Critical Heritages (CoHERE): performing and representing identities in Europe

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Essay: Critical heritages and serious play in museums: engaging with difficulty between Europe and the nation

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CoHERE explores the ways in which identities in Europe are constructed through heritage *representations* and *performances* that connect to ideas of place, history, tradition and belonging. The research identifies existing heritage practices and discourses in Europe. It also identifies means to sustain and transmit European heritages that are likely to contribute to the evolution of inclusive, communitarian identities and counteract disaffection with, and division within, the EU. A number of modes of representation and performance are explored in the project, from cultural policy, museum display, heritage interpretation, school curricula and political discourse to music and dance performances, food and cuisine, rituals and protest.

Work Package 1, **Productions and Omissions of European heritage,** provides a critical foundation for CoHERE as a whole, interrogating different meanings of heritage, historical constructions and representations of Europe, formative histories for European identities that are neglected or hidden because of political circumstances, and non-official heritage.

This essay explores the concept of difficulty in relation to European heritage, the routine paradigms and affective-political modes that museums employ to engage with difficulty, and how these might be changed to accommodate a 'more-than national' geohistorical position in the present. It discusses some of the problems of difficult heritage that have been identified across European and national settings, and how this might fit within a paradigm of 'crisis' invoked by the EC. This is intended to ramify 'difficulty' as a paradigm and to locate it in practice: understanding when, where and how difficulty emerges and for whom, when it remains submerged, and why it becomes critical to civil politics. Museum displays that creatively address unusual difficult pasts in unconventional ways may support an ethical project of learning from the past to create better grounds for civil futures.

Critical heritages and serious play in museums: engaging with difficulty between Europe and the nation

Christopher Whitehead

This paper explores the concept of difficulty in relation to European heritage, the routine paradigms and affective-political modes that museums employ to engage with difficulty, and how these might be changed to accommodate a 'more-than national' geohistorical position in the present. In these enquiries I write in the spirit of the EU-funded CoHERE project (*Critical Heritages: representing and performing identities in Europe*), making use of its conceptual apparatus for thinking through past-present relations now. The project began in 2016, under the European Commission's (EC) 'Reflective Societies' programme, which was intended to mobilize heritage studies to address the complex set of socio-cultural, economic and political crises befalling Europe and the EU. Negotiating this instrumental agenda, I discuss some of the problems of difficult heritage that have been identified across European and national settings, and how this might fit within a paradigm of 'crisis' invoked by the EC. This is intended to ramify 'difficulty' as a paradigm and to locate it in practice: understanding when, where and how difficulty emerges and for whom, when it remains submerged, and why it becomes critical to civil politics. I argue that the paradigm of difficult heritage as something that unsettles 'us' (whoever that refers to) and undermines positive identity positions is also applicable to current events, and, indeed, to pasts that are not normally framed as difficult. These other realities go unfaced and unrecognized in heritage and museum practice, in favour of habitual reference to an exemplary canon of difficult history. This canon provides only limited, and sometimes overdetermined, content for the ethical project of learning from the past and using historical consciousness to create better grounds for civil futures.

My proposition in this paper can be summarized as: 1) we need to frame more pasts as difficult and explore them as such for civil gain, organizing possibilities for people to see from a range of positions that transcend national ones; 2) it is similarly productive to understand and engage with contemporary phenomena within a 'difficult history of the present'; and 3) mapping the causal and discursive relations, both implicit and explicit, between difficult pasts and the present can create grounds for more informed public understanding of historical social antagonisms and divisive mythologies. At the end of this paper I try to use these ideas to advance some technical possibilities for museum and heritage productions: to recognize difficulty past and present without forcing mythical closures or resolutions; and to enable visitors to inhabit different positions on and in history, through forms of serious play with time and perspective that can be organized in museums. In doing this I aim to move beyond a theoretical articulation and account of contemporary phenomena to make some suggestions for museum practice.

This paper is not timeless. It is a development of a talk that I gave at a meeting of ICOM Europe in November 2016, near the end of a year of extraordinary political shifts in Europe and elsewhere. In my home country of the UK, the results of the EU 'Brexit' referendum in June 2016 refracted people's very different senses of position in relation to national identity and to European and global formations. Any sense of fundamental unity or shared identity at the level of the 'nation' (itself multiple in the UK) seemed shattered, and little has changed to

mend that at the time of writing. Along with this, difficult history seemed to be happening in the present, the Syrian conflict and Refugee Crisis being the most visible phenomena involving and affecting European nations. As well as this 'difficult present,' difficult pasts were looped into discursive connections to current affairs. Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann compared Hungary's treatment of refugees to 'the darkest chapter of our continent's history'. In a 2017 BBC Radio 3 broadcast, human rights lawyer and scholar Philippe Sands lamented the 'collective loss of historical memory' signalled by xenophobic nationalism. For him, those who sought to dismantle the EU had forgotten that it was a system of peace born of war, and the climate now recalled that of the 1930s. He asked the question 'are we heading back?'[1] Actually the discursive loop became commonplace, but in oppositional ways: defenders of the European project used the Nazi past as a cautionary tale against division; meanwhile, EU discontents interested in recovering a mythical national sovereignty tried to suggest that the EU was comparable to Nazi expansionism.[2]

Against this background, when I was asked by ICOM Europe to talk about how museums might negotiate difficult pasts in relation to national and European contexts, I have to own up to some trepidation. All three of the topic's constituent constructs – the concept of difficulty as applied to the past, the concept of the nation, and that of Europe – seemed to be critically unstable. So too was the ground between them, because of the tense interplay between European and national stories and the way in which difficult history ranges across them, or, as Sands suggested, is forgotten.

The major and crucial paradigm that has dominated official memory projects at the European level is that of World War Two, and in particular the Holocaust.[3] The EU itself has been called 'a peculiar kind of monument' to the War (Müller 2010: 30). The new EU-funded House of European History in Brussels exemplifies this, as its historical story of Europe begins in 1945, so that Europe is framed by, or built on the ashes of, a 'difficult past'. This difficult past is a touchstone of European commonality, because it implicated most member states and it offers an opportunity for moral consensus. But its significance is confused – sometimes tactically – and multiple. While Sands suggests that there has been a collective forgetting, World War Two and the Holocaust are ubiquitous in the domains of heritage, popular culture and tourism (see also Steyn 2014: 141). But what does this difficult past mean now? What kind of purchase does it have on collective imaginations? What other pasts, or present realities, does it occlude? If we remove 'difficulty' from the sense in which it has become conventionalized in heritage practice, then it can be seen all around us, not just in various pasts but in contemporary circumstances too. And yet, in general, museums and official heritage representations do little to engage with this, insisting on a restricted order of difficulty. To break out of this requires an ethical project of recognition (*not* resolution) of

[1] "Private Passions', BBC3 15 January 2017.

[2] For example, the United Kingdom Independence Party's website, ukipdaily.com. A post on 6th March 2016 (3 months before the referendum) reads: 'UKIP policy is also removing the 'occupation of Britain' by the EU. **Yes, occupation**. Let's look at what happened during the Second World War – which the allies won. A country in Europe decided to cross international borders and take away self-government of other European countries, by: their military, control of legal system, control of taxation, control of education, control of currency, control of media, impose a free movement of people for their own people, and control of culture. No referendums were given. Countries such as the Netherlands, which chose neutrality, were ignored and had their liberties taken away. The similarities are very similar to today, except without the military force.' (Original emphasis; accessed February 2017)

[3] I use the term mindful of the debates and alternatives, because its common use in official memory culture makes it the semantic element of the difficult heritage paradigm that I discuss.

difficulty past and present, so that we can step outside of our positions and reconceive our senses of self in place and time, as it were, to 'unsettle' ourselves, however temporarily. It seems strange that we focus on a limited canon of historic difficulty when there are so many unsettling pasts with which we could engage heuristically, or that we do not deal with links between the past and the difficult present in museums, especially while around us things fall apart cataclysmically and tragically.

What is 'difficult'?

In her 2009 book *Difficult heritage: negotiating the Nazi past in Nuremberg and beyond*, Sharon Macdonald defined difficult heritage as 'a past that is recognized as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity' (Macdonald 2009: 1). The key paradigm for this is the example of the Nazi past in Germany, and, broadly, the politics of regret (Olick 2007) that pertain to it. Often, the use of cultural memory devices and heritage structures is part of the phenomenon of '*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*', commonly defined as 'coming to terms with the past', or 'a conscious working-through of the past' (Glaeser 2000: 326). In this context the *choice* of a difficult past *as heritage* is due to its status as a vehicle for moral-affective work – work that is seen as a civil good because it enables progressive action and reflective identity-building around an ideal of historical-moral consciousness. The Nazi past is, in this sense, no longer a past that is particularly awkward in Germany, precisely because it has become a kind of usual negative touchstone for progressive German identities.

The Holocaust undoubtedly constitutes a deep node of collective memory for those who identify its victims as their forbears. But for those with no such sense of personal connection with victims – or indeed with perpetrators – there is a risk that it might be reduced, through its very ubiquity as an object of heritage practice, tourism and popular culture, to a site of secular pilgrimage (a 'must-see') a safe space of withdrawal, in which to exercise a routine empathy with unambiguous victims (a 'must-feel'). Michael Rothberg, drawing upon Freud, talks of 'screen memory' (2009: 13). Prevalent engagement with Holocaust memory may be a means of hiding immediate fears about other unsettling histories or present realities, and a surface (*the* surface?) onto which to project emotional content. In this sense, the Holocaust is rendered as a safe prompt to indulge momentary revulsion and sorrow, a 'comfortable horrible' (Linenthal 1995: 267) about which we know how and what to emote.

These arguments about the problem of the Holocaust as paradigm have been extended over the last decade or so, largely by various critics from within memory studies. The Holocaust is: 'canon of European memory' (Karlsson 2010); 'universal symbol of good and evil', that helps to create a transnational moral community based on the 'Never Again' ideal (Levy and Sznaider 2006); a 'memory kit', 'packaged for export' (Olick 2016; see also Müller 2010), 'aestheticized' (Steyn 2014) and so on. This critical turn should not be taken to mean we should not remember the Holocaust, or should turn away from it; rather, it suggests a need for a new reflexivity, to check complacency and routine in our memory and heritage practice. 'Difficulty', as a heritage prefix, requires critical attention, lest its content and markers become standardized commonplaces that we know how to deal with, through habituation.

Indeed, Sharon Macdonald has recently revisited her earlier position in a 2015 paper that asks: 'is 'difficult heritage' still 'difficult'? Her subtitle suggests not, or that 'public acknowledgement of past perpetration may no longer be so unsettling to collective identities'. She clarifies:

> The act of publicly addressing historical acts undertaken by the collective is no longer necessarily a disruption to positive identity formation. On the contrary, increasingly it seems to be a sign of moral cleanliness and honesty and, as such, a performance of trustworthiness (Macdonald 2015: 19).

The lexical problem here is indicated by the quotation marks, inviting critical scrutiny about constitutions and constructions of 'difficult heritage' and 'difficulty'. I agree with Macdonald about the safety of *what currently counts,* or is framed, as difficult heritage. But I maintain that there is a near infinite range of potentially unsettling histories that we do not choose to frame as difficult. Museums do experiment, as can be seen in the 2016-17 *German Colonialism: fragments past and present* exhibition at the Deutsches Historisches Museum, which aims to explore 'controversial memory' in Germany and its former colonies. The same could be said about those ethnographic museums, such as the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren, that choose to re-present their collections against the historical-institutional grain, to recognize the iniquities of the national colonial projects of which the museums themselves were once part. The memory of colonialism is also 'difficult' in Macdonald's sense, and like Holocaust memory it involves politics of regret about perpetration, othering and dehumanization, although it has only a secondary visibility in the public sphere. But here too we could question the real difficulty involved, which is not to say that such museum initiatives are free from public controversy, but that they are part of a still-limited canon of difficult heritage whose tropes and affective appeals are familiar. Our difficult engagements with past and present are sequestered into known exemplars They have, in some way, become sufficiently amenable, meaning that a sufficient audience will respond as they are supposed to: with empathy and sorrow for dead people's historic suffering, with ever-developing historical consciousness, and with an attempt at reflective self-transformation.

What is there to do: rethink and expand the idea of difficult heritage? Or articulate alternative concepts of that address more nuanced modes of discomfort with the past (e.g. Kidd 2014: 2)? For some theorists, such as Rodney Harrison, heritage understood *generally* (i.e. not only 'difficult' heritage) is a matter of collective choice: a selection from the past that is loaded with contemporary significance and values that 'we wish to take with us' for the production of 'our own 'tomorrow'' (Harrison 2013: 4). In this sense it could be said that the commonplace stories of difficulty become heritage precisely because they are what powerful groups (the 'we') *do* wish to take with them, because they enable a positive identity position of ethical memory practice seen to be necessary for constructing a civil future. But what then about the things that get left behind, ignored or unnoticed? Or things from the past that are taken up as 'good' by those (not 'we') with uncivil visions? Can heritage be something that is not always a matter of choice, but rather can, on occasion, *befall* 'us' or pervade our lives, be around us, whether we like it or not? Can heritage be something that we have to live with? This might be 'difficult' in a different sense, perhaps suggesting a distinction between a conventionalized 'safe-difficult' and a *really* unsettling 'difficult-difficult', that is screened off either through categorization as 'news' (not history, not heritage) or through occlusion.

I think of this through a lens *critical* heritage in a number of senses, not least the critical interrogation of the naturalized values of official heritage associated with the scholarly turn to a 'critical heritage studies,' interested in cultural politics, mythic constructs and power relations (Smith 2012: 535). The other sense in which I deploy 'critical' is to indicate where

and when heritage is hooked into contemporary social and political difficulties that profoundly divide us – in other words, when and where heritage is involved or implicated in social crisis, as a set of mobilizations and/or practices that problematize and jeopardize civil intergroup relations. A crisis is a time of 'intense difficulty and danger' as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it. In a further meaning of 'critical' we may consider whether heritage has a 'decisive or crucial importance in the success, failure, or existence of something'. This brings out a different way of thinking from 'difficult heritage' about the gravity of past-present-future constructions in two senses. Firstly, in what crises does heritage figure, whether causally or discursively, and what contemporary social difficulties does this express? Secondly, what *something* is heritage critical *for*? For example, could it be critical for addressing contemporary social tensions, for peaceful co-existence, for senses of belonging, for the success of the European project?

'Critical' heritage in Europe, of Europe

The CoHERE project is a response to the European Commission's Horizon 2020 'Europe in a changing world – inclusive, innovative and reflective societies' programme launched in 2014.[4] The core challenge of this was 'to explore and show how critical reflection on the historical, cultural and normative roots of Europe´s cultural and democratic practices and institutions contribute to an evolving European identity today'. These assumptions concerned the importance of cultural heritage for communitarian social relations, individual personal development, inclusive senses of belonging and economic development. This was mirrored in official publications such as the Council of Europe's *Conclusions on Cultural Heritage as a Strategic Resource for a Sustainable Europe* (2014) and the Horizon 2020 Expert Group's report *Getting Cultural Heritage to Work for Europe* (2015). Valorizing, sustaining and transmitting cultural heritage were understood as a powerful means of overcoming an 'EU crisis' marked by social and cultural divisions, disparities of wealth between nations, regions and groups, and reduced confidence in the political and social project of the EU.

This political drive, both axiological and instrumental, was articulated before the some of the most divisive issues and representational acts that exercise Europe and the EU now. Subsequently, the Refugee Crisis bolstered views that both European and national identities and values were 'under attack' by cultural others. It fostered tension about quotas and responsibilities that were not simple quantitative matters, but went to the heart of contests about the civility of the European Union and its role in the world. In some quarters the threats associated with the Refugee Crisis, imaginary or otherwise (e.g. the imposition of Sharia Law in European cities, the harassment of women in public and private space, etc.) were conflated with EU Freedom of Movement, often tactically by populist politicians or newsmedia actors attempting to stoke fear, as in the UK prior to Brexit. Nigel Farage, a protagonist in the UK Leave movement, masterminded and fronted one of the most heinous pieces of visual culture of the referendum: the 'Breaking Point' poster, showing a long line of non-white, mostly Syrian refugees of war as though they were queuing at the UK border (actually they were in Slovenia). The anti-EU *Sunday Express* headline threatened (incorrectly) that if the UK were to remain as an EU member state then twelve million Turks would promptly immigrate there. In short, the 'EU crisis' identified in Reflective Societies in 2014 is considerably exacerbated and ramified now, and ideas about commonality in Europe are both more embattled by nationalisms and more divisively mobilized, as with, for example, Viktor Orbán's speech of 12 September 2016. In this he effected a tactical confusion of exclusive nationalism *and* a

[4] http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2014_2015/main/h2020-wp1415-societies_en.pdf

notional European identity. The influx of Muslims, he said, meant that in Hungary 'We may lose our European values, our very identity, by degrees like the live frog allowing itself to be slowly cooked to death in a pan of water.'[5] This appeal to Europeanness was at once a way of highlighting EU member status and a cover for the promotion of an exclusive nationalism, demonstrating the complex discursive interrelation of orders of identity. At the very least this statement prompts critical attention to mobilizations of European commonality.

The instrumental understanding of a European heritage suggested by European Commission actions would seem to lead to the central problematic very well explained by numerous authors (Kockel 2010: 122; Pakier and Stråth 2010; Jarausch 2010). This is that the construction of a *singular* collective European memory is an attractive, but fundamentally self-defeating, means of creating a harmonious cultural space and legitimating the transformation into a 'superstate' within which individual nations would be happy to situate themselves (Pakier and Stråth 2010: 19) and of which people would be happy to call themselves citizens. In this view, constructing a singular collective European memory is self-defeating precisely because the attempt to identify common ground, shared *lieux de mèmoire* and common roots 'has the opposite effect of raising tensions and fostering disagreement' (ibid). As a consequence, an alternative project emerges of demythologizing and deconstructing the notion of a single European memory, and by extension, a single heritage and identity – a project that is bolstered by reflection on the historical contingency of Europe as a mutable geopolitical construct and somewhat arbitrary patch of the globe, with a loose conglomeration of territories, seas and (only later on) of nation states.

Certainly, the EU is one of the most testing crucibles through which national, supranational and transnational histories, discourses and forces encounter and react against one-another. This is critical now, when the communitarian project of the EU seems to be fracturing, and exclusive nationalisms are taking centre stage in some places. If national member states are nested in the EU, then we are witnessing determined attempts from various quarters to break the nest in favour of exclusivist ideas of state sovereignty. But the same populist constructions of nation (and of national history) that are mobilized to break the nest also foment division within individual countries, because they are so often ethically incompatible with liberal and cosmopolitan identities practised by what appears to be a large minority. Such nationalisms also involve a turn away from the idea of a history shared across national borders. Even the negative founding myth – the moral-historical glue of Europe – has become brittle. The post-war European idea of creating the political and social conditions for peace and international solidarity, to remove forevermore any conditions for the recurrence of an event so cataclysmic, so appalling and so replete with moral failure and crimes against humanity, is now publicly invoked remarkably infrequently by the political class.

A possible way between these prospects – one utopian and instrumental but apparently doomed to failure, and the other analytical and deconstructive, but destructive of ideals – is to understand European heritage as diverse *in and of* itself. This is a development of the notion of 'unity in diversity' with increased attention to the nature, historical depth and effects of difference. In other words, Europe might be conceived as a cultural space comprehending multiple heritages and being itself characterized by its heritage of diversity, of mutability, of contacts within and outwith itself, but also of differences, antagonisms and moral failures.

[5] http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-address-in-parliament-before-the-start-of-daily-business20160912

This has the effect of historicizing social cleavages and difficulties rather than resolving them or ignoring them. It does not dissolve accusations between groups or provide fictional closures. It also makes redundant any project to harmonize national histories with European ones, and allows that the same transnational events can be meaningful in different ways according to contrasting national positions. This works against a notional singular, collective European memory, where actually any constituent event (such as World War Two) takes on diverse inflections, affects and meanings, according to the contrasting standpoints from which it is apprehended (including nationalistic ones). It recalls Jeffrey Olick's distinction between 'collected' rather than 'collective' memory (1999), and Natan Sznaider's, that there is 'nothing wrong with divided memories or narratives'. Sznaider explains:

> [Divided memories or narratives] are not 'noise' in an integrated system. They do not need to become united. Common narratives are not common in the sense that everybody should tell the same story. Instead the *recognition* of the different narratives is the crux of the matter… It primarily involves a kind of conflict-ridden history, in which various groups, linked across national boundaries and cleavages, seek to live with the conflict without necessarily trying to overcome it, engaged in the quest for a common narrative but without ever actually hoping to reach it. In doing so, to a certain extent they change their own identities and create new opportunities for political action (Sznaider 2013: 63; emphasis added).

Comparably, Michael Rothberg, in the context of his formulation of multidirectional memory proposes an 'ethical vision' involving the recognition (not the resolution) of the 'conflicting claims that constitute the archives of memory and the terrain of politics' (Rothberg 2009: 29). The CoHERE project was built around a similar project: a recognition that ethics necessarily, ineluctably attaches to heritage, and that it is a good thing to try to enable peaceful civil relations based upon the idea that there may be some common heritages; but that at the same time heritage can be divisive and used by actors to create or exacerbate contemporary social cleavages. We ignore this at the peril of constructing fictional heritages and mythic closures, blinding out historical connections that would help us to make sense of life and circumstance in the present. At the same time the project outline expresses scepticism about the idea of a singular European identity or heritage, and wariness at the idea of engineering them. While it may surprise some readers (as it did me), part of the reason for the European Commission decision to fund the CoHERE project was precisely its realist attention to difficulties and antagonisms, that are hard to smooth away through 'soft' heritage politics. This may be because the 'EU crisis' referenced in the Reflective Societies programme had reached such a pitch that it was necessary to face such prospects. It may also be a result of official recognition that heritage politics – particularly concerning the status of the national in, or in relation to, the EU – are deeply imbricated in the very conditions of 'crisis' that beset the European project. But if a European shared history is impossible unless it is 'conflict-ridden' then is the national frame a more constructive one to address past and present?

The liabilities of the national frame

With the EU-funded Eunamus project ('European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, 2010-2013) Peter Aronsson and his colleagues understood that the variety of museal forms associated with concepts of 'the nation' is too great for a single critique, so that 'national museums' were understood not so much in a statutory sense but as 'processes of institutionalized negotiations where material collections and displays make claims and are recognized as articulating and representing national values

and realities' (Aronsson 2011: 117). At a time when questions of sovereignty are so closely hitched to investments in national distinctiveness and historical mythology, the idea of 'representing national values and realities' seems a fraught one. For some, the sense of the nation as a shared identity is fatally compromised. Brexit in the UK, a threatened 'Frexit' in France, and the more general rise of populist political movements there and elsewhere, reveal more clearly in the countries concerned the illusory nature of the Andersonian imagined community. These things have 'denounced the abyss', to borrow what Marx said of the events of 1848 (in McLellan 2000: 368). Where social divisions may previously have been latent or generally somewhat unnoticed, now ideological rifts might seem so significant as to overwhelm senses of shared national identity. For many, 'the nation' is not the secure ground it may previously have seemed and there are few certainties about national political futures. Reviewing the Estonian National Museum opened in October 2016, architecture critic Rowan Moore voiced the same concern, commenting that 'for a European country to build a national museum at this moment, when nationalism is taking new and unpredictable forms, is perilous' (2017). In other words, the national frame has dangerous liabilities; it can be co-opted to power exclusive and divisive positions in the present that recall – as Phillipe Sands and others have done – Europe's darkest times.

Irrespective of the political arguments against a national frame, some museums have taken on historiographical arguments against it, by emphasizing transnational perspectives on the historical movement of peoples and people, goods, objects, ideas, capital, religions and so on, for example in the Ashmolean Museum's 'Crossing Cultures, Crossing Time' redisplay of 2009, or the Danish National Museum's 2012 'Europe Meets the World' exhibition. These deal in onerously complex historiography and it is perhaps this that gives them their tendency to revert to stock meta-narratives as anchor points (e.g. Hellenistic Antiquity as starting point). But nevertheless they attempt a global view, which has the capacity to transcend national perspectives without willing nations out of history (see also Macdonald 2003). As a coeval development, novelist Orhan Pamuk's appeal to break the national frame in museums in favour of an everyday, human one is also suggestive, not least in the context of the current interest in personal voices and testimony in the museum.[6] As he puts it, 'we do not need more museums that attempt to construct a historical narrative of our society and community as a narrative of faction, nation and state' (Pamuk 2012). However, instead of Pamuk's insistence on the individual as the right frame to comprehend history, I find even more compelling Jeffrey Olick's account of multiple 'systems of memory', as an inclusive representational scheme attentive to the intersections and traversals that configure our positions:

> [There are multiple systems of memory], including the region, along with the global system a level up, and nation states, localities, families and even individuals as other analytical – but not concretely – independent systems… These are not merely nested like Matryoshka dolls, one inside the other, [rather]… flows and effects of memory can leap between different orders, from system to system, in a wide variety of ways" (Olick 2016: xii).

If it were possible to represent in museums such flows and leaps – to identify and track them as part of the transnational cultural histories that some museums have attempted – would this not be a better frame with which to view our place in geohistory? It seems to me to offer a more historically sensitive alternative to the national frame, that has the added benefit of

[6] URL. This was reiterated in Pamuk's keynote at the 2016 ICOM conference.

avoiding the reductive and exclusivist determinations that latter is liable to inspire. At the same time, it is not equivalent to a merely transnational position, and does not say that the nation is unimportant. Furthermore, in its attention to other systems and sites of memory – the locality, the family, the individual – it can help to bypass a reductive dichotomy between national and supranational realities. Life is, after all, about more than that. It opens up the possibility of a 'more-than' position of apprehension (more-than national, more-than local and so on) that can help both to avoid the limitations of the single 'system' and to mitigate against people's investments in simplistic identity positions that lead to us-them logics.

Neglect

The need for new reflexivity around Holocaust memory discussed earlier also suggests a review of neglect for other histories – histories that might be too far removed from us temporally or affectively to be difficult, or too recent to be safe. Time and distance are at issue: seventy years (since the Holocaust) is an 'edgy' amount of time, literally. It is at the edges of autobiographical memory. It is, at least in some places and times, at the edge of safety and the edge of difficulty, which is what makes it so powerful. Meanwhile, the establishment of mythic closures of difficult history can obscure its connections to contemporary social antagonisms that are truly 'difficult' now. The heinous acts of 'lone wolves' such as Anders Breivik in Norway, or Thomas Mair, who murdered pro-Remain MP Jo Cox in the UK, are not really extricable from the long history of European fascisms and racisms. The multicultural society that they hate, and the structural disadvantage and racist abuse experienced by ethnic minorities in European countries, are not really extricable from the historical pursuit of territorial or national advantage, of which colonialism is just one example. To be sure, it would be crass to conflate such historical and contemporary phenomena, but it is also disingenuous to separate the latter from the former. These points seem almost too basic to make, and yet in official heritage and museum culture we too often fail to make the connections.

There are two problems of museal representation enfolded here: the first is that a limited number of 'pasts' are explored as 'difficult'. While avoiding any 'zero-sum' memory contest (Rothberg 2009), it is easy to identify other pasts to explore that would be difficult if they were opened to scrutiny. Pakier and Warwrzyniak (2016: 9) suggest that 'Europe is gradually becoming a hotpot of new rival historical narratives' such as those of the Balkan conflict, the Holodomor, or the contestation of the Armenian Genocide by Turks living in the EU, that do not make it into conventional and official heritage and memory culture precisely because they are so tense and contested. These, more than the dominant paradigm of the Holocaust, are the really 'hot memories' to use Charles S. Maier's terminology (2002). We can extend this list, very far back and forth in time, to face difficulties that might turn out in other histories if they are afforded attention; to name a few: crusader massacres; blockades, trade wars, punitive expeditions/acts; collaboration and complicity with occupiers/oppressive regimes, out-of-territory interventionism (and sometimes non-interventionism), refugeeism and national and European responses to it, women's struggles and rights, slavery, child labour, neo-Fascism, and so on. Some of these are not 'over' or, if they are, have nevertheless materially determined contemporary cultural, political, economic and social circumstances, however indirect this may feel. Difficult histories can often be presented as 'finished' or complete. But they rarely are: they have effects in the present and have causal links to contemporary phenomena that are either ignored or misleadingly presented as novel and discrete.

The second problem of museal representation is that from the perspective of the history of the present, difficult history is happening now, but the present is rarely viewed in museums with a historical perspective, which is to say that we should present a history of the present. A number of objections are often raised against doing so: that it is 'too raw'; 'too sensitive'; not 'processed'; 'we don't have the correct distance from events'; 'you can see that stuff on the news; you don't need it in a museum'; that the museum is a space of leisure; and that as a technology, display/exhibition is too slow to deal with this (it is 'not the right medium'). We need to rethink all of the assumptions involved in the current state of avoidance of contemporary difficulties lest our museums become spaces of ignorance.

As a case in point, one I have discussed elsewhere, here is an emblematic story about the Museum of London. The museum – across its two branches – has for some time taken a politically and socially progressive stance and presents multiculturalism positively, as something unequivocally good for London, not least because it brings a cultural diversification of what London can offer (Whitehead et al 2015: 32; see also Ross 2015: 73); it is the serendipitous legacy or side effect of the otherwise difficult story of colonialism. In response, the right-wing populist British National Party was for a time in the habit of dropping leaflets in the galleries to argue the opposite – that multiculture and diversity are inimical to a truly British identity. These leaflets were routinely cleared away by museum staff (Ross, pers. comm.). While racism *in the past* was a topic covered in displays (including the inherent racism of the British colonial project), connected antagonisms and racisms *in the present* went unacknowledged. This is in part a problem of our attitudes to time and timelags, and the question of when it is that things become 'safe to talk about'. Perhaps it was not 'safe' to talk about the BNP at that time (and doing so may bring tricky public order issues into play that also need to be negotiated). It is clear that difficulty is not a matter of counting clock time, as similar mnemonic references can have very different temperatures in different places, or for different groups. How then can museums engage with this problem of our positions in, and on, history?

History and serious play in the museum

'History' in the museum can be seen not just in the vernacular sense of 'what happened', but as a mode of apprehension. This involves techniques that position the visitor in relation to phenomena and narratives, and that effect interplays between proximate and distanced positions. These can be modulated to achieve different kinds of visitor experience, from emotional, immersive ones to detached and critical ones. Sometimes, conventional museum techniques can be used to historicize contemporary rifts, putting them 'behind glass' and providing the necessary distance to view them holistically (literally, a BNP leaflet could be put behind glass and historicized) or else we can create immersive accounts of distant events to which visitors might otherwise feel little personal connection. Just as difficulty can become safe through habitude, so too might lesser-known pasts be framed as difficult for heuristic purpose, whether for moral reflective work or to better understand why things are as they are, or to help people gain historical awareness that overcomes their entrenched incomprehension of the situations and beliefs of others. As Mark Salber Phillips has noted, 'every history has to take on the task of positioning its audience in relation to a past' (2006: 89).

This technical engagement through modes of display can also be allied to a creative one in which positionality creates opportunities for visitors to see things from unusual viewpoints, or to make more expansive and searching connections between past and present. Some work

has been afoot here for years, particularly in museums that make use of personal voices in order to engender empathetic responses. Visitors come face to face with the human dimension of difficulty, ideally gaining 'a sensibility with the capacity to unsettle the self, enabling a possibility of reflexive critique and transformative insight regarding one's relationship to the past and one's complicity with established historical certainties' (Bonnell and Simon 2007: 69). This can align with Pamuk's call for a human frame, not just to construct an empathy position but to enable visitors to observe the influence on people's lives of geohistorical forces, or what it means to live in time and place. This comes with cautions about the liabilities and limitations of empathy (Kidd 2014: 10; Pedwell 2014), which is often problematically understood in the museum sector as an unambiguously good thing.

The example of the BNP leaflet also prompts a view of the past as unsequestered from the present. The closed boxes of the past can be opened thinking through the past-present links between phenomena – for example how colonialism, war and post-war reconstruction and economic migration are imbricated in contemporary multiculture, inequalities and racisms; or how contemporary islamophobia connects to historical culture clashes and fear of the other. These narratives can be produced through global history approaches that make deeper historical connections and take longer views, and by mapping in museums what Rothberg calls the 'conflicting claims that constitute the archives of memory and the terrain of politics' (Rothberg 2009: 29). These archives are never completed, and are perpetually re-ordered, and the terrain is not static. The positions on the past that we occupy in given times and places are unique, and this can be exploited, as Eva Hoffman argues, to 'try to see aspects of the past that may not have been perceptible at other moments and from other perspectives' (Hoffman 2000: 9). 'Long' discursive connections often characterize divisive mobilizations of heritage, as with the interest in the Crusades or the repulsion of the Ottomans at Vienna in 1683 held by elements of the European Far Right. It seems appropriate to respond to this with an alternative account of history and past-present relations.

The final type of heuristic game I propose is temporal play: to transport things from past to present (or living memory), or from present to past, to subject them to a different experiential, attitudinal and political gaze. How would we deal in a museum with the Ayyadieh Massacre of 1191 as if it had happened last week, with the Norman invasion if it had happened only 70 years ago, or with the neo-Nazi sympathies of today's 'lone wolf' murderers, if different intervals of time had passed? How might we see, present and represent Srebrenica, intervention in Iraq or the Refugee Crisis one century from now? What if a museum display were to work backwards instead of forwards in time, or to expand one moment globally? This should not be some fatuous kind of roleplay, or a way of reverse-engineering history so that it resolves on a harmonious cadence or goes differently (as when the 'English' beat the 'French' at 1066 battle re-enactments), but a set of serious games to question our relationships to time and place and make us rethink difficulty, distance, proximity, identity, the nation, prompting us as collectives and individuals to consider how we are positioned and constituted in these relations, who we are, and who we might become.

My suggestion here is that playing seriously with position and perspective is a way to engage difficulty in more thoughtful ways, checking routinized practices and habitual paradigms, and understanding why the past is critical, or why heritage is embedded in crisis. It is serious play that can test our tolerances to difficulty. It can render the complexities of geohistory constructively in ways that are liable to open minds and dislodge habitual identity positions and practices, to foster a general ethical project of openness to other ways of being in the

world that can support critical outlooks and political action (Amin and Thrift 2013: 158). It can engage us as archaeologists of crisis. Through serious play we can be helped to break out of the national frame at least momentarily, but without denying that nations and national positions are structuring forces, just as families or cities or supranational matters are. It can create, in this sense, a 'more-than' potential of apprehension through which identities can be shocked out of habitude. Finally, forms of serious play may unlock new ways of dealing with difficulty. The point of this is not to provide closure for difficulty or to 'resolve' memory contests, but to identify avenues for recognition, apprehension and engagement. The questions to end (and begin) with are: through what forms of museum and heritage representation can we be enabled to inhabit more spaces, times and positions, or 'systems' and 'orders' of memory, in order to understand their complexity and connectivity? And then, to what good effect?

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