View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk brought to you by CORE
provided by UWL Repository

From a World in a Box to a World without Borders: Art Museums, Media Technologies and Cosmopolitanism

Michelle Henning
lecture given at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Poland
21 November 2013

When I was invited to give this talk, I was asked to discuss the notion of universality in museum practices, in an age of electronic communication, globalisation and artistic multiculturalism. I was told that the Muzeum Sztuki itself was originally intended as a "universal museum" to map the development of 20th century art. In Poland, after the Second World War this became an increasingly difficult task with the museum resorting to the use of reproductions at times in order to keep its exhibits comprehensive. I would like to use this idea – of reproductions being used to complete the collection – as a starting point for my discussion.

I will begin by discussing how the universal museum project relied both on hand-made facsimiles and technical reproductions (such as photographs); how we map or visualise a history of modern art, and how the ways in which we do this are related to the media technologies of our time. I will say a bit about the idea of the museum as a container (or box) in which all the world's stuff is stored, and as a kind of narrative journey. Finally I will address the ways in which the notion of cosmopolitanism has been proposed as an alternative to the perceived Imperial aspects of the universal museum, and briefly comment on the situation today for museums as public spaces in a global context and their responsibility to their publics.

*

It wasn't always unusual to use reproductions or facsimiles in place of actual, original artworks in museums. So, in the 18th century, there were cast galleries across Europe, where you could visit whole collections of plastercasts of famous sculptures from antiquity. You could find these at the Palazzo Sacchetti in Rome, the Palazzo Farsetti in Venice, at Mannheim and Charlottenburg, and in Peter the Great's Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in Russia. In Britain, the Victoria and Albert museum at South Kensington, which was established after the Great Exhibition of 1851, set out to be a universal museum that would include as many of the world's artworks as possible by means of plastercasts and reproduction (Haskell and Penny, 1981). Reproduction was a means of completing the story the museum wanted to tell: so long as the art museum was conceived of primarily as an educational institution, reproductions were perfectly okay although still regarded as a substitute for the experience of the original. However, if the museum was conceived of as somewhere you went to have an aesthetic experience in the presence of an original - an experience that could only be had in that specific place, in the presence of the artwork - then reproductions could never be satisfactory.

In the 1920s and '30s, art museums hovered between these two poles. There were those who argued that the museum was a place you would go to experience the work of art in its full 'presence', and that this function should not be compromised - regardless of the fact that this was only accessible to those who had the financial means and leisure to tour the great museums. This view rested on a Romantic notion of the importance of communion with the masterpiece. Another view was that museums had already displaced many original artworks, historical objects that were never meant to be viewed in such a context in the first place, so that the notion of the authentic experience was already a fraud (Henning 2013).

Reproductions were understood as modern and as democratizing. A museum of reproductions, instead of unique objects, was in principle a reproducible museum. This was an idea developed by Otto Neurath, who was the director of the Social and Economic Museum in Vienna during the '20s and '30s. He imagined branch museums, in which identical collections could be viewed by people in different places – much like branches of a library. He was not thinking specifically of art collections: the touring exhibitions of the Social and Economic Museum pioneered this with their reproducible maps, charts, models, and dealt with social facts and information relevant to the visiting public. For a while he worked with Paul Otlet, founder of the Mundaneum in Brussels, on these plans. Otlet thought that all the world's literature (and therefore, effectively, all the world's recorded knowledge) could be made accessible to everyone through a complex card-filing system or proto-database: he is now often viewed as a visionary who anticipated the internet before it was technically possible. Neurath and Otlet imagined a world network of museums, mainly containing copies and reproductions of objects and images, which would make the best use of mass reproduction and communication technologies to transcend national boundaries and produce an international culture. Otlet and Neurath's projects were part of a larger movement of internationalism that set out to overcome nationalist sentiment and parochial interests, class inequality and the dominance of the church through the spread of literacy, knowledge and mutual understanding. Here the use of reproductions and the idea of internationalism are closely linked (Henning 2006).

The use of reproductions and facsimiles in the art museum actually became quite conventional during the 1930s, particularly in the United States. Alfred H. Barr jr., who was the first curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York between 1929 and 1943, had began his career as a lecturer at a women's liberal arts college in Boston (Wellesley college). So his approach to curating was very much a pedagogic one – a teaching approach, as Richard Meyer's recent book *What Was Contemporary Art?* shows (Meyer, 2013). As a teacher, one of Barr's innovations was to accumulate a collection of high –quality facsimiles and stage exhibitions for his students. Some of the exhibitions he curated at MoMA consisted entirely of reproductions (Persian wall-paintings, cave paintings) while others included reproductions mixed up with originals (such as the exhibition of Russian Ikons)**.** Completism (of the narrative) was as important than the encounter with the original: so if originals could not be had, the reproduction was the next best thing, because it still helped construct the overarching understanding of developments in, and sources for, Modern art. The Modern art Barr was dealing with was European and difficult to access for an American audience. One example of the way in which Barr attempted to construct a coherent and specifically American history of European modernism is the famous Barr Chart.

Barr designed this diagram for the exhibition "Cubism and Abstract Art" in 1935/36. It is an evolutionary diagram, and it's an educational one: a potted history of modern art for the uninitiated, that uses a language very much of its own time – the language of graphic communication that was being pioneered by innovators such as Neurath and his colleagues. Barr's priority was to familiarize an American audience with the developments taking place in Europe. As is well known, Barr's version of modernism, the aims and politics of the different modern movements or groups are ignored - everything leads teleologically from an origin point in Cubism and toward geometrical and non-geometrical abstract art. You can see that the size of the names of movements and styles varies according to their perceived importance in the development of abstraction, and all arrows point downwards, a one-way movement of influence from the past into the present.

Alexander Alberro has recently described how Barr's chart "conveys by its scientific look an exhaustive, even hermetic and hence unchallengeable layout of the course of modern art" (Alberro 2013, 372). But we can be more specific about this scientific look. It is in fact, a modernist look: influenced by the limited palette and fonts of Isotype charts, Bauhaus design and the machine aesthetic (those two words that sit right at the centre of the diagram). It recalls electronics diagrams: switches, circuits, contacts – the telephone switchboard. It isn't scientific, nor particularly rational, not even all that functional but it wears the connotations of scientism, rationalism, functionalism.

Alberro juxtaposes Barr's chart with the information graphic produced for the 2013 exhibition at MoMA *Inventing Abstraction*: *1910-1925* which was curated by Leah Dickerman and Masha Chlenova. As Alberro says, MoMA is "still heavily invested in a narrative of modern art that was largely spun by Alfred H. Barr jr." – but in this graphic the emphasis has shifted from movements to individuals and a network of communication. Alberro concludes several things from this: 1) it brings to the fore artists that are often ignored in art historical accounts, 2) it expands the number of participants in the development of abstract art, and 3) it links figures across national boundaries. This is how the curators explained it,

> The invention of abstraction was not the inspiration of a solitary protagonist, but a relay of ideas that moved through a network of artists and intellectuals working in different countries and different media. This diagram maps the nexus of relationships among those artists represented in the exhibition Inventing Abstraction: 1910-1925, all of whom played a significant role in the development of a new modern language for the arts. Vectors connect individuals whose acquaintance with one another in the period 1910–1925 could be documented. The names in

> red represent those figures with the most number of connections within this group. The chart was produced as a collaboration between the exhibition's curatorial and design team and Paul Ingram, Kravis Professor of Business at the Columbia Business School, and his students."[1]

So, while the original Barr chart just recalled the technical diagrams of the time, this diagram is actually to some extent a technical diagram insofar as it is related to the new science of organisational structures and networks. In network theory, figures with the greatest number of connections are called "hubs" or connectors: in business that means these are the people who have most influence and with whom you work if you want to spread an idea or a practice. Leah Dickerman refers to them in the catalogue as "connectors … facilitating relays of ideas" (cited in Alberro 2013, 373). This is again, the discourse of network theory . What you can't see, of course, is how those ideas were transmitted, or whether they were – it just maps the fact that these people were in contact.

Alberro concludes, from looking at the exhibition, the catalogue and this map, that the network model allows the exhibition *Inventing Abstraction* to show "the singular and the multiple *simultaneously*".[2] But he also points out that the network model dissolves the idea of any single controlling centre (or we might add, any one path of development) and it inhibits the task of constructing a coherent narrative logic. The only way the exhibition can handle this is to brush over incompatibilities between artworks – Alberro argues:

> the logic of the exhibition passes over these incompatibilities and neglects to address how the spectator might make sense of them. Instead, *Inventing Abstraction* is formed around coherence, around a now-much-messier but still-unified whole, and the dominant model of 'abstract art' and the story of its 'invention' is reiterated once again.(Alberro 2013, 380-381)

We can add a couple of things to this: first of all, the two charts make it explicit that we imagine the world using the technological models of the time – specifically the media of the time - just as the life-groups and dioramas of 1920s-40s natural history museums drew on the aesthetics of cinema (Griffiths 2003; Henning 2006). The network is the way we visualise things these days, in the age of decentralised, networked electronic media. This way of visualising connections between things and people seems natural and self-evident to us, because this is the sea we swim in. But network theory (particularly as practised in business schools) is not at all value free. The idea of prioritising individuals and communication between them over collectives and movements, the idea of certain well-connected individuals being "hubs" of influence, and the abandoning of any kind of historical or chronological dimension in favour of an image of co-presence – these are all value-laden ideas. One could argue, then, that *Inventing Abstraction* is an example of a museum trying to construct a coherent, universal art history, while rejecting the linear, chronological developmental framework that characterised older attempts at universalism.

At its most simple, a universal museum is understood as a container: it wants to hold the world within it. This is one reason I have called my talk "A World in a Box". But the "box" also refers to television. Television brings the world into the living room, it domesticates it. Similarly, the art museum that aims at universality wants to bring the art of the world home. The film and museum studies writer, Alison Griffiths, adopts a neat phrase from Henry Fairfield Osborne, president of the American Museum of Natural history in New York. Osborne, writing in 1910, described the museum as a "journey for those who can not travel" (Griffiths 1996). For Osborne, the museum as journey was closely connected with the museum as school – in which each exhibit is arranged to enable it to "speak for itself".

For Barr too, the museum was a "journey for those who can not travel". Using a combination of original artworks and reproductions (mostly handmade facsimiles), he brought Europe and the Middle East to America; though what he brought was of course a particular interpretation, a particular version of the history of Modern European Art and its sources. Nevertheless, when (in Serge Guilbaut 's words) "New York stole the idea of Modern Art" (Guilbaut 1983), it did so partly on the basis of Barr's (and others) teachings: American artists had completed a basic course in Modernism, thanks to curators like Barr who travelled to Europe and performed this act of cultural translation.

In the universal museum, the "journey for those who cannot travel" is enacted via the journey that the visitor makes around the museum. At its most extreme, this means an itinerary that is highly controlled. Some writers have argued that the design of the museum and exhibits can order the visit in such a way that the visitor literally lives the narrative, not only the explicit exhibition narrative, but also its underlying ideology. This was most famously argued by Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, writing in 1978 about the way that Barr's teleological history is embedded in the building of MoMA itself – with the higher floors of the museum representing the triumph of abstraction and of individual freedom under capitalism, and this notion, they argue, is experienced bodily by visitors as a moment of transcendent arrival (Duncan and Wallach 1980). But a more extreme example of the journey through the museum as an upward journey toward transcendence is in the architecture of another museum, the Guggenheim, the spiralling design which has been described by Philip Fisher as "pure path" (Fisher 1991, 9).

I am not convinced that museums can control visitor experience, since I am one of those visitors who never follows the path set out for me. But the idea of the museum as " a journey for those who cannot travel" is an important link between it and the media. Like media, the museum compresses time and space, and like photography and film, it was understood as a means for travel when actually, international travel was not possible for the majority of people. In the case of media, this imaginary travel came at a price. Walter Benjamin's famous 1936 passage about how film transformed the world is often read in a positive sense:

> Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling" (Benjamin 1973, 238).

However, in this passage, film doesn't simply free us from the prison world, it reduces the city to rubble in an image which anticipates the destruction of Europe in the second world war. This destructive side of mass reproduction is envisioned almost from the moment photography is invented. In 1859, the American essayist and poet, Oliver Wendell Holmes, had said (with some irony) “Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please.” (Holmes 1859)

The museum too is envisaged as a destroyer: a participant in the imperial adventures of men like Napoleon or Lord Elgin who took the Parthenon sculptures from Athens to London. The French writer Quatremère de Quincy, wrote about this destructiveness in the decade after Napoleon had looted the artworks of Europe (and before some of them were returned). Quatremère saw the removal of antiquities from their original situation as an act of vandalism that killed art and destroyed its relationship with history (Belting 2001; Maleuvre 1999; Sherman 1994). Museum objects were the spoils of empire: historically the universal museum project was an imperial project. If Barr set out to master European modernism, Victorian museums set out to justify the empire (to an often sceptical working class) by bringing treasures home. This imperial history is not easily shaken off: arguably the very idea of a universal history of art or culture is an imperialist notion.

Some people would contest this, of course. One of the main proponents of universal museums is James Cuno, previously the director of the Art Institute of Chicago and currently the president of the J.Paul Getty Trust. He sees universal museums as essentially cosmopolitan, rather than fundamentally imperialist. And he opposes this cosmopolitanism to the more narrow nationalist interests of those people who argue for, for instance, the repatriation of objects held in such museums, meaning the return of those objects to their countries of origin (Cuno 2009; 2011). I would argue that here cosmopolitanism is being used because it is seen as something palatable, and acceptable - but it is connected to Empire. As E.M. Forster once said, “The imperialist is not what he thinks. He is a destroyer, he prepares the way for cosmopolitanism” (cited in Nava 2007, 7). It is perfectly plausible that an originally Imperial collection (such as that of the British Museum) can promote cosmopolitanism today, meaning it could and probably does promote an interest in different cultures, and an open-minded awareness and tolerance of difference generally. The problem is that cosmopolitanism is used as a justification for imperialism. For example, the controversial joint declaration on "universal museums" that was issued by the directors of 18 major museums in Europe and America, in 2002, argued that these institutions were universal because they served international publics and transcended national boundaries. In other words: they were bastions of cosmopolitan values. But as is well-known, the context for this statement was that these museums were under great pressure from repatriation claims – such as the Greek government’s campaign for the return of the Parthenon sculptures from the British museum – so-called the “Elgin marbles” because they had been removed and transported to Britain by Lord Elgin.

The Universal Museums declaration was a transparent tactic to resist repatriation claims. The destructive aspect of imperialism is subsumed under a protective narrative: one argument was that the Elgin marbles would not have survived in Athens and were better off in the British museum. One of the arguments against repatriation is based in precedent: basically, if you set a precedent by returning an object to its place of origin where will it end? If the rather ironically named British museum had to return everything in it that didn't come from Britain, there wouldn't be a lot left. There is also the argument (that I have a little more sympathy with) that many things were meant to travel and be traded, that objects are not eternally static – and they have their own "social lives".

The universal museum project is built on the idea of taking things from "there" and bringing them "here" – giving a "journey for those who cannot travel" but also severing objects from their previous contexts. So when André Malraux proposed, during the 1940s, that the world of art reproductions was a *Musée Imaginaire*, or Museum without Walls, he recognized that this world of reproductions was only continuing the decontextualising already begun by the museum (Malraux 1967). In fact for Malraux, the museum narrative (which seems so forceful and inescapable to Duncan and Wallach) cannot disguise the fundamental rupture carried out by the museum. As Marc Blanchard has put it (summarizing André Malraux) it allows the visitor,

> to consider together art objects that would otherwise never have been thought to have anything to do with one another, and to experience the discontinuities of human cultures, without the thread usually retrieved by the interpreter or the historian. Precisely because they are thrown together into a showspace and cut off from their contexts, works of art elicit from the spectator a certain terror" (Blanchard 2000, 688).

The terrifying aspect of the universal museum is either its overbearing ideological narrative, if we are to believe Duncan and Wallach, or, in complete contrast, the way it enables us to see discontinuities, and incompatibilities. The universal museum undermines itself: how can a narrative bring together so many and such diverse material objects without falling apart, or becoming nonsensical? In early twentieth century ethnographic museums in Germany, research showed that overcrowding with objects was leaving visitors in a confused state (Penny 2002). The historian H. Glenn Penny has argued that the commitment to an ethnographic project which required that museums collect objects non-stop, meant that the narrative aspect of the museum was neglected. But, even when there was what curators felt to be a coherent narrative, as in the Grassi museum in Leipzig, visitors didn't follow the intended path through the museum but wandered this way and that, struggling to make sense of the mass of objects (Penny 2002, 163-214).

Nowadays, people often talk about the flattening of geography and history , and what they mean by that is the simultaneous availability on the internet, of bits of culture from all over the world and from all different historical periods. But was already happening and being noticed in the nineteenth century. The philosopher Nietzsche, in particular objected to history as an encyclopaedic discipline, history as the "science of universal becoming" (as he put it) in which the past is not understood in relation to oneself but just as a mass of "all that has ever been". He wrote: "Now the demands of life alone no longer reign and exercise constraint on knowledge of the past; now all the frontiers have been torn down and all that has ever been rushes upon mankind" (Nietzsche 1997, 77). And the nineteenth century person overloaded with too much available information, responds in the most superficial way: they become "strolling spectators" detached, distracted, jaded and unimpressed by even the most extraordinary things – wars, famine – nothing shocks (see also Henning 2006, 40). In other words, the crisis of overaccumulation that is felt in the nineteenth century is not unlike the one felt today in relation to the proliferation of media and the constant demand for attention from social media, mobile phones and so on.

In the ideal (imagined) universal museum, every object would have a place in the narrative, everything is meant to add up to a coherent vision. The museum as a medium itself is effaced: by which I mean that the mechanisms by which artworks become available, comparable, and the values according to which the narrative is constructed are intended to be hidden from view, or made to appear neutral. This is of course very difficult to do, and the problems become particularly vivid when historical events and geographic or political isolation make it impossible to achieve a completist, universal account, as perhaps happened at this museum.

But as I have suggested there is an opposite problem too, of too much stuff, too much information. The crisis of the universal museum is not just a crisis of display (how to order the displays in a legible and coherent way) but also a crisis of storage (see Henning 2006, 38-44 for a fuller version of this argument). The universal museum project develops alongside the growth of a global commodity culture: trade exhibitions (such as the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London) fed into the expansion of the public museum. One consequence of a commodity culture is an ever-growing need for more and more storage. Just like an Ikea cupboard, museums are partly a storage solution: boxes or containers for obsolescent commodities.

Cosmopolitanism is one of the ways in which the universalism is being rethought. If a universal museum is the “world in a box”, perhaps cosmopolitanism offers us a way out of the box by conceiving of global culture as something that cannot be contained and made coherent, as a set of connections and interrelationships rather than something framed in one grand narrative. Some commentators such as David Harvey take a pessimistic view of the concept of cosmopolitanism: broadly speaking, he sees it as rhetoric masking globalization (Harvey 2009). Other writers are concerned about the “Eurocentric legacy” of the term. In the 1920s and 30s, the period I keep returning to here, cosmopolitanism in Europe tended to be opposed to national boundaries and borders but was associated with a particular kind of privileged, cultured person. Today cosmopolitanism is used to include a wider range of people, including economic migrants. The cultural historian Mica Nava sees cosmopolitanism as “a structure of *feeling*: as an empathetic and inclusive set of identifications” (Nava 2007, 3). This is what she calls a “visceral cosmopolitanism” that is felt and lived by people of all classes especially through interethnic relationships and marriages.

More recently, too, cosmopolitanism is talked about as something which operates on borders, at the edges, boundaries or periphery: in the contested territories without resolving the conflict or eradicating those territories. As Nikos Papastergiadis proposes in his book *Cosmopolitanism and Culture*, cosmopolitanism might provide a framework that could challenge the anxieties drummed up by nation states, about “barbarians at the gates” – meaning terrorists (Papastergiadis 2012, 2). Papastergiadis sees contemporary art as producing what he calls the “cosmopolitan imaginary”. Thanks to new communication media and the ease of international travel and trade, contemporary artists are globally networked and many work across cultures, producing hybrid work that draws both on local traditions and traditions within modernism. Papastergiadis is especially interested in collective and collaborative projects in contemporary art that emphasize the staging of encounters and the production of new kinds of social relations.

In this current environment, curators and arts organizers take on a greater role than they used to have, not only bringing together and framing the artworks with a narrative or interpretation, but also commissioning work within a political and conceptual framework that they have planned in advance. Some of the ways in which the globalised art world intersects with local concerns and issues can be seen in Biennales. For example, the 13th Istanbul Biennale that was held this year (2013), titled “Mom, am I barbarian?” was originally planned to take place in urban public spaces, and focus on the development of new languages and poetry in art and social movements. But then the occupation and demonstrations at Gezi park erupted in response to the destruction of public space, and the neoliberal repressive politics of the Turkish government. The Biennale organizers shifted their plans so that the biennale no longer took place on the street, in a move which some criticized as a withdrawal / abdication. The new plans included free-entry and the participation of grassroots social organizations, and the artworks (many of which had been planned before the demonstrations) took on new force.

The way that the Biennale connected with a kind of “cosmopolitan imaginary” can be seen in the way the curators talked about this experience of having to change their plans in response to unfolding events in the city. One of the curators, Fulya Erdemci, discussed how the conceptual framework for the biennale was based on the question of how art could create a space for debate and collective imagination - in her words - “without reaching a consensus (under which the weakest voices are repressed)” . She said, “the creative, collective, anonymous and self-organized living and action capacity [that] came out from the Gezi occupation taught (and is still teaching) us how diverse, even clashing World views and practices can live together and act together.”[3]

This is a near-perfect definition of what Papastergiadis means by cosmopolitanism. For Papastergiadis, a cosmopolitan museum would be a public forum dedicated to public engagement, participation and dialogue. It would move away from internationalist exhibitions and projects that he says “either promoted universal commonalities or celebrated cultural differences” towards a focus on the relationship between local needs and larger debates about human rights, and human culture (Papasteriadis 2012, 166). This is one way of thinking about the difference between a cosmopolitan and a universalist approach: there is no attempt at consensus, no attempt to suppress difference and no definite goal. Nevertheless, one might be able to imagine a situation in which this kind of “cosmopolitan art practice” by becoming the dominant mode, undoes its own cosmopolitanism by suppressing the diversity of other practices.

At first glance, this notion of a cosmopolitan museum would be quite distinct from a universal museum (which tells a world story to a global audience) and a national museum (which is used for the construction and consolidation of national identity and the reproduction of certain kinds of citizenship). Both national museums and universal museums tend to subsume cultural differences or incompatibilities within a larger narrative (just as MoMA does with its continuing story of the development of abstraction). While universal museums include art museums, national narratives are played out most explicitly in historical museums, usually, and in those museums that are actually designated as “National museums”.

These narratives tend to be at their most forceful at times when the state is trying to consolidate itself. So for example, in Poland, that would probably be the period between the wars when Poland had expanded into territories that were still inhabited by lots of different nationalities and in the Communist period after 1945, when the aim was to assimilate lands that used to be German into the People's Republic of Poland” (Mazan 2011, 667). At these times, national museums were apparently used as one means of constructing a national identity - and this meant concealing or underplaying the actual diversity of communities living within the borders of the nation.

Despite these differences, what the national museum, the universal museum and this cosmopolitan ideal of the museum all share is that they are premised on a belief that museums primarily operate - or ought to operate - as a kind of public sphere. But in fact, museums have become something else in the last thirty years: they are increasingly connected to the market and to the production of cultural consumers rather than ideal citizens.

So museums now find themselves in an interesting situation. On the one hand they need to address a global marketplace and at the same time act as a kind of public space or forum that is accountable to a specific audience. Perhaps they do this by having a significant and representative collection, or exhibition programme, by being an international museum. Perhaps they do this by developing their own “unique selling point” which is to do with their specific location and the cultural production or identity of the region. Perhaps they expand beyond their own walls, using platforms like Flickr, Tumblr or the Google art project to take their activities and collections to a wide audience. Or perhaps they have a reputation as a key platform for globalized contemporary art and for the cosmopolitan imaginary. But to the extent that these museums all remain educational institutions, they also need to continue to provide “a journey for those who cannot travel”. Of course, today lots and lots people do travel, as migrants and for economic rather than cultural reasons, but the museum is still engaged in opening up worlds to them, as any educational institution ought to be.

Like the electronic and technical media that have developed alongside it, the museum has for a long time been engaged in overcoming the limits of place, in enabling us to “calmly and adventurously go travelling” (to use Walter Benjamin’s phrase). Like the media too, it needs to strike a balance between radical diversity (turning into an accumulation of incomprehensible stuff) and homogeneity: one way of thinking about the Guggenheim museums (for instance) is as a kind of “franchise” not so far removed from

Starbucks. The Utopian dream of the museum that is universal because reproducible, becomes something else: a nightmare of homogenous culture.

If the same story really were told everywhere there would be no outside – no elsewhere from which to stand and recognise the specificity and partiality of your own version. We can now see the limits of Barr's totalizing narrative, the particular values it espoused and the things it ignored, it's much easier from this vantage point, now. We can critique the *Inventing Abstraction* diagram too, for its unexamined assumptions about relationships as networks, for its dismissal of time as a dimension, for its inability to imagine collectives and localised concerns. Yet I'm pretty sure it will be much easier to question it and recognise its limitations when this network theory model is no longer in fashion as an explanatory model for culture and human relationships in general. The universal museum is born of a very specific culture: so the first step is making that culture visible, by stepping outside and looking back. One task of the museum would be to continue to create those outsides, while avoiding telling the same story everywhere.

References

Alexander Alberro. 2013. "A Messier Coherence: Inventing Abstraction at the Museum of Modern Art" in *Modernism/modernity*. 20(2), 371-381.

Benjamin, Walter. 1973. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," (1936). In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt; trans. Harry Zohn. London: Fontana, 219-253.

Belting, Hans. 2001. *The Invisible Masterpiece*. London: Reaktion Books.

Blanchard, Marc. 2000. "The Dandy and the Commissar: Notes on the History of Culture" MLN, 115(4), 662-689.

Cuno, James (ed.) 2009. *Whose Culture? The Promise of Museums and the Debate over Antiquities*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cuno, James. 2011. *Museums Matter: In Praise of the Encyclopedic Museum.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Duncan, Carol and Wallach, Alan. 1980. "The Universal Survey Museum". *Art History* 3(4), 448-469
Fisher, Philip.1991. *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in a Culture of Museums.* Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Griffiths, Alison. 2003. *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* . New York: Columbia University Press.

Griffiths, Alison. 1996. "Journey for Those Who Can Not Travel': Promenade Cinema and the Museum Life Group". In Wide Angle 18(3), 53-84.

Guilbaut, Serge. 1983. *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Harvey, David. 2009. *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny. 1981. *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500–1900*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Henning, Michelle. 2006. *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*. Maidenhead UK: Open University Press.

Henning, Michelle. 2013. With and Without Walls: Photographic Reproduction and The Art Museum. In *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*. Online version at http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118829059.wbihms996/abstract accessed December 2013.

Holmes, Oliver Wendell. 1859. "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph." *Atlantic Magazine*, June, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1859/06/the-stereoscope-and-the-stereo graph/303361/ (accessed January 20, 2013).

Nava, Mica. 2007. Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalization of Difference. London: Berg Press.

Maleuvre, Didier.1999. *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.

Malraux, André. 1967. *Museum Without Walls*. London: Secker and Warburg.

Mazan. Kazamierz. 2011. "National Museums in Poland". In *Building National Museums in Europe 1750-2010*. Conference proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Bologna 28-30 April 2011. Eds. Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius. Linköping University Electronic Press: http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=064 - Accessed October 2013.

Meyer, Richard. 2013. *What Was Contemporary Art?* Cambridge, Mass.:MIT Press
Papastergiardis, Nikos. 2012. *Cosmopolitanism and Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Penny, H. Glenn. 2002. *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*. Chapel Hill NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Sherman, Daniel. 1994. "Quatremère/Benjamin/Marx; Art Museums, Aura and Commodity Fetishism". In *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourse, Spectacles*. eds. Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff. New York: Routledge.

---

[1] Cited at http://hyperallergic.com/57599/amazing-new-graph-drawing-charts-the-invention-of-abstraction/ - accessed October 2013.

[2] Alberro 2013, 375: "To think of the emergence of abstraction as a network is to try to think the singular and the multiple *simultaneously*. Rather than focus on distinct artistic practices or media, each complete with its own identity, structure and properties, *Inventing Abstraction* suggests interrelated artistic formations, cross-medium exchange and singular variations"

[3] http://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2013/09/05/mom_am_i_barbarian.html