



Alice Thomine-Berrada et Barry Bergdol (dir.)

Repenser les limites : l'architecture à travers l'espace, le temps et les disciplines
31 août - 4 septembre 2005

Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art

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DOI : 10.4000/books.inha.186

Éditeur : Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art

Lieu d'édition : Paris

Année d'édition : 2005

Date de mise en ligne : 5 décembre 2017

Collection : Actes de colloques

ISBN électronique : 9782917902646



<http://books.openedition.org>

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 4 septembre 2005

Référence électronique

CAN BILSEL, S. M. *On the Modern Cult of Authenticity: Prolegomena to a Study of Berlin's Pergamon Museum* In : *Repenser les limites : l'architecture à travers l'espace, le temps et les disciplines : 31 août - 4 septembre 2005* [en ligne]. Paris : Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2005 (généré le 18 décembre 2020). Disponible sur Internet : <<http://books.openedition.org/inha/186>>. ISBN : 9782917902646. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.inha.186>.

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 18 décembre 2020.

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- 1 Two prominent figures of Wilhelmine Germany, the museum director Wilhelm von Bode and the architect Alfred Messel, collaborated in 1907 on the project of a new Royal Museum in Berlin, in order to exhibit the finds of German archaeologists in the Middle East. Delayed by the fall of the *Kaiserreich*, the building was completed twenty-four years later during the artistically productive and politically tumultuous days of the Weimar Republic. As the regimes that patronized the museum changed, so did its original program and architecture: the museum that opened to the public in 1930—today's Pergamon Museum—took its final shape in the hands of Berlin's cultural bureaucracy, whose factions competed to gain more influence on its plans. To this day, the museum is renowned for its gigantic interiors, which offer an awe-inspiring vision of antique architecture. Walking through the galleries, the visitors encounter the Ishtar Gate and the Processional Street of Babylon, the Market Gate of Miletus, the Great Altar of Pergamon, and a façade from Mshatta among others. The presentation of Babylonian, Hellenistic, Roman, and Islamic monuments in a sequence has made the Pergamon Museum one of the most visited sites in Berlin, just as the photographic and filmic reproduction made its “masterpieces” cornerstones of a typical survey of the history of world architecture.
- 2 Seeking a cultural and historical analysis of the Pergamon Museum, the product of a lengthy discursive process, I shall start by reflecting on the outcomes of its presentation of antiquity. Since it met its public the Pergamon Museum has operated on two distinct and yet interrelated registers:
- 3 As all imperial and colonial museums of its size and ambition, the Pergamon Museum has ordered the sites of world's cultures in space and time by means of the proximity, distance, and succession of the exhibits on the museum's plans. The narrative sequence of the museum, however incomplete and fragmentary, is analogous to a reading of the

history of culture. More specifically it makes a point in illustrating the fin-de-siècle thesis of cultural diffusion: the evolution and migration of style from the East to the West, from the Ancient Orient to Greece, culminating in a “Hellenistic synthesis.”

- 4 Secondly, like all museums that feature “ancient art,” the Pergamon Museum not only displays but also fabricates its object. An acquisition of an archaeological or ethnologic expedition, an ancient fragment, undergoes in the museum a structural transformation, being displaced from its functional and ritual context, and placed in another. As a work of ancient art, the fragment is not merely an exemplar of culture, history, or place. It is through the process of modern display and framing that an ancient art acquires its uniqueness and ubiquity: it becomes authentic as well as iconic. Its status as objet d’art is guaranteed by its uniqueness.
- 5 What sets the Pergamon Museum apart from the majority of archaeology and ancient art museums is the fact that it presents its object not merely as a fragment (sculpture) but as an ensemble (architecture). Hence as the museum’s first critics in the 1920s did not fail to notice, the museum’s presentation of antiquity confused the distinction between a monument of antiquity (original work) and a décor. Each display is installed as a stage set that reenacts the experience of a work that would not be typically contained in a museum interior: an outdoor architectural ensemble.
- 6 Equally important is that which is conspicuously absent from the museum’s grandiose reconstruction of Middle Eastern antiquities. The only binding feature of the Pergamon Museum’s collections, which are as diverse as the Hellenistic sculpture, ancient Mesopotamian architecture, and medieval Islamic ornaments, is the colonial disposition of the Prussian state towards the Ottoman territories, from which nearly all exhibits originated. The politics of a colonial empire, in other words, prefigured the museum’s objects. Perhaps with the occasional exception of a less spectacular Islamic collection, however, one is struck in the Pergamon Museum by the conspicuous absence of ethnologic presentation of the cultural other. The Processional Street of Babylon, even though no less a phantasmagoria than the Cairo Street of a typical universal exposition, lacks the belly dancers, hashish smokers, African eunuchs, and the like. Instead, the Pergamon Museum conveys its visitors the experience of the “Near Eastern art” from the third millennium BC to the Middle Ages without the inconvenience of encountering the “Oriental” other.
- 7 The museal context of Pergamon, is, strictly speaking, architectural: A “museum of architecture,” unlike the decor of a universal/colonial fair, empties out the monuments from all ethnographic interest; leaving a void *in front* of the monuments to be filled by the modern (German) viewers.
- 8 In fact, all three aspects of the museum I outlined above, the ordering of the exhibits, the framing of the museum’s object as unique and authentic, and the production of an architectural ensemble in lieu of an ethnologic context, are complementary. Together they help narrate the historical processes of an irreducibly complex region in the singular and authoritative voice of a *Kunst-* and *Kulturgeschichte*. The appropriation of the fragments of the other as the cultural heritage of an imagined transcendental subject (man) is no less hegemonic than the ethnologic displays of the “natives” of the colonized lands.
- 9 The Pergamon Museum maps a large colonial domain into a set of original monuments and “authentic” places. Its narrative strategy consists of the twentieth-century realism, (see Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, 1996) in which the

consumers of history are led to believe that they can reenact a succession of “authentic” experiences of the history of culture in real time from a series of privileged viewpoints: hence the exhibits of the museum are both the monuments and the décor of a history of culture.

- 10 From a theoretical point of view, I hope to contribute with this project to a type of scholarship in cultural studies, first introduced by Edward Said’s seminal work in literary criticism, *Orientalism* (1979), although my position departs from a more recent phase of the “post-Orientalist” critique. Though varied in object and method, the post-Orientalist studies present a recurrent theme: as evident in Said’s introduction, which borrows from Foucault’s *episteme* and Gramsci’s analysis of hegemony, the critique identifies ways in which the unflattering representations of the cultural and ethnic other came to legitimize Europe’s “positional superiority” and by implication, European colonialism.
- 11 Despite Said’s carefully qualified statements and his often restated, utopian belief in the possibility of a genuine understanding of the other—the applications of his literary criticism to a wider sphere of the arts and humanities provided a vigorous critique of the very institutions of the Enlightenment, reading against the grain their claim to understand the rest of the planet, and speak for the universal. The museums in Europe’s once mighty imperial capitals, alongside the representations of Europe’s “others” in nineteenth-century art and exhibitions, has become an object of intense scrutiny.
- 12 And yet, it is also remarkable that the post-Orientalist critique has rarely offered insight about the production of modern knowledge, or in fact, modernity outside Europe and North America. Resistance to colonialism often required the construction of modern national identities, using the very same institutions and practices—museums, art, archaeology, etc. By interpreting the introduction of art, or of disciplined knowledge about culture as the imposition of Western values, the critics have dismissed post-colonial or half-colonial modernities as—to use Partha Chattarjee’s term—a “derivative discourse”—an internalization of Orientalism by the Westernized elites. (See *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: a Derivative Discourse?* 1986).
- 13 I contend that theoretical models developed to interpret the British and French colonial experience—and which are exclusively interested in an analysis of the Western representations of the other—do not necessarily do justice to the emergence of post-Enlightenment and post-colonial identities on the margins of Europe, in a vast geography that extends from Greece to Bengal.
- 14 In the post-Enlightenment construction of national and (post)colonial identities, there is, I argue, a direct relationship between the category of “ancient art”—the presentation of a work of art as “authentic”—and the idea of “culture” as bound with a place, a locality. This relation between work and culture is not merely metonymic: a work does not merely stand for a native land, people, etc. But the work of art is resacralized as the material trace of an original meaning, an essence. I propose *the modern cult of authenticity* as a discursive formation, which is deployed in the construction and localization of essentialized identities.
- 15 Similarly, the localization of the essentialized identities and the production of an authentic culture always work both ways, both in establishing and overthrowing colonial hegemony. The recent Greek and Turkish campaigns to repatriate monuments of antiquity from Europe’s imperial museums also point to the workings of the cult of

authenticity in construction of modern, local identities. The millions of people who reportedly signed a petition for the return of the Altar of Pergamon to the Turkish city Bergama, share with the museum they targeted both the idea of an original monument, and authentic place: the first was literally constructed in the museum, and the latter, metaphorically by its lack *thereof*. Hence the Turkish demands for return of the altar from exile to its real home, entails a rejection of the legacy of German cultural imperialism, as well as a *promesse de bonheur*—a Turkish “Anatolian” identity’s inclusion in a universal (that is, in this case, German) narrative of *Kultur*.

- 16 It is my argument in this essay that the Pergamon Museum does not merely suppress difference by making the forms of the “Oriental” cultures subordinate to the abstract taxonomy of “Western” Enlightenment. Quite on the contrary, it constructs the museum as yearning for the lost place of original art and authentic culture. The museum is the negation of the very cult of authenticity it constructed: it embodies both the home that never was and the modern condition of permanent exile.

RÉSUMÉS

The main concern of this essay is to sketch out a theoretical framework for a study of the Pergamon Museum in Berlin (conceived in 1907 and completed in 1930), Germany’s most ambitious presentation of the Middle Eastern antiquities and a self-acclaimed “museum of ancient architecture.” I am particularly interested in exploring the historical intersections between the German reconstruction of antiquity and the emergence of an international discourse of authenticity in the twentieth century, whose ramifications can be seen in a variety of fields from the disciplinary practices of museology and historic preservation to the popular conceptions of cultural heritage.

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Index chronologique : époque contemporaine, XIX^e siècle, Antiquité, Moyen Âge

Index géographique : Europe, Allemagne, Berlin, Pergame, Milet

Mots-clés : colonialisme, orientalisme, colonialism, cultural imperialism, museology, orientalism, muséologie

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