a důvěry návštěvníků v muzea (1991). Nejnovější příklad (2022) je na hony vzdálen jakékoli muzeologické teorii. Propracovaná výstavní instalace má za cíl seznámit návštěvníka muzea s fiktivním příběhem spojeným s předmětem, který není vystaven. Jasný morální apel v tomto vyprávění má za cíl přesvědčit návštěvníky muzea, aby si zakoupili umělecké reprodukcce a splatili tak prezentovaný historický dluh. Na těchto třech případových studiích je jasně vidět, že originály postupem času ustupují do pozadí a stávají se zcela postradatelnými. Současně s tím se výstavní texty stávají důležitějšími a normativnějšími. Je logické, že

čím jasnější je změna v postoji, kterou dotyční umělci vyžadují od svého publika, tím slabší jsou příležitosti k participaci.

KEYWORDS/KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

conceptual art – museum criticism – theoretical museology – exhibition theory – participation konceptuální umění – muzejní kritika – teoretická muzeologie – teorie výstavnictví – participace

The conference “*Reinventing museology: the role of conceptual art*” provided the impulse for writing this essay as the full text version of a lecture given during this conference.¹ The scope of this conference was to reflect on the role that conceptual art had for the evolution of museology. Contributions with historical or recent case studies were desired. References to sociomuseology should also be shown.

There is a long-standing, intensive relationship between fine art and practical museum work in both directions. Artists have repeatedly explored the procedures and results of collecting and exhibiting; Claes Oldenburg made a start with his “*Mouse Museum*”, which was first exhibited in 1965. An initial overview was provided by the

¹ This conference was a cooperation project of the Fondation Maison Science de l'Homme, Paris, and Universidade Lusófona, Lisbon; the lecture took place on October 7th, 2022 in Maison Suger, Paris.

retrospective “*Museums by Artists*” at the exhibition “*documenta 5*” at Kassel in 1972. On the other hand, museums engage artists as curators for exhibitions, replacing the traditionally academic task of curating with a creative activity involving works of art. The “artist-curator” detaches the exhibits from the research context by shifting the focus from their source value to their artistic interpretation.² Therefore, it seemed logical to concentrate the analysis on the relationship between conceptual art and certain positions of museological theory concerning the exhibits.

The desired bridge to sociomuseology appears innovative because here the focus is on the participation of the population and not on the artistic approach, although contemporary art also recognises a participatory direction. There is no doubt that participation is also one of the most important key concepts in museology, as the use of the term in the new version of the International Council of Museums’ definition of museums demonstrates. This provides an opportunity to explore case studies of conceptual art in their relation to participation and the museological theory of musealia as exhibits.

Three case studies have been selected representing both different time periods and specific attitudes towards the exhibits: the exhibition project “*Le musée sentimental de Cologne*” in Cologne, Germany (1979), the artistic installation “*Death Room of the Composer Johannes Vogl (1874–1928)*” in Vienna, Austria (1991), and the

performance “*Moving Mountains*” (“*Berge versetzen*”) in the Museum for Ethnography in Leipzig, Germany (2022). Each case study also involves an interest of the individual artworks in participatory forms, thereby capturing the social aspect of the artwork in question.

First case study, “*Le Musée sentimental de Cologne*”, Cologne, 1979

This exhibition is one of a series of identically named projects by the Swiss artist Daniel Spoerri planned together with his life partner the historian Dr. Marie-Louise Gräfin von Plessen, first in 1977 for the opening of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, then in Cologne in 1979. Further *Musées sentimentaux* followed in Berlin (1981), Basel (1989, without the participation of Plessen) and Krems (2010).³ A special feature of the Cologne project was that Spoerri was a lecturer for multimedia at the Cologne University of Applied Sciences from 1977–1983.⁴ He and Plessen carried out this project with a group of students as a course subject of the multimedia class.⁵

The exhibition was the fruition of an invitation of the director of the Kölnischer Kunstverein, who had heard about the exhibition in Paris.⁶ The Kunstverein usually

presents contemporary art in its rooms, so it had to be clear to visitors that an art project was on display. The biographer Bezzola calls the *Musées sentimentaux* a “*large-scale installation*”.⁷ This exhibition seemed like a new version of city history museums; the exhibition’s subtitle promised to reveal unknowns from Cologne (“*Cologne incognito*”). The exhibition was based on detailed research tracing historical facts, aesthetic values and “sentiments” in the sense of emotions related to individual memory, collective perception and identification. The latter comprised students from the region serving as initial informants, and the local press reported details of the object research months before the opening of the exhibition.⁸

Plessen clearly described the relationship between exhibit and emotion: “*Things that have no historical or art-historical value certainly carry sentimental value, as long as they prove a sentimental relationship. They are not in themselves charged with emotion, but they live from the subjective feeling that the viewer gives them, as it were, as a biographer – through memories*

2 BAVIN, Julie. Artification. In MAIRESSE, François (ed.). *Dictionary of museology*. Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2023, p. 34; BAVIN, Julie. Artist-curator. In MAIRESSE, François (ed.). *Dictionary of museology*. Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2023, p. 34; WALZ, Markus. Museumsarbeit als Kunstwerk. In WALZ, Markus (ed.). *Handbuch Museum. Geschichte, Aufgaben, Perspektiven*. Stuttgart 2016, pp. 32–35.

3 PLESSEN, Marie-Louise Gräfin von. “Man hatte das Gefühl, man geht jetzt fischen, jagen und sammeln”. In HEESSEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, pp. 26–27.

4 BEZZOLA, Tobia. Spoerri, Daniel. In *SIKART Lexikon zur Kunst in der Schweiz* [online]. Zürich, Lausanne: Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft, 2012 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://recherche.sik-isea.ch/de/sik:person-4001639:exp/in/sikart/actor/list?0.0.type=actor&0.0.@id=sik:person-4001639&0.type=actor>>.

5 SPOERRI, Daniel. Einleitung. In *Entwurf zu einem Lexikon eines Musée Sentimental de Cologne: Reliquien und Relikte aus zwei Jahrtausenden, “Köln Incognito”, nach einer Idee von Daniel Spoerri*. Köln: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1979, p. 9.

6 CEBULLA, Dana. “Wir haben gearbeitet wie die Hafennutten.” In HEESSEN, Anke te and

7 BEZZOLA, Tobia. Spoerri, Daniel. In *SIKART Lexikon zur Kunst in der Schweiz* [online]. Zürich, Lausanne: Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft, 2012 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://recherche.sik-isea.ch/de/sik:person-4001639:exp/in/sikart/actor/list?0.0.type=actor&0.0.@id=sik:person-4001639&0.type=actor>>.

8 ANDREAE, Stephan. “Pass auf, nicht alles ist echt!” In HEESSEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, p. 53; PLESSEN, Marie-Louise Gräfin von. “Man hatte das Gefühl, man geht jetzt fischen, jagen und sammeln”. In HEESSEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, p. 21.

*of his own experiences, sensations, his discoveries about the object.*⁹

Spoerri and Plessen formulated their search programme for exhibits as a conceptual approach: exhibits as “*Reliquien und Relikte*” – relics (in the sacral sense), relics (from past times). Spoerri and Plessen chose the alphabetical arrangement of the respective keyword as the presentation structure. Accordingly, the subtitle of the catalogue promised a “draft of a lexicon of relics and relics from two millennia”. As is common in encyclopaedias, a wide variety of aspects stood side by side, e.g. “Dada”, “Dom” and “Drittes Reich” (the art movement Dada, the Cathedral and the Third Reich). Nevertheless, this arrangement was not considered random, but meaningful, as Plessen explained: “*The smallest, most inconspicuous objects begin to live as soon as they can dissolve their singularity in the variegatedness of the city chronicle. The principle of assigning objects and their associated histories places the concept of the Musée sentimental, at least in a historical context, above all other regulations that are subdivided according to subject matter or narrowed down to categories. It creates a tapestry of contexts that touches more closely on the reality of past times than any positivistically sanitised conception of history that focuses only on the essential milestones of the course of history or only on the products of high art.*”¹⁰

Spoerri and Plessen’s museological position was clearly reflected in the metaphor put forward by Plessen that the exhibits were the pens with which the exhibition was written, rather than the exhibition

texts (or a written concept).¹¹ The basic concern of the exhibition was revealed in a double emotional reference: the exhibition team looked for emotionally charged exhibits that triggered similar emotions in the target audience. Spoerri described this with a vivid example: “*Carnival, for example, plays a very big role for the people of Cologne. An outsider might present a prince’s costume or a carnival medal as an object. But that would be simple and boring. We were looking for an object that would trigger something, that would have a similar effect to a relic. Then Stephan Andreae, one of my students, came to me with a pair of old ankle boots that seemed to have old, dried-up clay stuck to them. But it wasn’t normal dirt, it was a thick layer of sugar candy. At the carnival parades, people throw tons of ‘candy’ out of the carriages. The spectators standing on the sidelines don’t catch them all, of course, and eventually you end up wading in camellia dirt, so to speak. [... The shoe] was presented under glass on a bed of velvet. That triggered something in all the people of Cologne. The Musée sentimental usually doesn’t interest anyone else, only the people concerned themselves.*”¹²

Three exhibit examples of the Musée sentimental de Cologne will be presented to illustrate its concept and realisation. One showcase displayed a pair of boxing gloves hanging down from the lid of the display case, below which, at the usual viewing height, was a paper print of a press photo showing a boxer knocking down the referee in the ring. This scene occurred on

7 June 1952 in Cologne: the boxer Peter Müller (1927–1992), a six-time German middleweight champion, born and living in Cologne was insulted by the referee as a “gypsy” during the boxing match on that day. His violent reaction led to a lifelong disqualification, which was lifted in 1954. One would assume that 27 years after this extraordinary event, inhabitants of Cologne interested in sports would recognise the photo motif and correctly classify the boxing gloves (“relics”). The encyclopaedia keyword attached to each exhibition unit which was the popular nickname of the athlete, “Müllers Aap”, had a supporting effect. An alternative level of information was an exhibit label in the display case.

The unit on the encyclopaedia keyword “Nippes” presented a much more difficult viewing task: several decorative porcelain objects were on display that were presumably created in the late 19th century. The catalogue depicts one of them: It has the shape of a lady’s shoe with a high heel. On the toe of the shoe squats a pair of cupids embracing each other. In German, the word “Nippes” denotes unnecessary objects for home decoration that are considered dubious in terms of taste. Inversely, “Nippes” is the name of a district located outside the medieval city of Cologne. Another Nippes figurine increases the possible meanings of the keyword because it bears an on-glaze inscription “Nippes” on the bottom. Such on-glaze inscriptions either served to keep order in the manufacturing company or marked a marketing context. It could therefore refer to the porcelain company Cremer & Sohn based in Cologne-Nippes. The inventory of the Kunstgewerbemuseum Köln records that the first owner of the figurine acquired it in 1911 and lived in Cologne-Nippes. Hence, a detailed examination

9 PLESSEN, Marie-Louise Gräfin von. Zum Verhältnis von historischem Museum und Musée Sentimental. In *Entwurf zu einem Lexikon eines Musée Sentimental de Cologne: Reliquien und Relikte aus zwei Jahrtausenden, “Köln Incognito”, nach einer Idee von Daniel Spoerri*. Köln: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1979, p. 15.

10 Ibidem.

11 PLESSEN, Marie-Louise Gräfin von. Autoren-Museen. In SCHWENCKE, Olaf. *Museum – Verklärung oder Aufklärung. Kulturpolitisches Kolloquium zum Selbstverständnis der Museen*. Rehburg-Loccum: Evangelische Akademie, 1985, p. 164.

12 SPOERRI, Daniel. “Man muss es finden!” In HEESEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, pp. 35–36.



Fig. 1: A showcase of the “Musée sentimental de Cologne” presented the real gloves of the boxer Peter Müller from 1952 – together with a proof photo: Müller knocks down the referee (Photo: Stephan Andreae)

reveals that the exhibition of decorative “Nippes” under the heading “Nippes” is not an irony in reference to the name of the place, but a depiction of a Nippes object acquired in Nippes by a resident of Nippes. The catalogue provides an information text explaining the contradictory etymology of the word and the place name Nippes.

The third exhibit example takes an obviously ironic approach. This exhibit was marked “out of catalogue” as a special feature. On display was a case that had been borrowed from the Schnütgen-Museum, a museum for sacred art. The exhibit label claimed that it contained a pea from the folk tale of the Cologne

Brownies (“Heinzelmännchen”). The historical case alluded to the principle of “relic”. The label emphasised its questionable character by naming it a supposed pea from the fairy tale of the Princess and the Pea; in reality, it was supposed to be a pea from the tale of the little Brownies. Things from folk tales only exist in this narrative, but not physically; nevertheless an art collector bought the pea after the exhibition as an art work for 10.000 Deutsche Mark.¹³

Without the inscription, the Brownies heirloom does not reveal itself at all; after reading it, questions arose among some visitors in regards to the existence or reality of other exhibits. Among other things, the exhibition unit on the well-known writer Heinrich Böll included commercially available pencils lent by the writer himself. These could have been purchased in a shop. On the other hand, the students made individual exhibits that could not be procured, such as the toy guitar mentioned in the memoirs of the Cologne-born politician August Bebel, which a military comrade of his father had made for August during his childhood.¹⁴

Considered an innovation of the Musée sentimental de Cologne, Susanne Padberg points out that narratives have become exhibits here. She points to artistic parallels in visual poetry and the

13 ANDREAE, Stephan. “Pass auf, nicht alles ist echt!” In HEESEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, p. 54; HERZOGENRATH, Wulf. „Das müssen wir im Kunstkontext tun.” In HEESEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, pp. 79–80.

14 ANDREAE, Stephan. “Pass auf, nicht alles ist echt!” In HEESEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, p. 50.

Fluxus movement.¹⁵ However, this overstretches the declared intention of the Musée sentimental: retelling narratives was certainly not the basic idea; many of the emotions that visitors were supposed to recreate or feel anew might be connected to a narrative, but it was about this emotion, not the narrative.

Some exhibition units can only be understood if one has read the exhibition text, but these are not typical arrangements, but rather complementary elements that reflect a subliminal striving for completeness. For example, August Bebel's children's guitar can also be interpreted as a wish to offer the political father figure Konrad Adenauer (founding member of the conservative party CDU) in the presence of August Bebel (co-founder of the socialist party SPD). Spoerri also demonstrated the same striving for completeness in his persistent research for fragments of the war-damaged equestrian monument of King Frederick William III – after the tail of the horse, he also found its hindquarters, thus creating a voluminous exhibit in the centre of the room.¹⁶ Other exhibits that were difficult to understand were based on concept ideas such as the epitaph of Ursula von Groote, which only bridges the gap between Cologne's city patron saint, St. Ursula, and the first tenant in the municipal Eros Centre, Ursula Gerdes if one knows that Ursula von Grote allegedly had an affair

with the legendary Casanova in 1760.¹⁷

The Musée sentimental used the ideas and forms of the time regarding exhibition design (showcases, pedestals, headlines, exhibit texts) as a matter of course and predominantly made use of the exhibit-centred form of presentation recognised at the time. It looked for unusual exhibits that appealed to existing notions of history and evoked feelings associated with identity and love of home. A cheerful mood, unusual for museums, was desired – the artist Nam Yun Paik reported that he had never seen more laughing old ladies than in this exhibition.¹⁸ Beyond this intended effect, the exhibition team thought about the city population only as possible lenders of further exhibits. Participation as we understand it today was not an issue.

Spoerri emphasises the exhibition principle of making contrasts and contradictions visible through the arrangement of the exhibits. *“The fact that museography must find its way back from isolation and segregation [...], which we do not want to question at all, to such contrasts, seems to us to be a primary problem of our time.”*¹⁹ Plessen's museum critique turned against the expert authority of

the museum staff and argued for artistic contributions to the museum work, whereby visitors would find different, but unchanged receptive approaches: *“I would like to promote the idea of involving artists and theatre people in the work of reformulating the concept and dramaturgy of an evolved collection. [...] Only in this dissolution of domains of domination, which are justified by the outdated claim of scientificity, can I imagine a public-intensive opening of the museum in the future in the long term.”*²⁰

Second case study, “Death Room of Johannes Vogl (1874–1928)”, Vienna, 1991

Formally, the first two case studies are closely related; the Viennese work can also be classified as an installation. The Belgian conceptual artist Guillaume Bijl created this work in 1991 for a solo exhibition at the Hubert Winter Gallery in Vienna, whereby the gallery used external rooms in a historic house in Vienna's old town for this purpose. The “Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig”, Vienna, acquired the work in 1993 and exhibited it in the then Palais Liechtenstein exhibition building. It is no longer on display. The museum documentation gives the floor space as 7.12 × 5.90 m.²¹

In 1998, Bijl himself formulated his conceptual approach for a group of installations dealing with cultural tourism as follows: *“With my installations, I explore the questionable fetishistic approach to*

15 PADBERG, Susanne. Vom Fallenbild zum Bilderfall: Wunschobjekt, Fake und die Schriftlichkeit als Objekt. In HEESSEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, p. 172.

16 PLESSEN, Marie-Louise Gräfin von. “Man hatte das Gefühl, man geht jetzt fischen, jagen und sammeln”. In HEESSEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, p. 23.

17 HEESSEN, Anke te. Die Entdeckung des Exponats. Das ‚Musée Sentimental de Cologne‘, Daniel Spoerri, Marie-Louise von Plessen und das Jahr 1979. In HEESSEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, p. 139.

18 PLESSEN, Marie-Louise Gräfin von. “Man hatte das Gefühl, man geht jetzt fischen, jagen und sammeln”. In HEESSEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, p. 23; SPOERRI, Daniel. “Man muss es finden!” In HEESSEN, Anke te and Susanne PADBERG. *Musée sentimental 1979: ein Ausstellungskonzept*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011, p. 42.

19 SPOERRI, Daniel. Einleitung. In *Entwurf zu einem Lexikon eines Musée Sentimental de Cologne: Reliquien und Relikte aus zwei Jahrtausenden*, “Köln Incognito”, nach einer Idee von Daniel Spoerri. Köln: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1979, p. 10.

20 PLESSEN, Marie-Louise Gräfin von. Autoren-Museen. In SCHWENCKE, Olaf. *Museum – Verklärung oder Aufklärung. Kulturpolitisches Kolloquium zum Selbstverständnis der Museen*. Rehburg-Loecum: Evangelische Akademie, 1985, p. 169.

21 MUMOK Onlinesammlung [online]. [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://www.mumok.at/onlinesammlung/detail/sterbezimmer-johannes-vogl-1874-1928-4984>>.



Fig. 2: Guillaume Bijl: installation “Death Room of Johannes Vogl (1874–1928)”, 1991. Mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, inventory number P 340/0. © Guillaume Bijl. Room installation with antique pieces of furniture, labelled as the alleged museum death chamber of a fictitious artist (Photo: © Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien / Deinhardstein)

historical figures and their legacies.”²² Although he alone arranges the exhibits, he shifts the action level to the exhibition visitors: “*In the installations the audience becomes a sort of theatre actor, without knowing it explicitly. I create with my installations a sort of trompe l’oeil situation.*”²³

Bijl clearly placed this work in the context of art, but offered visitors an entirely non-artistic viewing surface: A large room was visible from the door side, bordered by barrier cords. One saw tastefully arranged antiques (furniture, wall clock, picture ornaments on the walls, ceiling light, oriental carpet), several houseplants and heavy red curtains gathered to one side in

front of the windows. Experts may have queried the authenticity of the furniture, which seemed rather sparse compared to the size of the room. For a layman, this death room fulfilled all expectations; at the same time, it offered a symbolic structure: The open grand piano, the wall clock and the bed showed the life and death of a musician like a picture puzzle. Those interested were granted access to more information. Even some experts were irritated by the unusual exhibit inscription on a brass plate: “Johannes Vogl / Komponist / (1874-1928) / STERBEZIMMER”. Two text panels countered doubts about authenticity: they outlined the life of Vogl, who was supposed to have been born in Graz and died in Vienna.

Bijl wants to draw attention to a fetishistic attitude. His “Death Room” leaves open whether this fetishism occurs on the part of those responsible for the exhibition and/or the receiving public. It is

common practice in exhibition design to recreate lost original furnishings with antiques that closely resemble the historical situation that the historical persons could theoretically have acquired. Such reconstructions result from the assumption that the public neither wants to see empty rooms nor to read informational texts about furniture losses, and that they accept recreations as helpful sightseeing offers. Bijl’s installation interprets this “helpful” as “obvious”: a composer’s most important working tool is the pianoforte; of course he has the money to own a grand piano instead of a simple piano. Important people pass away in bed or on the battlefield, the composer consequently in bed, naturally facing the piano with his notes.

The art historical analysis agrees that for Bijl the viewing interest or the exhibition concept is not for facts, but for the confirmation of a preconceived opinion. In the interpretation of the art historian Martin Zeiller, this visual impression becomes a fact: “*The things are unique and yet interchangeable, merely staffage. [...] The replica becomes identical with the authentic object, the newly produced quite ‘false’ becomes quite ‘true’ simply through its facticity and presence.*”²⁴ Quite appropriately, Willem Elias calls the clichés presented “*petrified truth*”; “*The cliché says what one already knows, so nothing.*”²⁵

The only irritation is created by the environment through the gallery presentation: in order to recognise the artwork as such, the artificiality

22 BIJL, Guillaume. *Cultural Tourism* [online]. Antwerpen: Guillaume Bijl, 1998 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://guillaumebijl.be/textcultuuren.html>>.

23 CHAILLOU, Timothée. *Conversations: Guillaume Bijl*, 2012. In *Timothée Chaillou* [online]. [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://www.timotheechaillou.com/conversations/guillaume-bijl/>>.

24 ZEILLER, Martin. *Das Ding im Künstlermuseum – von Breton bis Beuys. Kontamination und Systematik*. Abridged and revised version. Wien: self-publishing, 1996, p. 11 [trad. M.W.].

25 ELIAS, Willem. *Guillaume Bijl (1948–)* [online]. September 22, 2012 [accessed 2022-12-02]. Has been available from www: <<https://www.belgischekunst.be/category/conceptuele-kunst/installatiekunst/>>.

of the arrangement and the fiction of what is ostensibly on view must be understood. The critique of fetishism can also be interpreted as elitist pleasure: Visitors to the art gallery or readers of this essay may shake their heads because museums (which are not art museums!) do not serve the truth, but buy antiquities together without artistic creativity and display them in a way that conforms to simple expectations. This seemingly professional behaviour and attitude of perception does not change through artistic critique, while artists, gallery and gallery visitors can take pleasure in looking critically at their environment. Consequently, this installation confirms the art public's self-assessment of being well-informed and always critical by exposing as such a substitute common in the outside world in the delimited art context and leaving this exposure in the exclusive art context.

The continued use of the "death room" fits exactly into this interpretation. This installation was never shown in a museum whose exhibition illustrates late Romantic music, cultural life around 1900 or the urban history of Graz or Vienna. Rather, an art museum acquired the work and exhibited it (for a limited time).

It goes without saying that the creation and use of the "death room" is without any participation: This conceptual art can only unmask audience expectations and the anticipatory fulfilment of such expectations by not allowing visitor participation.

Third case study, "Moving Mountains", Museum for Ethnography, Leipzig, 2022

The third case study, "Moving Mountains" ("Berge versetzen"), is considerably more complex than the first two. Here, elements of

performance, environment and exhibition design enter into a larger framework with offers of interaction.

The creator of "Moving Mountains" is the collective PARA, whose members are based in Berlin, Hamburg and Frankfurt am Main. According to the information on the website, eleven people belong to the "Current Research Council", another forty people are described as "associated artists, scientists".²⁶ The Tanzanian artists Rehema Chachage and Valerii Asimwe Amani have an unclear share in this work. The museum director credits them with the idea of what material was used,²⁷ and a sound installation by the two artists, "Avoid / Devoid", was played in the exhibition space.²⁸ On the project websites they are listed as associated or collaborating artists.²⁹

PARA describes its principles of action as follows: "*The collective explores future ruins, narratives of memory politics and questions the cultural heritage suitability of current modes of living together. To do this, PARA works in an interdisciplinary, site-specific and performative way, using techniques of re-construction and speculation, between research and fiction.*"³⁰

²⁶ PARA [online]. [accessed 2022-12-02]. Has been available from www: <https://www.p-a-r-a.org/web_mobil_para.pdf>.

²⁷ SCHLEHAHN, Britt. "Es soll ja weh tun". Grassi-Direktorin über künstlerische Zerstörung und Museumsvergangenheit. *Kreuzer online* [online]. March 25, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://kreuzer-leipzig.de/2022/03/25/es-soll-ja-weh-tun>>.

²⁸ PARA [online]. [accessed 2022-12-02]. Has been available from www: <https://www.p-a-r-a.org/web_mobil_para.pdf>.

²⁹ *Berge versetzen – Impressum* [online]. Berlin: &Sistig GbR [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://berge-versetzen.com/impressum/>>; PARA [online]. [accessed 2022-12-02]. Has been available from www: <https://www.p-a-r-a.org/web_mobil_para.pdf>.

³⁰ PARA [online]. [accessed 2022-12-02]. Has been available from www: <https://www.p-a-r-a.org/web_mobil_para.pdf>.

The starting point was a change in the management of the Ethnological Museum Leipzig. After the ethnologist Claus Deimel retired in 2013, he was first succeeded by the cultural anthropologist Nanette Snoep, and after her departure to Cologne in 2019 succeeded by the Judaist Léontine Meijer-van Mensch. Both felt that the permanent exhibition, created between 2005 and 2009 and structured according to world regions, was no longer up to date. The Federal Cultural Foundation provided the financial means to gradually set up a newly designed exhibition. In 2022, the first section of it was presented to the public. "Moving Mountains" was part of the overall scope of the funded project; the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe funded preliminary research work.³¹ On one level, this artwork took place as a performance during the vernissage on 4 March 2022; on another level, one element occupied a larger area within the new permanent exhibition. Since the performative parts were only carried out by the artists themselves at selected times, this resulted in off-peak times in which only equipment out of operation could be seen, and a kind of substitute phase involved freelance workers from the museum who appeared in the artists' marked work clothes and performed the planned activities instead of the artists.

In its invitation to the press briefing before the opening, the museum formulated: "*Thus, the collective PARA dedicates itself to a history that has almost been forgotten in Leipzig: the colonial geographer Hans Meyer (1858–1929) removed the top of Kilimanjaro in 1889 and brought this stone to Germany as a trophy. In the artistic work, PARA addresses the question of whether and how*

³¹ Ibidem.



Fig. 3: As a part of the performative artwork of the artists' group PARA, a kind of factory in the permanent exhibition of the Museum for Ethnography in Leipzig produced replicas of the alleged summit stone of the Kilimanjaro (Photo: Markus Walz)

the summit stone can be returned to Tanzania.”³² The financier wrote more cautiously: “Thus the artists’ collective PARA devotes itself to an almost forgotten story: the abduction of the peak of Kilimanjaro by Hans Meyer and the question of how it could possibly be returned to Tanzania.”³³

The description as “almost forgotten history” leaves it unclear if this artistic work is directed towards investigative journalism, the reproduction of a mythical narrative or the addition of historical knowledge. Individual vocabulary suggests that at least the museum commissioning this

32 Einladung zum Pressegespräch anlässlich der ersten Teileröffnung Reinventing Grassi.SKD. In *Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden* [online]. February 22, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www.skd.museum/besucherservice/presse/2022/einladung-zum-pressegesprach-anlaesslich-der-ersten-teileroeffnung-reinventing-grassiskd/.

33 Kulturstiftung des Bundes. *Initiative für ethnologische Sammlungen* [online]. Halle (Saale): Kulturstiftung des Bundes [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/de/projekte/bild_und_raum/detail/initiative_fuer_ethnologische_sammlungen.html.

work and the financier have a judgmental attitude towards the narrative material (“abduction”, “trophy”). For anyone who follows contemporary museum discourse, the motif of a return to Tanzania refers to discussions about the whereabouts and return of colonial-era collections held in European museums. In this manner, it becomes clear that the concept is designed as a parable referring to the right of returning objects that were brought from the colonies into the territory of the colonial power.

The parable portrays Hans Meyer (1858–1929), a partner in an important book publishing house and a geographical explorer; in 1915 he was appointed professor of “colonial geography and colonial politics” at the University of Leipzig.³⁴ In 1889, he was on a research trip in what was then German East Africa. He climbed Kilimanjaro, named the peak “Kaiser-Wilhelm-Spitze” and took

34 HANLE, Adolf. Meyer, Hans. In *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 1994, vol. 17, pp. 298–299.

stone material back with him. PARA narrates that Hans Meyer cut one stone in half, used one half as a paperweight and gave the other half to Emperor William II.³⁵

The only documented fact is that Meyer gave Wilhelm II a lava stone from Kilimanjaro; the symbolism Meyer possibly attributed to the gift has not been recorded. Kilimanjaro does not have a peak. The “Kaiser-Wilhelm-Spitze” is one of three flat elevations on a gravel plain at the highest altitude of this mountain.³⁶

In the grotto hall of William II’s private residence, the New Palace in Potsdam, a spot of the rich wall decoration of stones and shells was marked with the sign “Peak of Kilimanjaro 1890”. It is part of an extensive addition of various decorative stones to the baroque wall decoration in the late 19th century. The 1890 stone was accidentally destroyed during repair work after the Second World War. In 1985, another Kilimanjaro stone was added as a replacement. This stone was taken from a collection that Meyer had already brought back from there in 1887.³⁷ The paperweight, the other half of the stone, is now said to have passed from the family estate to a Viennese antiquarian bookshop, which wants to sell this stone for €250,000, but, when asked by PARA for a reduction, it has allegedly waived the calculated profit only to demand the claimed purchase price of €40,000.³⁸ A fairytale motive...no bookseller buys a stone

35 *Berge versetzen – Impressum* [online]. Berlin: &Sistig GbR [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from [www: <https://berge-versetzen.com/impressum/>](https://berge-versetzen.com/impressum/).

36 HEYDEN, Ulrich van der and Jürgen BECHER. Erfundene Geschichten: Wie die ‘Spitze des Kilimanjaros’ ins Neue Palais in Potsdam gelangte. *Museum aktuell*, 2022, no. 283/284, pp. 19–20.

37 *Ibidem*, p. 20.

38 *Berge versetzen – Impressum* [online]. Berlin: &Sistig GbR [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from [www: <https://berge-versetzen.com/impressum/>](https://berge-versetzen.com/impressum/).

at a price that can be freely set with the expectation of being able to achieve a profit margin five times that amount. Elsewhere it is written that the paperweight was auctioned off at an undisclosed time.³⁹ In any case, it seems questionable why a geographer who was a regular collector of geological evidence only took one stone with him during this visit to Kilimanjaro and therefore had to cut the stone in half as a gift for the emperor.

The creation of PARA's artwork started with the focus on the high purchase price for a fictitious object: The intention was to urge museum visitors to learn about this story and make financial contributions to enable the purchase of this stone to be returned to Tanzania. Unnamed people in Tanzania allegedly made this request: "We know from Tanzanian partners that the summit stone of Kilimanjaro is very much missing. So something was destroyed there that is still an issue today."⁴⁰ An elaborate, industrial-looking installation in the permanent exhibition focussed on pressing ceramic material into alleged silicone casts of the paperweight. The fired stone copies could be purchased at a vending machine for 20 €, and were simultaneously available for purchase on the internet. A member of PARA, Bastian Sistig, appeared by name as the seller of the replicas.⁴¹ The purchase of this multiple was the

39 LE GALL, Yann. Das Neue Palais und die Spitze des Kilimandscharo. In *Postcolonial Potsdam* [online]. Potsdam: Postcolonial Potsdam, 2020 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://postcolonialpotsdam.org/2020/03/17/neues-palais-und-die-spitze-des-kilimandscharo/>>.

40 SCHLEHAHN, Britt. "Es soll ja weh tun". Grassi-Direktorin über künstlerische Zerstörung und Museumsvergangenheit. *Kreuzer online* [online]. March 25, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://kreuzer-leipzig.de/2022/03/25/es-soll-ja-weh-tun>>.

41 *Berge versetzen – Impressum* [online]. Berlin: &Sistig GbR [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://berge-versetzen.com/impressum/>>.



Fig. 4: As an element of the performative artwork of the artists' group PARA, the real Karl Weule memorial stone is destroyed to finance the purchase of a stone allegedly claimed to have been owned by Hans Meyer (Photo: Markus Walz)

last stop of the artwork, which was intended by the artists to finance the purchase of the stone in order to be able to return it to Tanzania. This financial contribution to reparation turned the narrative into a parable of the current restitution demands for historical collection items.

"PARA calls these replicas *scruples*. The word derives from the Latin *scrupulus* for a 'stone of stumbling', a guilty conscience, and moral misgivings. The *scruples* are made from the raw material of the GRASSI

Museum für Völkerkunde."⁴² One of the artists' exhibition texts urges these replicas to be thrown against the glass panels of museums housing colonial artifacts.

At one station before the impressions were made, stone material was crushed to add stone crumbs to the ceramic material. The stone crumbs consisted of porphyry, which was gradually quarried from a memorial stele in the staircase of the museum. This

42 Ibidem.

stele was made as a pedestal for the bust of the museum's first full-time director, Professor Dr. Karl Weule, and inscribed accordingly. Since the bust had been moved aside several times in recent years, this action by the museum had turned the permanently visible pedestal into a memorial stele. The press once erroneously reported that it was the pedestal of a (non-existent) Hans Meyer bust.⁴³ It is true that the bust was donated to the city of Leipzig by the former owner of the museum, the Verein für Völkerkunde, on the occasion of the opening of the new building in 1929; the Weule bust was presented by the second chairman, Hans Meyer.⁴⁴ The stele is representative of the museum, "*which, according to a member of the group, 'itself becomes the raw material of restitution.'*"⁴⁵

Disagreements are weighed in. "*Outcries of indignation, especially from the conservative side, would be highly welcomed by the group. They are counting on reactions from Bavaria and Saxony and will employ what is necessary on channels of agitation such as Twitter.*"⁴⁶ "*The iconoclastic provocation was obviously deliberate and it was to be staged to have media impact.*"⁴⁷ One means of inciting this outrage was

symbolic violence: by destroying the stele, the artists wanted to tarnish the museum.⁴⁸ However, there was no regret on the part of the museum; instead, the director noted that unnamed people suffered ("*It's supposed to hurt, and it hurts some people.*"⁴⁹).

Compared to this provocation, other narrative details were secondary. Journalists cast doubt on various parts of the parable. Thus, the stone became the summit stone of Kilimanjaro,⁵⁰ even though a volcano does not have an isolatable peak; other press articles cast doubt on the existence of the paperweight.⁵¹ Professional journalists focused on reproducing the multi-faceted story. One blog post gave a clear assessment with

"colonial megalomania".⁵² Another blog post did not dwell on details, but praised the permanent change of narrative levels, through which the basic message became particularly clear: "*The message is clear: We must find new collective ways to reimagine the very fabric of the ruins of anthropology's project of cultural whiteness and the museums that represent its public spaces.*"⁵³

The "Moving Mountains" project contained many collaborative elements, but they all remained within the circle of art production and museum work: the artist group worked with two other artists. A museum manager worked with the artist group while freelance museum staff acted on behalf of the artists. Museum guests and visitors to the website were invited for purchase, thereby contributing to great cause at the same time. The public's reaction was limited: On November 8th, 2022, 431 of the 2,000 "Scruples" stones had been sold representing 21 per cent; sales increased to 686 copies by August 2024.⁵⁴ As the result, only a third of the targeted amount was generated. One cause may be deduced from the unsubstantiated claims regarding the existence of the half stone, its origin from Kilimanjaro and the Tanzanian reclamation.

"*Instead of exposing the lazy magic of the stone, the collective additionally charges it with symbolism. In this way, the action*

43 KUHN, Nicola. Neustart im Grassi Museum Leipzig: Mut zum Experiment. *Der Tagesspiegel* [online]. March 18, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/mut-zum-experiment-4313389.html>>.

44 REIN, Anette. Vom Gegenstand des Respekts zur Ruine. Die beauftragte Zerstörung eines museumsrelevanten Denkmals. *Museum aktuell*, 2022, no. 279–280, p. 10.

45 RICHTER, Peter. Postkoloniale Guerilla-Kunstaktion: Zugespitzt. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* [online]. March 2, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/kuenstlergruppe-para-voelkerkundemuseum-leipzig-1.5540033>>.

46 Ibidem.

47 BRUS, Anna. Iconoclasm in the Grassi Museum: seeking publicity for an international museum crisis by way of a damaged pedestal. In *Boasblogs* [online]. Siegen: Collaborative Research Center, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://boasblogs.org/dcntr/iconoclasm-im-grassi-museum/>>.

48 SCHLEHAHN, Britt. "Es soll ja weh tun". Grassi-Direktorin über künstlerische Zerstörung und Museumsvergangenheit. *Kreuzer online* [online]. March 25, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://kreuzer-leipzig.de/2022/03/25/es-soll-ja-weh-tun>>; RICHTER, Peter. Postkoloniale Guerilla-Kunstaktion: Zugespitzt. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* [online]. March 2, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/kuenstlergruppe-para-voelkerkundemuseum-leipzig-1.5540033>>.

49 SCHLEHAHN, Britt. "Es soll ja weh tun". Grassi-Direktorin über künstlerische Zerstörung und Museumsvergangenheit. *Kreuzer online* [online]. March 25, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://kreuzer-leipzig.de/2022/03/25/es-soll-ja-weh-tun>>.

50 BRUS, Anna. Iconoclasm in the Grassi Museum: seeking publicity for an international museum crisis by way of a damaged pedestal. In *Boasblogs* [online]. Siegen: Collaborative Research Center, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://boasblogs.org/dcntr/iconoclasm-im-grassi-museum/>>; Mit Hammer und Meißel: Künstler köpfen Zugspitze – sechs Zentimeter kürzer. *Bild* [online]. March 03, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://www.bild.de/regional/muenchen/muenchen-aktuell/mit-hammer-und-meissel-kuenstler-koepfen-zugspitze-sechs-zentimeter-kuerzer-79334724.bild.html>>.

51 RICHTER, Peter. Postkoloniale Guerilla-Kunstaktion: Zugespitzt. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* [online]. March 2, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/kuenstlergruppe-para-voelkerkundemuseum-leipzig-1.5540033>>; Mit Hammer und Meißel: Künstler köpfen Zugspitze – sechs Zentimeter kürzer. *Bild* [online]. March 03, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://www.bild.de/regional/muenchen/muenchen-aktuell/mit-hammer-und-meissel-kuenstler-koepfen-zugspitze-sechs-zentimeter-kuerzer-79334724.bild.html>>.

52 BRUS, Anna. Iconoclasm in the Grassi Museum: seeking publicity for an international museum crisis by way of a damaged pedestal. In *Boasblogs* [online]. Siegen: Collaborative Research Center, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://boasblogs.org/dcntr/iconoclasm-im-grassi-museum/>>.

53 HICKS, Dan. Unmasking a history of colonial violence in a German Museum. In *Hyperallergic* [online]. March 28, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://hyperallergic.com/719708/unmasking-a-history-of-colonial-violence-in-a-german-museum/>>.

54 *Berge versetzen – Impressum* [online]. Berlin: &Sistig GbR [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://berge-versetzen.com/impressum/>>.

seems like a treasure hunt without treasure.”⁵⁵ Paradoxically, the real Karl Weule memorial stone was destroyed to finance the purchase of a stone allegedly claimed to have been owned by Hans Meyer. It appears questionable whether an exciting fictitious story can be adopted as a good parable for international disputes. If the museum director criticises that the critics devoted too little energy on the gesture of returning the dubious stone,⁵⁶ it is appropriate for her to fully assume the responsibility of ordering the destruction of a real memorial stone.

Karl Weule was a historically relevant person correlating to his time frame. Those who instead dwell on a “dead White colonialist male” are satisfied with the artwork despite its fictionality and the fact that participation only works in the narrowest circle: “*But Chachage, Amani, PARA and the curatorial team led by Grassi’s director Léontine Meijer-van Mensch demonstrate how the task of exorcising obsolete colonial-patriarchal structures of exclusion and prejudice can begin with new forms of collaborative monumentality.*”⁵⁷

Participatory approaches in the case studies

Participation has been a widespread approach both in museology and in artistic creation in recent decades. It is therefore not surprising that it also appears in conceptual art.

⁵⁵ KILB, Andreas. Ein Museum schämt sich. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2022, no. 61 (March 14), p. 13.

⁵⁶ SCHLEHAHN, Britt. “Es soll ja weh tun”. Grassi-Direktorin über künstlerische Zerstörung und Museumsvergangenheit. *Kreuzer online* [online]. March 25, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://kreuzer-leipzig.de/2022/03/25/es-soll-ja-weh-tun>>.

⁵⁷ HICKS, Dan. Unmasking a history of colonial violence in a German Museum. In *Hyperallergic* [online]. March 28, 2022 [accessed 2024-08-15]. Available from www: <<https://hyperallergic.com/719708/unmasking-a-history-of-colonial-violence-in-a-german-museum/>>.

Indeed, it is surprising to see that the three selected case studies offered few opportunities for participation for the general public or museum visitors.

Even if participation in the creation of a work of art cannot go as far as in other types of museum due to the artistic freedom of creation, the distance to the participation that appears desirable in sociomuseology is remarkable. There, participation is defined as a museum management tool that allows external parties to participate in shaping the policies and future of an establishment for the benefit of a community.⁵⁸

In today’s museum practice, it is quite usual to see the participation of those who wish to participate as participation of the population. The first case study seemed like an early harbinger of this practice with its involvement of students who knew the place. Bijl wanted to provide information, an evaluation of current museum practice. To do this, he used the traditional one-channel communication. Reactions were certainly expected outside the encounter with the artwork, but there was no possibility of feedback or even participation. The most recent case study went the furthest by appealing to the visitors’ sense of justice and trying to trigger consumer behaviour without revealing that the object offered was not what was claimed.

References of this conceptual art to museological theory

There is no uniform theoretical museology, let alone one that can be easily extracted from a recognised manual. Nevertheless, in this field of theory regarding museum objects and exhibits, there

⁵⁸ VARINE, Hugues de. Participation. In MAIRESSE, François (ed.). *Dictionary of museology*. Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2023, p. 411.

are three ideas that have been known for a long time and three that have only arisen in recent decades about what constitutes a museum object and how exhibition practice deals with this quality.

The view with the longest tradition regards exhibits as authentic relics of events or persons in the past. This contrasts with the more recent view that exhibitions have the task of telling stories and using a complex montage of various media to do so; the museum objects represent a genre in this media network. The second traditional view perceives exhibits as testimonies; the best-known formulation was provided by ICOM’s 1974 definition of a museum as “*material evidence of man and his environment*”. This contrasts with the more recent view, which values the exhibits for their visual quality, but also reduces them to a kind of illustration of the exhibition topic. The third traditional view was given the ambiguous term “presentation”; it refers either to unique exhibits such as works by a well-known artist or to examples of a certain category of objects. This is contrasted with the idea that there is nothing to be seen in the exhibits themselves, but that they represent certain social or historical phenomena without the exhibit having any direct part in these facts (e.g. a poor garment that was not, in the strict sense, part of poverty in the Middle Ages).

The three analysed case studies follow the time line of the basic accents of theory development presented above: The oldest example, the Musée sentimental, referred to traditional exhibit theories, most clearly to the character as testimony. A narrative approach was only evident in direct reference to the individual exhibit when the exhibition and catalogue text reported the

biography of the person in question or personal memories of events in the exhibition text. In the middle case study, the focus seemed to be on the testimonial character of the exhibits, with the exhibits being used as visualisations of the exhibition text as representations of the biography presented. Since the textual content was fictitious, one older and two younger museological positions were exposed to simultaneous critique without offering a solution. The most recent example detached itself from museological theory altogether: in order to criticise historical collection strategies, a fictitious narrative was presented. In support of this approach, several text panels and newly created exhibition elements were placed in the room; at the end of the action, one of the museum's historical furnishings had been badly damaged and is now no longer on public display. In the desired case, the museum visitors would have bought a newly created ceramic object; as far as is known, no one followed up on how to cause damage to property in museums mentioned in one of the artists' exhibition texts at the vending machine.

What the three case studies have in common was to show exhibits that were not what they claimed to be. The Musée sentimental de Cologne used procedures for this that became common at the Museum für Deutsche Geschichte, Berlin-Ost (opened in 1952) at the latest: Missing originals were replaced by substitutes without explanation. On the one hand, Spoerri and von Plessen went beyond this by stylising a simple pea into a relic; on the other hand, they used substitutes only in exceptional cases. Hence there was no reason to complain about the use of substitutes instead of originals. The Musée sentimental provided many ideas for thinking about new groups of objects and

their presentation. Bijl engaged in fundamental criticism and therefore showed antiquities attached to no particular value due to the fictitious attribution to an equally fictitious person. The exhibits confusingly appeared as museum objects, but none of them were museum objects so long as the artwork did not enter a museum per se. PARA filled an entire exhibition space with machines converting something fictional to a materialised form. The only original object was a stone plinth, the destruction of which was supposed to tarnish the museum, but left the museum director indifferent. The time series shows a growing debate over keeping things permanently in a museum such as in the last example in a European museum and displaying them.

The critical content of conceptual art increased over the course of the case studies in that the focus of the criticism was aimed not only at the museum, but also the museum visitor. The Musée sentimental did nothing more than to display unusual exhibits chosen to stimulate an emotionally charged memory. Visitors attending the exhibition were taken very seriously in a creative way, and museum professionals were discreetly encouraged to pay attention to different forms of perception and to broaden their search for exhibits. Bijl exposed a superficial viewing behaviour based on the believe in explanatory texts leading to reflection on one's own perceptive attitude (or to be amused at the thought of visitors wholeheartedly believing everything). Museum professionals were encouraged to expand upon the trusting perception of visitors and refrain from engaging in misleading visual offers, i.e. to collect and exhibit fewer things. PARA had a clear but hidden message directed towards the generosity of visitors to make financial contributions in support

of the cause. The artists demanded in depth soul-searching on the part of the visitors and the museum professionals. Rather than the artists encouraging them to engage in open-ended reflection, they guided the latter to assume a sense of guiltiness.

Parallel to the growing critical content, the artworks are increasingly understood by texts as opposed to the artworks themselves. Certainly, there are sketches and descriptive drafts for the Musée sentimental, but this concept strictly follows the traditional idea that an exhibition is always a display of things, whereby each object deserves a closer look on its own and its viewing opens up the meaning of the exhibition. The example of the boxing gloves illustrates that a better understanding of the exhibits necessitated further visual offers. In this case, a reproduced press photo was added rather than explanatory texts. The artificial interior of Bijl was inaccessible without the brass plate and the wall text; the actual meaning remained hidden behind the apparent explanation and had to be understood with intellectual reflection. The most recent example presented a parable in the form of text panels and offered supplementary visualisations, ultimately to hold a moral evaluation of ethnological collection pieces in European museums. The visitors had to understand on their own the need to comply with the call to damage property which was clearly presented in an exhibition text only in a figurative sense.

With this last sequence, PARA's project referred to a well-known text in Art history, the "*Futurist Manifesto*" of Filippo Marinetti (1909). More than a hundred years after Marinetti, the Leipzig museum allowed the audience to read a similar call to bring about the end of all

museums. An exhibition based on text panels, only supplemented by visual elements, wanted to spread a moral posture that was not directly addressed, the proposed consequence of which seemed like an analogy to a historical text.

Conclusion

The selection of case studies from different dates suggests the search for lines of development. Indeed, if one takes the case studies as typical examples of their respective historical environments, a time series becomes recognisable involving a clearly growing sharpness in the criticism of museums. The first case study looks at relics of the past addressing to the everyday and the absurd, without fundamentally questioning the quality of museum artefacts as evidence. The second case study takes a clearly constructivist stance, exhibiting artefacts while denying any inherent quality worthy of preservation. The third case study goes far beyond this, because it is no longer interested in the exhibits, but wants to simultaneously influence the knowledge and attitudes of museum visitors and provoke collective action, even beyond the boundaries of the exhibition space. Parallel to this distance from the exhibits and their relationship to history, the relevance of the exhibition texts and their binding nature stems from the supplementary factual explanation to the misleading explanation only pertinent when taken as face value, to a striking text that is intended to be understood in a predetermined way and to encourage monetary donations.

With regard to the participation of museum visitors, the time series is not linear. The first case study appears exemplary, even if only the students of a particular course instead of the general public

participate as residents: The artist works together with a historian, and both retain their expertise to the extent that the participants work out their own ideas without committing errors in terms of design or historiography. The museum critique of the second case study is only successful if the traditional one-channel communication is utilised without any possible influence, inferring no participation. The third case study is quite different in demanding critical reflection and moral judgement while offering two options for contributing to compensation, either by wilfully destroying museum exhibitions or by making replicas and then buying the finished multiples.

If conceptual art is seen as an experimental field of future museum work, PARA offers a preview of museum work as preparing exhibitions without museum objects and ultimately presents single-channel communication with a predestined outcome.

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