

**Memory and Power: two movements\***

Mário de Souza Chagas

**Introduction**

*Therefore: it is possible to live almost without remembrance, and even happily, as shown by the animal; but it is entirely impossible, without forgetting, to simply live.*

Nietzsche

*To sow memory.  
So that forgetting does not grow.*

Visual poem  
opus 2/96 <sup>19</sup>

The institutions that work with the preservation and diffusion of cultural heritage - be them archive, libraries, museums, art galleries or cultural centres - present a certain discourse about reality. To understand this discourse, composed by sound and silence, by fullness and emptiness, by presence and absence, by remembrance and forgetting, an operation is implied, not only with the enunciation of speech and its gaps, but also the comprehension of that which causes to speak, of who is speaking and of the point whence one speaks.

Preservation and destruction, or, in another way, conservation and loss, walk hand in hand in the arteries of life. As suggested by Nietzsche (1999, p.273), it is impossible to live without loss, it is

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<sup>19</sup> Reedited in 1997, at the 1<sup>st</sup> Mercosul Biennale. The reference involves the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

entirely impossible to live avoiding destruction to play its game and drive the dynamics of life on.<sup>20</sup>

However, by means of a kind of tautological argument, one often justifies preservation by the imminence of loss and memory by the threat of forgetting. Thus, one ceases to consider that the game and the rules of the game between forgetting and memory are not fed by themselves and that preservation and destruction are not opposed in a deadly duel, but instead they complement one another and are always at the service of subjects that build themselves and are built through social practices.

To indicate that memories and forgettings can be sown and cultivated corroborates the importance of working towards the denaturalisation of these concepts and towards the understanding that they result from a construction process also involving other forces, such as: power. Power is a sower, a promoter of memories and forgettings.

The present text hopes to contribute, albeit in a plain way, to the analyses of the relationships between memory and power within cultural institutions that intend to deal with the preservation of knowledge, of value, of truth, of memory, of witness/testimonial, of the comprobatory document and of the monument. To recognise that there are relationships between power and memory implies in the politicisation of remembrances and forgettings. Memory – voluntary or involuntary, individual or collective – is, as known, always selective. Its selective character should be enough to indicate its articulations with the devices of power. These articulations and the form with which they cut through and make use of certain survivings,

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<sup>20</sup> I would like to say: the civilising process and the construction dynamics of the individual.

representations or reconstructions of the past in the present is what we intend to study, starting from the principle that no relationship with the past is, in itself (Santos, 1993: p.83), emancipating or coercive.

The present text is divided into two parts or movements: the first movement discusses the relationships between memory and power in cultural heritage preservation institutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, and the second movement approaches the same relationships in the present day, within the territory of the so-called “traditional” museums, and also within the scope of those that intend to develop new proposals and are ready to be guided by “new paradigms”. If there is some originality in this approach, surely, it is not to be found in the contribution for the understanding of memory and of power as isolated forces, but instead in the understanding that in the museums this couple dances together.

### **1<sup>st</sup> MOVEMENT: exploding memory**

*The memory accumulated until then explodes in the 1789 Revolution: could it not have been its great detonator?*

Jacques Le Goff

The admission that accumulated memory may have been the great detonator of the 1789 Revolution leads the researcher to admit that if there is a movement of memory towards a past that crystallises there – such as the “cult of nostalgia”<sup>21</sup>, a remembrance that alienates and evades the subject from itself and its time, a reified remembrance

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<sup>21</sup> Expression coined by Gustavo Barroso, Integralist ideologist and creator of the National History Museum, to refer to the functions that, according to his point of view, should be found within a history museum.

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saturated of itself and, because of that, devoid of the possibility of creation and innovation – there is also a movement of memory that is directed towards the present. It is the clash between these two movements, with the victory – albeit temporary – of the latter, which generates the possibility of memory to constitute itself in a great detonator of transformations or social and individual changes.

To move towards the past, without any perspective of change, implies in the commemoration of the established order, the affirmation of the juridical order, of given cultural values, of the imposed scientific truth, the repetition of knowledge.

The movement of memory that is directed towards the present, operating as a kind of counter-memory (Foucault, 1999: p.33), articulates with life and is placed, as Nietzsche would say, “on the threshold of the instant, forgetting all pasts”. According to the author of **On the Benefit and Harm of History to Life** (1999: p.273), he who isn’t capable of these forgettings will not be able to keep concentrated on a single point, as a victory goddess, and “will never know what happiness is, and, worse of all, will never do something that will make the others happy”. A man who could not forget anymore would lose his own humanity and next the power to act<sup>22</sup>.

Along this path, one understands that on admitting that accumulated memory may have been the detonating device of the 1789 Revolution, the way to the comprehension that in the midst of accumulated memory (a saturated solution) a counter-memory can operate and may flow into the power to act opens up.

Advancing a little further. If on the one hand memory explodes in the Revolution, on the other hand the Revolution

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<sup>22</sup> It is impossible not to establish a connection between these ideas by Nietzsche and Jorge Luís Borges short story titled, *Funes, the memorious*.

inaugurates new memory articulations. A new and modern network (of power and memory) is built, a network through which new class relations pass, new relations with the body, with justice, with politics, with the economy, with education, with intellectual production, with religion, with the public and private institutions.

The French Revolution institutes memory landmarks (dates, heroes and monuments) articulated with a new concept of nation. The commemoration of these new landmarks will be inserted into the revolutionary project. The feasts will not only be feasts, but also remembrances of the victorious Revolution. The memory that has been the detonating device of the new, is now used to remember, to commemorate, to guarantee the inaugurated order (in the past). Used to oppose the old ruling class, memory is now put to use by the bourgeoisie and goes on to subtly or unsubtly penetrate the schools<sup>23</sup>, museums, libraries, archives, as well as artistic, religious, philosophical and scientific production.

Initially conceived as “places” of the revolutionary project, the museums, archives, libraries and schools made into public institutions have multiplied and reached the present day as collective heritage and instituted memory. The National Archives were created

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<sup>23</sup> Those interested in the school and memory subject can refer to Lilian do Valle's works, specially **The Imaginary School** [A Escola Imaginária ] (1997) and the article **Memory and Heritage: meaning from the state school** [ *Memória e patrimônio: os sentidos que vêm da escola pública*]. In the latter, the author writes: “The state school is a revolutionary heritage conservation institution as it gives visibility – and more: it gives life, guarantees the existence of such values (...) From the point of view of society, the state School can be called a memory institution, but of memory of what is yet to come, memory of what it is intended to be prepared for the future, memory of a project that renders it permanently visible in the midst of society”. (1997: p. 96)

in France in 1790, and opened to the public in 1794. In the case of museums, the situation was not different. The will of the bourgeoisie to affirm itself as the ruling class involved the creation of a clearly drawn museological project. As Suano (1986, p.28) indicates: “In the year 1792, the revolutionary assemblies proposed and the National Convention approved the creation of four museums with an explicitly political aim, at the service of the new order. “These four museums are the following: 1<sup>st</sup> the **Louvre Museum**, inaugurated on August 10 1793 (the fall of the monarchy landmark)<sup>24</sup>, exalts civilisation, produces the nation’s eulogy and highlights its own participation in the universal concert as heir to Western classical values by privileging the consecrated works of art, later placing at its side artefacts by “primitive” peoples and from colonised countries; 2<sup>nd</sup> the **Monuments Museums**, inaugurated in 1795, it constitutes the archetypal “memory-museum”<sup>25</sup>, aiming at rebuilding the nation’s grandiose past, celebrating and commemorating the great feat; 3<sup>rd</sup> the **Natural History Museum**<sup>26</sup>, inaugurated on June 10 1793, emerging from the

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<sup>24</sup> Per Bjurström (1995: p.560) states that the choice of date meets well defined political interests: on the one hand the Revolution’s anniversary is celebrated, and on the other hand, it shows how “democratic State was able to carry out in a single year what the *Ancien Regime* wasn’t able to do in twenty.” Since 1777 the idea of transforming the Great Louvre Gallery into Royal Museum was under way.

<sup>25</sup> The “memory-museum” and the “narrative-museum” are two museological archetypes studied by Myrian S. dos Santos in her thesis: *History, time and Memory: a study about museums from observations made at the Imperial Museum and the National History Museum [História, Tempo e Memória: um estudo sobre museus a partir da observação feita no Museu Imperial e no Museu Histórico Nacional]*. IUPERJ, 1989.

<sup>26</sup> As stated by Foucault: “The documents of this new history are not other words, texts or archives, but instead the clear spaces in which things are

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Medicinal Plants Royal Garden, and is geared towards classificatory scientific development, naturally ordering-prone, since nature's history is also the revelation of the natural order of beings and things; and 4<sup>th</sup> the **Arts and Craft Museum**, guided towards the technical occupations and practical achievements, installed in 1802, as the *Conservatoire des arts et métiers*.

This singular museological<sup>27</sup> plan deserves attention. The power in exercise widens its relations network, produces new meanings, establishes thought lines, determines what should be known, multiplies the memory institutions (and forgetting ones) attributing to them a role of knowledge source, of "light" and of "enlightenment". These four museums, whose project is sketched in general lines at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, gain a body and develop in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, which, as is known, is the "museums' golden age" (Bréon, 1994: p.4) This quartet is constituted from the exercise of

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juxtaposed: herb gardens, collections, gardens; the place of this history is an non-temporal rectangle in which, devoid of all commentary, of all language twists an turns, beings present themselves side by side, with their visible surfaces, approximated by their common features, and in this way already virtually analysed and bearers of their own name." (1966:p.176)

<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to observe that the project for the creation of the National Artistic Heritage Service (SPAN), elaborated by Mário de Andrade in 1936, within the 1930 Revolution Programme, also suggests the creation of other national museums: the archaeological and ethnographic museum (which should result from the transformation of the Quinta da Boa Vista National Museum); the history museum (which should result from the development of the National History Museum); the Fine Art gallery (created in 1937, under the name of Fine Art National Museum) and the industrial techniques and applied arts museum (which did not exist and was never created). This museological project by Mário de Andrade keeps close relations with that sketched at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

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grouping beings, things and images under specific namings and functions. The beings within museums come to be the memory of nature and of life, excluded from the field of relations, they are framed within the *natural drawers* of the order of repetition. These must also be disciplined and organised with the support of memory, of experience, of thought on that which has been produced. Thought itself comes to be, repeatedly, derived from memory. Images placed within museums, submitted to an aesthetic pattern, find their own place and come to be monuments, reliable witnesses, memory records.

As clarified by Emmanuel Bréon, from 1789 on, the Revolution has started a process of confiscation of national property that had been under the possession of royalty, and, at the same time, a process of destruction of the remembrances of the *Ancien Regime*. “To secure the safeguard of these riches, [the Revolution] should create a neutral space, that **induced the forgetting**<sup>28</sup> of its religious monarchic and feudal signification: this space would be the museum” (1994: p.4). Bréon’s clarification favours the understanding of the subtleties of the exercise of power articulated with memory and forgetting. The museological project is aligned with the revolutionary ideal as it conceives museums as public institutions open to the public. A faithful depositary of property taken from the private sphere of royalty and inserted into the public sphere in the name of the Revolution, the museum also becomes the conservator of remembrances of the *Ancien Regime*, remembrances represented by means of material property that has escaped the guillotine by the safe-conduct of a supposed collective and national interest. National interest is a homogenising discourse. In the case of museums, it is also

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<sup>28</sup> My highlight.



the argument that sustains the continuity and permanence of riches and artistic and scientific values.

Abbott Grégoire's 1794 declaration to the National Convention, allows the identification of those in whose name remembrances should be saved: "Let us inscribe – says he – in all monuments and let us engrave on our hearts this sentence: the barbarians and slaves detest the sciences and destroy the art monuments; free men love them and conserve them." (1994: p.4) Therefore, the conservation of the sciences, arts and monuments, is meant to the "free men", to the successful bourgeois. Those who do not know, who do not enjoy the arts, those who do not identify with the monuments are "barbarians" or "slaves", and in any case are excluded politically from the process of memory building.

In the 18th Century and during a long period of the 19th, museums, the arts and monuments played a triple role: the education of the individual, stimulating its aesthetic sense and the affirmation of the national. The "barbarians" and the "slaves" were therefore placed outside the reach of this triple aim. In other words: modernity's museums are also disciplinary devices, they individualise their users, qualify their visitors and demand knowledges, behaviours, gestures and specific languages for the fruition of its property and enjoyment of its spaces. The power to discipline within museums is revealed in a clear manner by means of four aspects or four "basic characteristics" (Foucault, 1977: p.125-199 and Machado, 1999: p.VII-XXIII): 1<sup>st</sup> – the organisation of space. By means of museographic procedures the space is organised and individualised. Rooms, ambiences, circulations and circuits, related to specific and hierarchised functions are created. 2<sup>nd</sup> – **Time Control.** In the temple of memory time is controlled, no matter how free it may seem. There is an ideal speed for the museum's users: it is not convenient to be too quick, nor too slow.

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There is an ideal time for the bodies to enter and leave the museum. This ideal time is linked to the idea of a principle of normality for the absorption of knowledge of which the museum is the gentle depositary or faithful prison guard. Besides, there are timetables and interdictions; **3<sup>rd</sup> Vigilance and safety of heritage.** If the museum keeps peerless monuments, documents, treasures and riches, and if the “barbarians” and “slaves” only relate to them in order to steal, damage and destroy them, it is necessary to protect this array of property. This will be one of the main functions of the conservators, fiscal agents for things and of beings. It is necessary to ostensibly invigilate and at the same time keep an “invisible” gaze over the threats that hover over property placed within the museum. Among those threats, the public is highlighted. It is necessary to ostensibly invigilate the public, so that the public comes to invigilate the public. **4<sup>th</sup> – The production of knowledge.** The power to discipline in the museums also generates specific knowledges regarding space, time, collected property, to the public and the produced knowledge itself. This new knowledge will come to be applied again for the improvement of disciplinary power.

Before and after the Revolution, the hierarchisation of the fruition possibilities of property placed within museums is a fact. Only two examples, among many possible: 1<sup>st</sup> – in 1773, Sir Ashton from *Alkrington Hall (Manchester)* published in English newspapers a note where he stated:

(...) having tired of the common People’s insolence, whom I have benefited with visits to my museum, I have arrived at the resolution of refusing access to the lower class, except when its members bear a written note by a Gentleman or Lady of my acquaintance. And by means of this I authorise any of my friends to furnish a note to any orderly man to bring along eleven people, in

addition to himself, and for whose behaviour he is responsible, according to instructions that he will receive at the entrance.<sup>29</sup>

2<sup>nd</sup> - Twenty years later, in 1793, the *projet et règlement pour le Muséum français* established that the first 5 days out of a group of ten would be reserved to study by artists, and in the other days the museum would remain open to the rest of the public. Later, as revealed by Bjurström (1993: p.560), the days reserved for the public would be reduced to three and the ones reserved for artists increased to seven.

In the two examples one finds the blueprint for a policy that hierarchises uses and users of museum property, establishing who is allowed in and when, and also in what way he or she can use the museum and their collections. The first example valorises the social relations of a well-defined group of friends, stimulates the exchange of favours and fixes canonical behaviour. The second privileges, in a very special way, artists in detriment of other publics.<sup>30</sup> More than a privilege, this facilitated access is an exchange of favours, a permutation of powers, since it is the artists who are going to build the monumental artworks to secure the glory, the immortality, the presence in the body of the memory of images, of the feats and the

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<sup>29</sup> See the book **O que é museu** (Suano, 1986: p.27)

<sup>30</sup> Per Bjurström, in his texts **Les premiers musées d'art en Europe et leur public** (1993: p.560) informs that the Louvre's regulations excluded prostitutes and drunken people from the museum. The exclusion regulations, besides individualising segments of the public, allow the supposition that the museum was of interest, for different motives, to a very diverse public. A question lingers in the air: what did prostitutes and drunkards do inside a museum?

heroisms of a few revolutionaries who ended up acting as the old representatives of the nobility and of the clergy.

The historical heritage preservation institutions multiply in the 19th Century. Museums and monuments spread everywhere, having as the main irradiating pole Europe's colonising countries. Nation-building projects involve the construction of museums to order memories, knowledges and the arts.

The European expansionist movement finds in the institutionalisation of memory – understood as the creation and maintenance of museums, libraries and archives – an instrument and a path for the affirmation of bourgeois values. In this sense, these institutions are also a *mirror* or a *stage* (in the specific case of museums) where the transformations in operation within European society and the achievements carried out by the bourgeoisie are, in some way, reflected and presented.

Ethnographic, anthropological and historical museums are, in a strict sense, inventions of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. One needs to understand them within the same framework analysed by Foucault in *The Words and the Things*. “Human sciences – states the author – appeared on the day that Man was constituted in Western culture simultaneously as what was necessary to think about and what is there to know”. (1966: p. 448) As a consequence, the museums featuring a human sciences bias or even the museums of Mankind could only have been constituted later.

In Denmark, for instance, the creation process of the national ethnography museum (*Dansk Folkemuseum*, officially opened in 1885), began with the work of Bernhard Olsen, from 1879 on. Alongside this museum, that is: at the same time and in the same space, Olsen opened a *panoptikon*. He reconstituted in a realistic manner scenes illustrating historical events and representing famous

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characters using wax manikins (Maure, 1993: p.151) The word *panoptikon* has the meaning of an invigilating place, a central point or position from which the observer enjoys peripheral vision. Studying the origins of clinical medicine and penalty issues, Foucault (1972, 1975 and 1979) finds the title *Panoptikon*, by English jurist Jeremy Bentham, edited at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Foucault states that it is a kind of “Columbus’ egg in the political order”. The *panoptikon* is thus described by the French philosopher:

(...) a ring-like construction in the periphery; a tower in the middle; this tower is slit with large windows that open over the inner side of the ring; the peripheral construction is divided into cells, each one cutting through the whole of the construction’s thickness; they feature two windows, one opening to the interior, corresponding to the tower’s windows; the other, opening to the exterior, allows light to sweep the cell from one side to the other. Suffice to place an invigilator in the central tower, and in each cell to lock a mad person, a sick person, a convicted prisoner, a worker or school person. (...) The panoptical device organises spatial units so that they allow non-stop watch and immediate recognition. In short, the principle of the jailhouse is inverted; or, better, of its three functions – to lock, to deprive of light and to hide – only the first one is kept, and the other two are suppressed. The full light and the invigilator’s gaze apprehend better than the shadow, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap. (1977: p.177)

The museological *panoptikon* conceived by Olsen at the end of the 19th Century, in addition to witnessing the penetration powers of the architectural figure idealised by Bentham, also suggests that the approximation between museums and power technologies are many

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and need to be investigated in depth.<sup>31</sup> To reduce the *panoptikon* to an ideal optical system and from there justify its museological application, detaching it from the exercise of power is, at least, to hide the issue. It is interesting to ask, then: who is being taken out of the jailhouse, of darkness, out of the hiding place? Who is being immersed in a new light and vision field? Who watches and what is watched? Who watches whom?

It would be possible to think that the Olsen's museological *panoptikon* seeks to take museums themselves out of darkness and throw them in a new light field. In this case, the museums are what is invigilated and controlled. Wouldn't the very museological *panoptikon* be a cell or a peripheral in relation to a wider panoptical device?

It would be also possible to think that a collection, the collection, the whole of the historical, artistic and natural heritage is what is being taken out of darkness, out of the shade and replaced in an environment of light, in full visibility. It is true that to this day some basements and museological storages (kinds of jailhouses) hold boxed up cultural property, imprisoned, detached from the public eye. It is interesting to understand that the exhibition of a collection is linked to a certain discourse, to a certain discursive know-how. Thus, on giving more visibility to the collection, what is done is to affirm or confirm a discourse. What is exposed to the watcher's view are not objects, but speeches, narratives, histories, memories, characters in a cell, in the scene and in wax, frozen events. In this case, what is meant to be imprisoned and at the same time to leave one to view is memory, history, truth and knowledge. It is not bodies (sick and convicted) that

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<sup>31</sup> This research field, as far as I know, is practically unexplored.

are in the rooms or cells of the museological *panoptikon* but their simulacra, their wax doubles. Double prison.

It is possible to think, further, that the user (the visitor, the public) is what is being taken out of darkness and thrown into light. In this case, the visitor is the one being watched in the cell, invigilated, controlled by the eyes of the wax manikins, who want above all to condition knowledge, the gaze, behaviour and emotion itself.

The museological *panoptikon* is, strictly speaking, all of this at the same time and in the same space. The museum is watcher and watched. The watched collection also meant to invigilate. The public watches the scenes, the ambiances, the reconstitutions of the real and is watched by the invigilators' eyes, but also by the wax eyes, by the invisible gaze. All of this is related to a knowledge that wants to be luminous and illuminating.

Let the researcher add to these reflections the idea that the *panoptikon* is more than an optical equipment or an architectural system imprisoned within the reach of physical vision, it is a concept that allows to break with the limits of the gaze's scope and to create other gazes. This procedure allows us to think of Europe as a central tower, slit by windows opening to a peripheral construction, in a ring, divided into cells or colonies.

The development of museums beyond the European "central tower" and from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century is a colonialist phenomenon:

As argued by Hugues de Varine: "It was the European countries that have imposed on the non-European their analysis method of the cultural phenomenon and heritage; they have forced the elites and the peoples of these countries to see their own culture with European eyes." (1979: p.12)

But the European gaze, it must be added, is also being built and conditioned by the colonial system, since it is an integral part of the relations network. This memory and knowledge-producing gaze is reflected in the museums, be they central or peripheral.

The panorama of Brazilian institutions in charge of the preservation and diffusion of the material and spiritual heritages produced in the relationships with the empirical fields of work, of life and language, has been concretely transformed after the move of the Portuguese court and royal family from Europe to Brazil, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This move, linked to the sequence of events that had unfolded since the Revolution, has brought to the colonies not only the royal family, accompanied by a contingent of over fifteen thousand people, but also new habits, behaviours, flavours and odours, new medical knowledges and practices, new gazes, memories and forgettings.

A memory network that decidedly links Brazil to Europe is built with great speed. European words, books, documents, things, dreams, artists and scientists are brought over to the colony, which becomes the provisional headquarters of the Portuguese monarchy and, above all, “a producing and reproducing centre of its culture and memory” (Schwarcz, 1995: p.24)

Among the institutions created in Brazil as a direct result of the presence of the Royal family, one can highlight the Royal Acclimatisation Garden (1808), the Royal Library (1810), the Sciences, Arts and Crafts Royal Academy (1816) and the Royal Museum (1818). The emergence of such institutions is followed by many questions. For instance, to whom is meant the Royal Museum in a country where the illiterate abound, whose memories are not recorded in books or artworks, but on their bodies and in their daily social practices?



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In order to answer this question one can evoke the remembrance of abbot Grégoire: “the barbarians and slaves detest the sciences and destroy the art monuments; the free men love and conserve them.” Indeed, the created Institution is not geared towards the African, indigenous or mixed peoples; it is meant for the qualification of the Portuguese Crown unto other nations; but it also meets the interests of the Luso-Brazilian aristocracy, of the rich men, of the wealthy families, of the clergy, the artists, of the scientists, the travellers and paradoxically it contributes to the formation of an illustrated elite on a local level. It is for these individuals that the memory institution works as a disciplinary power device, indicating what can be known, what can be remembered and forgotten, what and how it can be said and done. In other words: museums, libraries, archives, institutes and academies are mirrors and stages on which the society’s dramaturgy to which they refer is staged and that on articulating a certain discourse, they also condition the gaze and imprison understanding, science and art.

The research here presented has been guided to punctually understand the relations between memory and power in modern cultural heritage preservation institutions, with emphasis on the 18th and 19th Centuries museums. Although they are not part of the scope of our investigation – for the next movement will be dedicated to the study of some alternative museological proposals – I want to highlight the importance of research geared towards the relations between memory and power in Socialist countries museums and even the importance of the project of a Universal (or Global) Museum, conceived by Hitler to be built in Linz, his home town, with the aim of being the biggest and most complete museum of the civilised world, gathering pieces sacked by the Nazi army and others bought by the Führer himself. This museum was not carried out, but was wished to

be the apex of the museums, the synthesis of the museological advances that the bourgeoisie carried out in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, or, as stated by Suano (1986: p.51), “the best expression of capitalistic society”.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> MOVEMENT: between diagnosis and prescription**

*I think of the current ‘retro’ fashion. What is this fashion? Does it mean that certain roots are discovered or that difficulties of the present need to be forgotten?*

Jacques Le Goff

Two movements of memory: one directed towards the past and another geared towards the present. The confrontation between them maintains life dynamics. The victory of the former over the latter is configured as the loss of utopia, the loss of dreams or the “treasure” to which Hannah Arendt has referred to:

The history of revolutions from the Summer of 1776 in Philadelphia, and of Summer 1789 in Paris, to the Autumn of 1956 in Budapest – which have politically deciphered Modern Age’s most hidden story, could be narrated allegorically as the legend of an ancient treasure, which, under the most varied circumstances, emerges in an abrupt and unexpected way, to again disappear as will-o’-the-wisp, under different mysterious circumstances. (...) The loss, perhaps unavoidable in terms of political reality, has come to be due to forgetfulness, to a lapse of memory that has befallen not only the heirs, but, in a certain way, also the actors, the witnesses, those who for a fleeting moment have held the treasure in the palm of their hands; in short, the very living ones. (1992:30-1)

It is often attributed to the memory institutions, and in particular to the museums, the role of safe houses for treasure keeping.<sup>32</sup> But, what if the treasure was lost, what do they keep? And if indeed they keep a treasure, what treasure is this?

Inside museums one normally finds material evidence of certain historical periods. However, symbolic and spiritual values of different shades are associated to these material evidence.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the treasure kept inside museums is not necessarily related to monetary values. This museological treasure, only apparently resides within things, since things are devoid of value in themselves. What is at play here is the construction attempt of a tradition that can link the present to the past (and, who knows, by means a path of an recalcitrant memory, the past to the present?). In other words: if the museum can, on the one hand, mean that the treasure has been lost and that there lies only its double, devoid of potency or life; on the other, it can also remind us that the treasure has existed, and that it has once been in the

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<sup>32</sup> In the period between December 14 1994 and January 8 1995, the Ministry of Culture, through the National Artistic and Historic Heritage Institute, carried out at the Paço Imperial the exhibition titled "Heritage Treasures". It brought together the collections of twelve museums and different typologies: sculptures, paintings, photographs, musical scores, prints, films, natural elements, coins, a princess' dress, a female slave smock, a torture instrument etc.

<sup>33</sup> I side with Jacques Le Goff: "Personally, I do not hesitate in using Michelet's expressions when he states that heritage is spiritual. I understand this as the introduction into the heritage field of the notion of traditions diversity, of the insurrectional movements, of the contestation movements, all that has allowed a people be what it is. To make this concept coincide with objects from a mythicised past is very dangerous." (1986: p.54-5)

hands of the living and that it can abruptly reappear, allowing the meaning of life to be reappropriated.

Thought along these lines, the museum (also devoid of value in itself) is a field where two memory movements meet, from the start marked by the presence of the germs of contradiction and the play of multiple oppositions.

The word museum, as is known, finds its origin in Greece, at the Temple of the Muses, the main building of the Pythagorean institute in Crotona (6th Century b.C.). The Muses, in their turn, were generated from the union celebrated between Zeus (identified with power) and Mnemosyne (identified with memory). The return to the origin of the term museum is nothing new. Many texts bring such reference. Advancing a little, one can recognise, with Pierre Nora (1984), that the museums linked to the muses by inheritance from the mother's side (matrimony) are "places of memory"; but by inheritance from the father's side (patrimony) they constitute configurations and devices of power. Thus, the museums are at once: heirs to memory and power. These two concepts are permanently articulated in the museological institutions.

It is easy to understand, taking this mythical trail, that the museums can be either celebration places for the memory of power or equipment geared towards working with the power of memory. This comprehension is bridled to the recognition of the immunological deficiency regarding the viral contagion of power and the full chemical dependency of power in relation to the lethargy of memory. Memory (prompted or spontaneous) is a construction and is not imprisoned within things; on the contrary, it is sited in the inter-relational dimension between beings, and between beings and things.

With all these ingredients, the researcher is able to understand that the constitution of celebratory museums for the memory of power

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results from the political will of individuals and groups, and represents the concretisation of certain interests. The celebratory museums of memory and power – though they may have originated, in terms of a model, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries – have carried on surviving and multiplying into the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. We are not talking here of institutions lost in the dust of time; on the contrary, the reference falls on museological models that, surpassing the apocalyptic forecasts of some specialists, have survived and continue to pass laws.

For such museums, the celebration of the past (recent or remote) is the touching stone. The cult of nostalgia, of valuable and glorious collections is fundamental. They tend to constitute themselves into weakly democratic spaces where authority's argument prevails, where what matters is the celebration of power or the predominance of a social, ethnical, religious or economical group over other groups. The objects (beings and things), for those who feed such museum models, are power coagulations and indicators of social prestige. Power, in its turn, within these institutions, is conceived as something with a locus of its own, with independent life and concentrated in individuals, institutions or social groups. This conception is distant from that announced by Foucault:

Power is everywhere; not because it encompasses everything but instead because it emanates from all places. And 'the' power, in what it has of permanent, of repetitive, of inert, of self-reproducing, it is only the group effect, sketched from all these modalities, a chain that is supported on each of them, and, in exchange, seeks to fix them. No doubt, we must be nominalists: power is not an institution nor a structure, it is not a certain potency that some are gifted with: it is the name given to a complex strategic situation in a certain society. (1997: p. 89)

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The tendency for the memory of power celebration is responsible for the constitution of ethnocentric and personalistic collections, treated as if they were expressions of the totality of things and beings or the museological reproduction of the universal, as if they could express the real in all its complexity or encompass societies by means of simplistic schemes, from which conflict is banished by means of magic thinking and technical procedures of purification and exclusion.

The close relation between the institutionalisation of memory and the privileged classes has favoured this museum conception. It is not a fruit of chance that many museums are physically located inside buildings that once served a purpose directly linked to instances that are identified and named as headquarters of power or the residence of “powerful” individuals. Exempla: the Republic Museum and the Itamaraty Museum – old republican headquarters of executive power; the Imperial Museum and the Quinta da Boa Vista National Museum – old residences of the Imperial family; the Imperial Palace – the old seat of the executive power; the Deodoro House Museum – old residence of the Republic’s proclaimer; the Rui Barbosa House Museum – former residence of one of the Republic’s minister; the National History Museum – an architectural complex that groups military building from the colonial period (São Tiago Fortress, War Arsenal and the Train House); the Museum of the 1<sup>st</sup> Kingdom – former residency of the Marchioness of Santos, emperor D. Pedro I’s lover.

The indication of these few examples, it is convenient to clarify, does not imply the statement that museums born under a celebratory character are maculated by some original sin and so fated to the reproduction of models that eliminate social participation and

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the possibility of connection with the present. Besides, this statement would amount to the negation of the museum understood as a “body” where power circulates. Thus, inside the very museums, one develops power circulation channels allowing the production of programmes, projects and activities that betray the original mission of the institution.<sup>34</sup> For better or for worse, the museums are not homogenous and entirely coherent blocks. In their veins circulate bodies and antibodies, memory and counter-memory, living and dead bodies. In any way, beyond this microscopic view, one must not discard the general tendencies predominant within an institution, within an institutional complex or within a group of processes and practices. It is interesting to state that some museums, proving that change is possible, seek to become equipment geared towards work with the power of memory.<sup>35</sup>

The differential, in this case, is not in the recognition of the power of memory, but in the placement of memory institutions at the service of social development, as well as its theoretical understanding, and in the practical exercise of memory appropriation and its use as a tool of social intervention.

To work in this perspective (of the power of memory) implies in the statement that the role of the museums as agencies capable of serving and instrumentalising individuals and groups for the better framing of their collection of problems. The museum that adopts such a path is not interested only in widening the access to accumulated cultural heritage, but, above all, in socialising the very production of

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<sup>34</sup> In administrative and managerial terms this mission should be re-evaluated and reviewed every now and then.

<sup>35</sup> The National History Museum, the Republic Museum and the 1<sup>st</sup> Kingdom Museum, for instance, have already developed projects along those lines, but continuity was not guaranteed.

cultural heritage, services and information. The commitment, in this case, is not one of holding, accumulating and preserving treasures, but instead is one of relationship space, able to stimulate new productions and open up to the living together with cultural diversity.

Operating with inherited or built objects, material or non-material, the museum always works with the already done and the already carried out, without it constituting an obstacle for the connection with the present, at least theoretically. This assertive is valid both for the museums of contemporary art and the eco-museums involved in the process of community development. The fundamental issue, as indicated by Le Goff, it is to know whether the museological institution is adhering to the past and the “retro”<sup>36</sup> fashion in order to understand the present acting here and now or in order to forget “the difficulties of the present”. In any case, to point (museographically) *towards* the past is to reinvent *a* past, since only leftovers are kept. However, the attempt of “forgetting the difficulties of the present” often allies itself to a the past-venerating movement <sup>37</sup>, which, linking the concept of heritage to material objects, seeks to affirm that memory and history are being preserved, devoid of conflict, with no contestation, with no innovative production. (Le Goff, 1986: p.55).

To work with the perspective of a movement of memory that is strategically connected to the present without meaning to forget it, but necessarily forgetting some aromas from the past, leads the

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<sup>36</sup> As the end of the year, of the century and of the millennium approach, the ‘retro’ fashion increases. It is as if the present lost its vigour and the past sucked history’s subjects into its Saturnine bosom.

<sup>37</sup> Examples of promotion of the past-venerating movements in Poland, Italy and France are analysed by Le Goff in his book **Reflections on History**. This author identifies a great danger in the concept of heritage geared towards the past.



investigator to a recognition that what is announced in museums is not the truth, but one possible reading, entirely permeated by the play of power. Where there is memory there is forgetting and “where there is power there is resistance”. (Foucault, 1997: p.91) The possibilities of many readings redeem for the museological field the dimension of lawsuit: a new reading is always possible.

Where there is power there is memory.

The power in exercise drives memory towards the past, subordinating it to a world view, but as the past is a non-place and its forgetting is necessary, the insubordination possibilities are not destroyed. The lost treasure is not in the past, it is lost in the present, but it matters to remember (or not to forget) that it can abruptly erupt, burning the living.

### **CONCLUSION: almost another movement**

*The agony of collections is the clearest symptom of how classifications that distinguished the learned from the popular and both from the massive do vanish.*

Néstor Garcia Canclini

With the present text I have sought to understand, from the analysis of institutions that work with heritage, concentrating particularly on museums, how the relations between memory and power are operated at the very place where theories and practices of preservation and of use of cultural heritage are articulated.

The studies developed suggested that where there is memory there is power and where there is power there is the exercise of memory construction. Memory and power feature a mutual demand. The exercise of power constitutes “places of memory” that, in their

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turn, are invested with power. In the great national museums, in the small museums geared towards the local populations and communities, the art museums, the social and human sciences museums, as well as in the natural science ones, the play of memory and power is present, and as a consequence forgetting and resistance also participate in the game. Individuals and collectivities in relation play this concrete game. There is no unchangeable meaning, there is no guideline that cannot be remade, and there is no connection that cannot be undone e redone.

On dealing with two movements of memory, with distinct vector orientations, I have briefly sketched either the link with the past or the connection with the present, but these two movements are complex and non-linear, there are advances and retreats in diverse ways.

To conclude, I want to introduce a debate that may spark interest especially in the museums geared towards social development and the operation with a collection of problems that affect individuals and the groups linked to them.

The experiments that both in theory and in practice have opposed the paths of encyclopaedic character<sup>38</sup> adopted by classical museums in the 1970's have flowed into the voluminous waters of the 1980's<sup>39</sup>, allowing for the construction of alternative paths and the search for the theoretical-experimental systematisation. Among these experiments I wish to highlight the following:

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<sup>38</sup> These museums have inherited the “1900's concepts that have condemned them to be sacred and abstract temples of culture (...)” (Monreal, 1979: p.104)

<sup>39</sup> The New Museology International Movement (MINOM) was created in 1984.

**1<sup>st</sup> The Nigeria National Museum**, in Niamey. In existence since at least 1958, this museum became famous in the 1970's. It is an original project developed by Pablo Toucet<sup>40</sup> (1975: p.32-5), an exiled Catalan archaeologist and museologist, sensitive to the population's needs and problems. In an area stretching over approximately 24 hectares, a museological complex was installed, which, in the words of Hugues de Varine, encompassed:

an open-air ethnological museum, a children's garden, zoo and botanical garden, a place to walk about and take fresh air and for African and European fashion shows, as well as a centre for the promotion of quality handcraft producing useful objects; it constitutes the largest literacy school and, when is the case, a centre for the diffusion of musical programmes. (1979: p. 73)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Casa del Museo**, in Mexico. After the *Santiago do Chile Round Table* (1972), the Anthropology National Museum, of the Mexican History and Anthropology National Institute, launched the experimental project *Casa del Museo* in three popular areas: *Zona do Observatório*, *El Pedregal de Santo Domingo* and *Nezahualcoytl*. The practice in these areas has pointed to a museological conception according to which the museum becomes an education and communication means integrated into the development of the community. As stated by Moutinho:

It has come to pass, however, that the success of the work in *El Pedregal*, by the way fruit of the teachings collected in the first experience [*Zona do Observatório*] and that in 1980 were grounded

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<sup>40</sup> He has also directed excavations in archaeological sites in Tunisia.

on the training course for new museologists [*Nezahualcoytl* city], was felt by the traditional museum conservatives as a threat to the instituted museums. (...) Within an adverse environment, fearsome of change, the *Casa del Museo* project found all support to be progressively retrieved, so in 1980 it was closed down. (1989: p.39-40)

**3<sup>rd</sup> Local Museums in Portugal.** After the April 1974 Revolution, several museological experiments were developed in Portugal from local initiatives carried out by cultural associations and autonomous power. Some museums born or transformed grounded on such experiences came to consider their collections as a “means” for the carrying out of social interest work; their interventions widened and turned towards the valorisation of locality, the areas of communication and education and job generation. As stated by the head of the Monte Redondo Ethnological Museum:

This is the true wealth held by these museums, a wealth that is always in transformation, and in correspondence with the transformation processes that encompass all life areas in the country.

It is our conviction that the collection of a new museum is composed by the problems of the community that gives it life. Thus, it is easy to admit that the new museum must be managed and equipped in such a way as to deal with a collection, which limits are of difficult definition, and worse, always in continuous change. (1985: p.46)

The effort to systematise new museological experiences and mark the differences with other theoretical referentials has led Hugues de Varine to establish the following schematic table:

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Traditional Museum = building + collection + public
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Eco-museum/New Museum = territory + patrimony + population
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I see here a theoretical-practical problem of great museological interest. I sought to demonstrate that the relationship between memory and power in the museums is not fortuitous or occasional, but on the contrary is part of its own constitution. Although in traditional museums this relationship gains greater visibility by means of the building (architectural typology), the collection (paintings and monumental sculptures, rings, weapons, flags and “primitive” peoples’ artefacts), the public (invigilated, selected and of little participation) and the museographic discourse, it is not absent from alternative projects, be they eco-museums, regional museums, community, local or tribal. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that in such cases it gains some specificities.

Memory may be guided towards the past or the present also in the eco-museums, as well as also there it may come to have an emancipatory or coercive function. The model has no automated working operation, and practice has demonstrated that eco-museums can also become traditional.

The term *territory*, in its turn, demands conceptual care. The establishing and defence of museological territories has no value in itself. The demarcation practice can also be excluding and perverse. What is, after all, the territory of the human? I risk the thought that eco-museological practices have not always been one of

territorialisation<sup>41</sup>, but on the contrary they move between territorialisation and de-territorialisation, without assuming a definitive position. I remember one of the people in charge of the Monte Redondo Ethnological Museum stating, in a certain work meeting: “The Museum is Rui’s Pub [Taberna do Rui] when we gather there to make decisions, and also Joaquim Figueirinha’s home, in Geneve, when we are working there.” There is no notion of territory that can support such abrupt displacements. In another moment, this same person thought it was important to make the physical scope territory of the Ethnological Museum coincide with a map of the region of the Leiria Region in medieval terms (Gomes, 1986: p. 9). The ideas: the shattered museum, the museum of multiple sites, a decentralised museum, a museum with antennae and others, are, to my eyes, the confirmation of what I have just expounded.

If on the one hand, to demarcate a territory can mean the creation of memory icons favourable to resistance and the affirmation of local knowledges in the face of globalising and homogenising processes; on the other, to take in the volatility of such territory can implicate in the construction of strategies that favour exchanges between the museum agents involved and their *political-cultural strengthening of*.

The concept of patrimony is also not conflict-free, as it involves certain risks and can be used to meet different political interests. Therefore, as one moves from the concept of collection to that of patrimony, problems were widened. However, eco-museological practices here do not seem, in many cases, to reinforce the idea of a

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<sup>41</sup> Professor Myrian S. dos Santos has stimulated this reflection with the following question: to abandon the idea of the building as defining element of the museum, is it not also to give up territory?

collection or even of patrimony, conceived as a property handful. Museological practices such as the *Itapuã Community Didactic Museum* (State of Bahia, Brazil) and the *Santa Cruz Eco-museum* (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) operate with the collection of problems of the individuals involved with museum processes. What seems to be in focus here is a de-collection, as formulated by Canclini. (1997: p.283-350). In both cases, there is not a patrimonial concern in the sense of the protection of a classical and monumental past, but instead an interest in life dynamics. In other words: the interest in the patrimony does not find justification by the link with the past, be it what it may, but instead by its connections with present-day fragmented problems, the life of human beings in relation with other beings, things, words, feelings and ideas.

The term population, besides anchoring the museum's basic challenge, is also of high complexity. First, it is necessary to consider that the population is not a homogeneous whole; on the contrary, it is composed of multiple orientations and often conflicting interests. Second, within the same population there are completely distinct identification processes and cultural identities that do not fit into certain theoretical reductions. Thus, local cultural identities are also not homogeneous and are not given from the start.

A synthesis question: would the challenge for alternative museological proposals that insist on not losing their transformation potential not be placed on the favouring of the various identity processes and in the use of the power of memory at the service of individuals and increasingly complex local societies?

What is at stake in museums is memory and is power, therefore also danger. One of the dangers is the authoritarian and destructive exercise of power; another is the saturation of past

memory, the saturation of meaning and the consequent blockage of action and of life.