Ethnologia Europaea
Journal of European Ethnology

Contents of volume 33:1

Editorial: Museum and Modernity................................................................. 3
Valdimar Tr. Hafstein: Bodies of Knowledge. Ole Worm & Collecting in Late Renaissance Scandinavia.......................................................... 5
Bjarne Stoklund: Between Scenography and Science. Early Folk Museums and their Pioneers.............................................................. 21
Bjarne Rogan: Towards a Post-colonial and a Post-national Museum. The Transformation of a French Museum Landscape.......................... 37
Bjarne Rogan: The Emerging Museums of Europe....................................... 51
Regina Römhild: Confronting the Logic of the Nation-State. Transnational Migration and Cultural Globalisation in Germany...................... 61
Marysia H. Galbraith: Gifts and Favors. Social Networks and Reciprocal Exchange in Poland................................................................. 73
The institution called museum must be counted among the most peculiar and fascinating features of modernity. To analyze and interpret this institution and its changing roles is therefore a relevant task for those interested in the cultural history of the Western world. Consequently, there has recently in the humanities been a growing interest in museum history, especially among European ethnologists who include several museum pioneers among the early practitioners of their own subject.

The majority of the articles in this issue of Ethnologia Europaea are dedicated to museums, their history and their role in a changing Europe. We start with the first museums, the cabinets of curiosity of the Renaissance. In his paper, Valdimar Hafstein focuses on one of the early collectors, the Dane Ole Worm (1588–1654), professor of medicine at the University of Copenhagen, who not only established a famous museum that came to form the basis of Denmark’s National Museum, but also did pioneering ethnological surveys, wrote a monumental work on runes and collected and published medieval folklore and literature. Through his study of this learned man and his European relations, Hafstein wants to clarify “the new technicians of knowledge, the virtuosi, whose emergence in the Renaissance marks the rise of the (secular) scholar to prominence as a third power in European societies, alongside the royalty and the clergy”.

In the second half of the 18th century, the old cabinets of curiosity gave way to specialized collections, primarily among the natural sciences. In the 19th century, however, the museums of cultural history became the most prominent, closely related, as they were, to the new nation states then under formation in most of Europe. The first of these museums were concentrating on prehistoric and medieval objects, while museological interest in the Renaissance and the succeeding periods only appeared in the second half of the century. These decades also saw the birth of some new kinds of museums, which were in form and content inspired by another important institution of the time: the great exhibitions. In his paper, Bjarne Stoklund focuses on one of these new types, the so-called folk museums. By taking a closer look at four of the pioneers in this field: the Swede Artur Hazelius, the Dane Bernhard Olsen and the two Germans Rudolf Virchow and Ulrich Jahn, he tries to characterize these museums as situated at the crossroads between scenography and science.

The folk museum was a Scandinavian invention that took root also in Central and Eastern Europe, but played a very peripheral role in old colonial powers like Great Britain and France. France did get a museum of that kind, but nearly half a century after the founding of such museums in Scandinavia and Central Europe. Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires was established in 1937, on the initiative of George Henri Rivière, another of the great pioneers in the history of museums. This museum, its long crisis and the final decision to close and remove it, is the point of departure for two articles by Bjarne Rogan on the current situation of ethnological and anthropological museums in Europe.

In the first paper he looks at a series of radical changes in the French museum landscape, involving not only the mentioned museum of popular culture, but also two other well-known anthropological museums in Paris. Bjarne Rogan gives a detailed description of these transformations and the associated debates, and he discusses the factors behind. The museum of popular culture is not only geographically removed from Paris to Marseilles, but its whole character has been changed from a national to a transnational institution, with the future name of Le Musée des Civilisation de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée. This may be the
beginning of a new trend in European museology, and this question is the topic of Bjarne Rogan’s second paper. By taking a comparative look at similar transactions or new creations in Berlin, Brussels and Torino, he discusses the similarities and differences in background, ideology and museological programmes in these new initiatives.

The last two articles in this issue of *Ethnologia Europaea* are concerned with problems of topical interest to European ethnology. With a point of departure in a representative of the category of Russian immigrants classified as “ethnic Germans”, Regina Römhild explores the increasing gap between the cultural dynamics of transnationalisation in Germany and the national self-perception of the German society. And Marysia Galbraith has studied a classical topic in a new setting and situation. In her paper she examines reciprocal exchange in today’s Poland, and considers the continuities and changes in uses of gifts, favours and recommendations as state socialism is replaced by market capitalism.
Bodies of Knowledge
Ole Worm & Collecting in Late Renaissance Scandinavia

Valdimar Tr. Hafstein

In a letter penned in Copenhagen on February 5th 1644, the Danish Renaissance man Ole Worm offers a young friend this advice: “To seek unbeaten paths is the best way to find virtue” (Schepelern 1965–68, III:8, my translation from Danish). In May the same year, a German correspondent from the town of Wittenberg, August Buchner, extols the virtue and fame of Ole Worm in a letter addressed to him: “... [your] name and glory is not only renowned among one people and nation, but across the earth, wherever scientific and learned studies are practiced and honored. For it is certainly not only mother Denmark and the countries by the Baltic, it is also learned Germany, erudite Italy, and eloquent France that wonder and marvel at my Worm and count him among those who, in addition to the pursuit of other great arts, have won immortality for themselves through the study of antiquities and the finer sciences” (ibid., 19–20).

This paper is about virtue and wonder, about learning, erudition, and eloquence. It is about knowledge and power. It focuses on a professor of medicine in Copenhagen, Ole Worm. The primary data is Ole Worm’s collected correspondence, as well as a museum catalogue he authored, describing the various objects in his collection.

If he is in focus here, however, then the background is the early modern project of knowledge production, expressed primarily in the activities of collecting, travelling, and corresponding, and in material manifestations such as cabinets of curiosities, botanical gardens, and publications of various sorts.

This production of knowledge, in turn, forms part of the larger social and historical complex of early modernity in Europe. By modernity I mean to designate political, economic, and cultural formations characterized by compression of space and time, by increased circulation (of commodities, information, people), by increasing centralization coupled with increasing surveillance, by heightened reflexivity, and by uncertainty and agitation. These characteristics,
associated later with industrialization and high modernity, are evident also in the early modern period, albeit in a limited form compared to their later escalation and democratization: circulation, but for and of an elite; compression, centralization, and reflexivity, but on a relative scale and emerging quite slowly.

It is also in the early modern period that the scholar emerges as a third leading power in European societies, alongside the political and spiritual powers, the courts and the churches (Schulz 1990, 175; cf. Giard 1991, 19). Marking a break with the firm, finite, and immutable world-view associated with the middle ages, new vistas were opened up by the discovery of the “New World,” which simultaneously revealed the contingency of the “Old World,” while the authority of the medieval church was broken by the Reformation in Northern Europe and the Counter-Reformation in Southern Europe.

This historical break created interstitial spaces in which enterprising individuals could use their wits to establish themselves as technicians of knowledge. These were the “virtuosi” of the Renaissance, that is to say gentlemen with cutting-edge interest in natural history and the arts (Swann 2001, 4). Their travels and correspondence created networks of knowledge across the continent. Their collections of natural specimens and cultural artifacts were known as cabinets of curiosities, or Wunderkammern. The first Wunderkammer was established in Vienna in 1550. For a century and a half they were opened up by the discovery of the “New World,” which simultaneously revealed the contingency of the “Old World,” while the authority of the medieval church was broken by the Reformation in Northern Europe and the Counter-Reformation in Southern Europe.

Mirroring and inverting the expanding horizons of the era, knowledge production used condensing and universalizing forms of representation, capturing the multifarious world in one room, as with cabinets of curiosities, or in a small plot of land, as with botanical gardens. These spaces of collection and reflection were simultaneously sites of knowledge and power, commanding wonder and curiosity on both accounts. They reflected a general tendency towards centralization in this period—the condensation of knowledge in the collection paralleled the consolidation of political power. This consolidation is witnessed of course in empire-building, with its center–periphery colonial relations, but also in the emergence of absolute monarchies in various European states in the seventeenth century.

Networks of Knowledge

Narrowing my focus then, I want to discuss one of the virtuosi of the Late Renaissance, an avid collector, antiquarian, and polymath: Ole Worm. Claimed as a founding father for several modern disciplines in Scandinavia (except Sweden, which has its own roster of primal patriarchs), including archeology, museology, philology, ethnology, and folklore, Ole Worm is a pheno-
menal figure in North European intellectual history. He set up a famous museum that came to form the basis for Denmark’s National Museum, he engineered pioneering ethnological questionnaire surveys of the Danish kingdom, he wrote a monumental work on runes (the ancient writing system of Scandinavia), he collected and published medieval folklore and literature, and those were just some of his “hobbies”: his position at the University of Copenhagen was as a professor of medicine (on Ole Worm as a doctor, see Hovesen 1987).

Ole Worm was born in the town of Århus, Denmark, on May 13, 1588. Son of the mayor, he belonged to a family of public servants (his maternal grandfather was also a mayor). Some details of his formative years are known through an obituary published by the University of Copenhagen a week after his death on August 31, 1654. Danish philologist and Wormspecialist, H.D. Schepelern, has made this obituary available in his dissertation (1971) on the Museum Wormianum, a manuscript assembled by Ole Worm in the last years of his life and published posthumously in 1655, based on his lecture notes and dealing with the objects in his museum. Schepelern has also published Ole Worm’s complete correspondence in Danish translation in three thick volumes.

Worm attended grammar school in Århus between ca. 1595 and 1601, but his travels began early for at the age of thirteen he was sent off to the German town of Lüneburg to continue his schooling at the distinguished Academy Johanneum. However, he only stayed there for a year, and in 1603 he moved to the former Hanseatic town of Emmerich on the Rhine where he stayed with relatives and studied at a Jesuit school for a period of three years. He returned to Denmark, but completing his studies at the University of Copenhagen was out of the question for the Danish king had recommended in 1604 that measures be taken to safeguard the integrity of such institutions against young Danes who had attended Jesuit schools.

In 1605, Worm set out on travels that would take him across Europe, to many of the cultural capitals of the Renaissance, and would last for eight years. This “grand tour” became fashionable in Renaissance Europe among the sons of the nobility and the educated fraction of the emerging bourgeoisie, and came instead of a sedentary university education. We learn about Ole Worm’s travels from his travelling autograph album, signed by all colleagues, professors, and dignitaries with whom he consorteded on his travels – a collection of notables, if you will.

He stopped for shorter or longer periods of time in various university towns and centers of culture: Marburg, Hamburg, Giessen, Frankenberg, Kassel, Heidelberg, Strasbourg, Basel, Padua, Naples, Siena, Montpellier, Paris, Leyden, Enkhuizen, Amsterdam, and London. He studied philosophy, theology, anatomy, and medicine, visited museums, and served as a private tutor. In Basel, Switzerland, he received a doctorate in medicine in December 1611, for a dissertation that catalogued most diseases known to man and their various cures.

Somewhere along the line, he became an
active collector, and we do know that on his journey to southern Italy in the spring of 1609 he visited Ferranto Imperato, a famous collector in Naples. He spent six weeks or so in Kassel, a center of the German Renaissance, where he acquainted himself with one of Europe’s most famous art collections, patronized by the Hessian Prince, Moritz the Learned. In Enkhuizen, he was received by the collector Bernhard Paludanus, who presented him with a fragrant reed and a coffee-bean for his collection – rarities from across the ocean, commodities from the burgeoning international trade, standing pars pro toto for the New World and the new worldview emerging in this period (Schepelern 1971, 42–85, esp. 43–46).

Travels like these, the “grand tour,” created networks of knowledge in early modern Europe, centered in the intellectual hubs of the Renaissance, but dispersed throughout the continent. Complemented by vigorous correspondence between the virtuosi, the “grand tour” amounted to a methodology of knowing. If intellectual vagrancy – the “grand tour” – was thought to substitute for a sedentary university education, this affords us an insight into conceptions of knowledge in this period. The changes wrought by the virtuosi to the idea of knowledge and methods of knowing amounted to a paradigmatic shift towards empiricism. The Renaissance empiricists became interested in travel because it gave members of the educated classes an opportunity to cultivate themselves as well as to acquire “true knowledge,” that is to say knowledge gained through observation (Stagl 1995, 65). It bears mentioning, however, that the virtuosi were not empiricists in quite the same sense as, say, Locke or Hume. Rather, theirs was an early empiricism, characterized by an interest in things, in physical objects and in tactile experience, but not by experimentation. Experience and observation were not yet the basis of knowledge, which was still sought in books, but they served increasingly to supplement the authority of the written word, to demonstrate and to verify that knowledge (cf. Collet 2003 for a more skeptical view of the applicability of empiricist labels to the Renaissance).

Ole Worm’s grand tour of Europe ended with a sojourn in London, at the end of which he returned to Copenhagen for a university position. For the next ten years, Worm consecutively held the chairs of pedagogy, Greek, and physics at the University of Copenhagen. In 1624, he became professor of medicine (Randsborg 1994, 135). The beginnings of Ole Worm’s museum at the university, the Museum Wormianum, can be dated to ca. 1620 (Schepelern 1990, 81). The modest collection of geological, biological, and cultural curiosities he rounded up on his travels provided the initial basis for the collection, but the bulk of the museum was actually assembled through correspondence – he was a letter-writing collector. Worm was enmeshed in the cosmopolitan network of knowledge and virtue, and had connections with virtuosi from across the European continent, including such renowned figures as Athanasius Kircher, Fabri de Peiresc, Achille Harlay, Isaac Lapeyrère, and Jan de Laet (Schepelern 1990, 84). In addition to collectors, his correspondents included physicians, antiquarians, and various other learned men.

In Worm’s correspondence, one finds frequent allusions to objects donated to the museum by his correspondents, as well as numerous exhortations such as this one: “If further along in your travels you should come across any rarities that might enrich my cabinet of naturalia, I ask you to keep me in mind” (Ole Worm in a letter to Christen Stougaard in Strasbourg, 19.5./13.10.1628, Schepelern 1965–1968, I:160, my translation from Danish). The growth of Worm’s museum can thus be documented fairly well through the correspondence, as well as his dominant interests in various periods. The letters afford glimpses of the logic guiding the collecting effort, which in turn is an index of the modes of knowledge production in this period and their relationship to power.

The grand tour and its associated networks of knowledge and virtue were thus essential to the establishment and compilation of Ole Worm’s museum in Copenhagen. The museum, in turn, was a node in the intellectual orbits of its time. By the time of Worm’s death in 1654, it was held in such high regard that a visitor reported that in this museum “is found and can be examined with wonder, odd and curious rarities and things among which a
large part has not been seen before, and many royal persons and envoys visiting Copenhagen ask to see the museum on account of its great fame and what it relates from foreign lands, and they wonder and marvel at what they see” (qtd. in Dam-Mikkelsen and Lundbæk 1980, xix–xx).

Material Knowledge

If the pursuit of knowledge and virtue are inseparable in the activities of the virtuosi, these center around the practice of collecting. Gathering knowledge, gaining virtue, and amassing objects – all were tightly intermeshed as so many aspects of knowledge production. Renaissance empiricism made knowledge a physical virtue, embodied by the virtuosi, but also by the various things in the world. Knowledge came to revolve around material objects, and objects came to materialize knowledge.

In a letter to one of his regular correspondents, dated June 20, 1639, Ole Worm explains the rationale behind his museum (Schepelern 1965–1968, II:132, my translation from Danish):

“As to the display of curiosities in my museum, I have not yet completed it. I have collected various things on my journeys abroad, and from India and other very remote places I have been brought various things: samples of soil, rocks, metals, plants, fish, birds, and land-animals, that I conserve well with the goal of, along with a short presentation of the various things’ history, also being able to present my audience with the things themselves to touch with their own hands and to see with their own eyes, so that they may themselves judge how that which is said fits with the things, and can acquire a more intimate knowledge of them all.”

Stressing the importance of intimacy, of touching with one’s own hands and seeing with one’s own eyes, Ole Worm articulates the embodied, tactile nature of knowledge in Renaissance empiricism. But above and beyond the empirical outlook, however, this scientific materialism should also be seen in the context of the materialism that characterized the Renaissance in general. Collecting is one mode of conspicuous consumption, also seen in the portraits of this era in which nobles and men of means are depicted surrounded by their worldly goods, by which their greatness may be measured (Jardine 1996, esp. 8–19). In this sense, the project of collecting is an expression of early capitalism; the virtuosi with their collections of natural and cultural objects exemplify an emerging ideal of self as owner – the self invested in possessions (Swann 2001, 5–6).

Renaissance empiricism thus involves literally an objectification of knowledge, but also an objectification of the self. Collecting was a project of objectification by which scholars created themselves as bodies of knowledge – as virtuosi. The collection, in other words, is both the product and the producer of its owner. Together, the collector and the collection produce and are produced by the particular constellations of modernity at play in Northern Europe in the seventeenth century. As a symbolic mirror of the cosmos, the collection condenses the world at large. This compression makes power claims for the collector, but also extends these claims to his patron – the prince or the king. Ultimately, the collections – through their work of condensation, classification, and display – demonstrate mastery of a large and complicated world.

The Renaissance museums thus repeat and underwrite the political logic of centralization in society at large, witnessed in the building of empires and the emergence of absolute monarchies in many European states (including Ole Worm’s Denmark). As we’ve learned from cultural geographers like David Harvey, compression of space and time is one of the major characteristics of modernity. While in a much-tempered form compared to the post-modern implosion Harvey is best known for analyzing, this kind of compression is also at stake in the Renaissance, variously expressed in the domains of culture, politics, and economic relations.

The Catalogue

Already in the middle of the fifteenth century, the printing press created the conditions for new kinds of materializations of knowledge, a revolution in communications that allowed identical texts, “images, maps, and diagrams [to] be viewed simultaneously by scattered read-
ers” across the European continent (Eisenstein 1979, 53). The hitherto unimaginable potential for reproduction and distribution of knowledge was fully exploited by the new technicians of knowledge of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This period saw the emergence of an original genre of literature: the published catalogue. In the catalogue, the virtuosi invented a way of textualizing collections through an enumeration of their objects and a rendering of the erudition embodied in each object. The catalogue allowed collectors to display their objects of knowledge to a much wider audience, augmenting the profile of their museums while achieving greater distinction for themselves (Swann 2001, 9–10).

Ole Worm published a catalogue inventorying his museum in three editions. The first one, from 1642, was little more than an enumeration of its holdings. A second edition appeared in 1645, revised and updated but still a skeletal inventory. For the last few years of his life, however, Worm worked on a much-augmented version with a full account of the derivation, history, and significance of the objects found in his museum. The name-dropping in the catalogue entries reads like a who’s who of the European world of virtuosi; through these, Ole Worm demonstrates his own membership in networks of prestige and power, presenting himself “as a collector of rare men as well as rare physical objects” (Swann 2001, 11).

This third, full-length edition of the catalogue was published posthumously, in 1655, as the Museum Wormianum (with the subtitle: seu, Historia rerum rariorum, tam naturalium, quam artificialium, tam domesticarum, quam exoticarum, quae Hafniae Danorum in aedibus authoris servantur). As was customary at this time, the catalogue divides the holdings into categories based on the three kingdoms of nature: mineral, plant, and animal, proceeding in that order, from the “lowest” to the “highest.” It ends with a fourth category, artificialia, i.e., man’s creations, but within that category the objects are listed in ascending order within subdivisions based on the natural materials in which they are wrought. Always the rare, alien, and curious is accentuated. Thus the classification celebrates the universe as divine creation, representing God’s omnipotence through the more “wonderful” results of the creative act: the rarities, exotica, and monstrae (cf. Kenseth 1991, 88). Man is numbered among animals, for in the last chapter of Book III, Worm discusses malformed foetuses from his collection, as well as a giant tooth and giant skull attributed to prehistoric gigantic races (mummies, however, are numbered last among the minerals in Book I; Schepelern 1971, 292–293). The giant tooth and giant skull bear out Susan Stewart’s observation that “what often happens in the depiction of the gigantic is a severing of the synecdoche from its referent, or whole” (1993, 89). In this case, the referent must be seen as “antiquity,” and the giant remainders testify to the radical difference of antiquity, its ontological as well as temporal distance from the present. All the while, in spite of man being numbered among animals in Book III, his position at the apex of creation is asserted, with human remains counted last in the hierarchical ordering. Moreover, the divine face of the human race is attested to in its own acts of creation, listed in Book IV, giving shape to the God-given naturalia.

Book II deals with plants in the collection, and may serve as an example of the catalogue’s contents. It is richly illustrated, and subdivided into 35 somewhat arbitrary chapters (Schepelern 1971, 249). An introductory chapter is followed by two chapters on rare fungi, such as boletus cervi, thought to grow from semen that elks spill on the ground during mating season (ibid., 251). Chapters four through nine inventory exotic plants in the collection, including bambus and ficus Indica (which Worm says he cultivated in his botanical garden), to name just two examples (ibid., 251–254). The next five chapters discuss roots and leaves in alphabetical order, beginning with China roots. We are for example told that Worm was sent a Yuca root by his friend Thomas Bartholin, that it originates in the West Indies on the island of San Domingo (Haiti), and that it is used to make flour, which in turn is baked into biscuits that the natives call Casavi, which the Portuguese eat on their long voyages across the ocean—a “root metonym” for a whole complex of colonial relations.

Worm also discusses tea leaves, of which he
had procured a few dried ones; he put one of these in water and was thus able to restore its original shape, which is represented in his catalogue by a wood carving (ibid., 254–256). Chapters fifteen through nineteen tabulate and discourse on exotic types of trees, of which Worm had samples in his collection, beginning with Aloe from the New World, and proceeding alphabetically through trees from India, Arabia, Italy, Iceland, and Florida, to name a few. The nineteenth chapter is devoted to miscellaneous tree “monstrosities,” i.e., trees that have the shape of animals or recognizable things (ibid., 256–260). Chapter twenty examines the bark of exotic trees and its sundry medical and culinary uses (ibid., 260). This is followed by three chapters on fruits, e.g., from Peru, Egypt, Brazil, Russia, the West Indies, and the East Indies (ibid., 260–267). The final four chapters are less fleshed out, comprising a short discussion of rubber, various solidified saps, marine plants, and zoophytes (ibid., 267–268).

Exotica and Antiquities

As this enumeration makes clear, Worm’s cabinet is, among other things, a metonymic representation of the “New World,” displaying tokens of the alien from overseas, whilst maintaining them in the space of the catalogue/cabinet as distinctly Other. Here, they are experienced as wonders – wonder representing, in this case, recognition of difference. As Stephen Greenblatt elegantly phrases it, wonder registers the presence of the European spectator’s “fears and desires in the very objects he perceives and conversely the presence in his discourse of a world of objects that exceed his understanding of the probable and familiar” (1991, 75). Furthermore, wonder was adopted in the Renaissance as an agent of appropriation. The discourse of the New World in the early modern period is “a record of the colonizing of the marvelous” (ibid., 24–25).

In her writings On Longing, Susan Stewart has remarked on the similarities in the logic that makes “objects of desire” of both antiquities and exotica. In short, “the exotic object represents distance appropriated” (1993, 147), whereas “the antiquarian seeks to both distance and appropriate the past” (ibid., 142). This, too, may be observed in Worm’s catalogue, where old worlds and new coincide, much as they would in the gaze of a European spectator in Worm’s cabinet of curiosities. There is no attempt to separate the two; the absence of such an effort may be read as an affirmation of the power of the European machinery of representation. It establishes the ability to easily incorporate the “New World” into the “Old World” and its systems of knowledge and representation.

Book IV, De artificiosis, is divided into 12 chapters. It recapitulates the hierarchical ordering of nature in the first three books, progressing from objects forged from earth, stone, metal, and glass, through objects contrived from plants, tree, and fruit, to objects made out of animal furs, bones, and shells. Again, exotica feature prominently, although in this category antiquities are a close runner-up. In the chapter on objects wrought in metal, as we might expect, European antiquities are more numerous than exotic artifacts. We find, to be sure, a Chinese scale, two Indian swords, an Indian knife, lance, spear, pen, lock, and gold ring, as well as an American lance and harpoon. However, these are interspersed among Roman clasps, an ancient Danish bronze bracelet, bronze knives and swords excavated in Denmark, two iron battle-axes unearthed in Norway, various spurs attributed to historical kings of the Scandinavian kingdoms, and a small bronze horse (gift to Worm from the Danish chancellor), which, we read, two Norwegian witches used to wield magical powers over fishing (Schepelern 1971, 334–342).

Among artifacts fashioned from wood, exotica outweigh antiquities: from Greenland we have a kayak oar, a spear, a harpoon, and an instrument of uncertain use; we find bows and arrows from America, Greenland, India, Persia, and Scythia, as well as from the Sami of northern Scandinavia, from whom we also find a reindeer sleigh; a Chinese fan with floral patterns; and various tobacco pipes from the New World. However, other wooden objects in Worm’s museum are local antiquities: Danish runic calendars, Icelandic and Norwegian shields, Lithuanian and Icelandic flutes, to give some examples. Finally, two wooden artifacts imitate
nature in a novel and impressive way, dem-on-
strating human power over and subordina-
tion of nature: _mus rotis actus_, a mechanical mouse, 
carved from wood and covered with mouse-hide, 
operated by a clockwork mechanism; and _statua 
librata pondere mobilis_, a human figure with 
flexible limbs operated by a wheel, which can 
run around and pick things up (Schepelern 
1971, 348–355). The human figure, it should be 
noted, holds a spear in one hand and wears 
clothes and a hat that identify it as a “savage.” 
Needless to say, such a depiction of “natives” as 
mechanical puppets reflects on colonial power 
relations and encapsulates the wider political 
significance of the various New World acqui-
sitions in cabinets of curiosities (and, indeed, of 
ethnographic objects from the “savage” per-
ipheries of Europe). Moreover, as Jean Baud-
rillard has said, “the automaton has no other 
destiny than to be ceaselessly compared to 
living man – so as to be more natural than him, 
of which he is the ideal figure” (1983, 93). In this, 
the automaton shares the destiny of the savage, 
who allows questions to be posed regarding the 
natural state of man and the cost of civilization. 
Ole Worm’s savage automaton or automated 
savage thus holds up a mirror to the Western 
gaze, objectifying one aspect of the logic of the 
museum as a whole.

The Gift of Comprehension

The title page of the _Museum Wormianum_ de-
picts some of its contents (including the human 
figurine). Whether we take the illustration to be 
an accurate depiction of Worm’s cabinet, as has 
been maintained (Schepelern 1990), or a craftier 
tool of public relations, it is at any rate a repre-
sentation of order, produced also inside the 
catalogue. It represents a particular conception 
of order(liness), which reproduces some of the 
cultural-historical characteristics of the Renais-

Museum Wormianum 1655. Frontispiece. The collection was bought by Frederik III the same year.
sance discussed above. Thus, its order contains no empty spaces, and was therefore “capable of filling every visitor with wonder by immediately conveying the idea of riches and variety” (Olmi 1993, 239). In much the same way, blanks are strikingly absent from the catalogue (in contrast to Enlightenment taxonomies by the likes of Linnaeus; cf. Campbell 1999, 80–82). The inventory inside the catalogue also names the objects, thus demonstrating a mastery of sorts, incorporating them into the representational machinery of (the Latin) language, this in addition to the attempt to impose order through hierarchical categorization.

On the other hand, the conventional wisdom of early modern scholarship sees in the title-page illustration of Worm’s museum an awe-some juxtaposition. According to this position, the cabinet itself, through its arrangement, is an agent of wonder. In other words (those of Steven Mullaney), the cabinet of curiosity constitutes the objects it displays as wonders precisely because, unlike the inventory, it “lodges them beyond the bounds of cultural hierarchies or definitions” (Mullaney 1988, 67). Thus the cabinet arouses wonder by suspending categories, presenting its objects as entirely new and wholly unique, because unsystematized and out of context.

However, though this interpretation is certainly clever and rather convincing, it was effectively scrapped in a recent article by Camilla Mordhorst, at least as far as the illustration of Worm’s museum is concerned. In a simple and compelling analysis, Mordhorst demonstrates that from an embodied perspective – the perspective of one physically entering the museum as it is depicted in the illustration – the display is actually quite systematic. Moreover, its logic is precisely the same as that of the catalogue; if one peruses the contents from right to left, the objects are arranged in the same order as Books I–IV, according to the classical division of nature into three kingdoms. The arrangement even closely resembles that of the chapters within the four books of the catalogue (Mordhorst 2002). The inventory and the illustration (and, presumably, the cabinet itself) thus depend on and demonstrate the same imposition of order onto nature.

The illustration of the museum also accompanied the 1642 edition of the catalogue and Ole Worm sent a copy to many of his correspondents. The following response from the learned Arngrímur Jónsson, dated August 11, 1642, is fascinating for what it reveals about the reception of such collections. It clues us in to the significance given to Renaissance collections by contemporaries:

“It remains to be said that I am taken with wonder over the mirror-image of Worm’s Library [i.e., museum]; its distance from my brain’s understanding, however, is as long and as great as the heavenly domain is said to be from the earth. Heavenly is this gift of comprehension, given to one man’s intelligence, and God the Lord must be praised in all his works. Through such divine gifts he makes us wonder at that which we do not comprehend, rather than disdain it like animals. For this is the face of God, when he lets one man stand so high above all else, that we look and recognize how much greater the highest is than the lesser, and join together in praise to Him who provides” (Schepelern 1965–1968, II:384, my translation from Danish).

The epistemic principle of wonder is amply illustrated in this quotation. Moreover, we can see that wonder is a function of distance – the “distance from my brain’s understanding,” in the words of Arngrímur; the distance between the highest and the lowest; the distance from heaven to earth. As mentioned, the objects collected in the cabinet of curiosity were in one way or another removed from the ordinary – through spatial separation, through temporal separation, or through natural aberration. If the purpose of the objects in the collection is to evoke wonder, it is precisely their distance from the everyday life of the audience that allows them to accomplish this.

Arngrímur also praises “the gift of comprehension” given to one man, witnessed in the picture of Worm’s museum. And that is what virtuosity is all about: comprehension – comprehending God’s creation in all its complexity. We would do well in this context to recall the literal meaning of comprehension: to bring together –
to collect, that is. Comprehension and collection in the Renaissance are coextensive; the more comprehensive the collection, the greater the compression achieved, the more powerful is the display of mastery. This is what makes this “gift of comprehension” “heavenly;” it is why virtuosity affords us a glimpse of “the face of God,” as Arngrímur testifies. It demonstrates, that is, the inexorable union of knowledge and power.

Collections and catalogues reveal themselves as instances of space-time compression wielded by particular individuals who have carved out spaces for themselves in a time of uncertainty and agitation in this part of the world. Collections and catalogues emerge, in other words, as tactics and strategies by which a scholarly establishment constitutes itself as a power to be reckoned with, alongside the government and the church. Virtue is the particular power of virtuosi; it involves commanding knowledge, and through knowledge commanding renown, and through such distinction commanding people. It is a gift of comprehension, displaying mastery over the world by collecting it inside a room, naming it, organizing, cataloging, surveying, etc. To have virtue, in this sense, is to have wonder at your command. Accordingly, virtue is the scholar’s claim to power through his knowledge, but it is also the claim of the powers that be on knowledge and its scholars.

The Deep Ocean of Antiquities

Ole Worm laid claims to virtue well beyond the walls of his museum. While cultural artifacts make up only a portion of Worm’s museum, he is at least as well known for his antiquarian pursuits. These, too, took the form of collections of sorts.

In a letter to another virtuoso and antiquarian, dated 1626, he expresses his sense of elation, immersion, and total lack of bearings before the project of collecting and surveying: “I don’t know what storms have driven me out onto this deep ocean of antiquities; I see no harbor; the dice are cast, whatever destiny in turn may bring” (Schepelern 1965–1968, I:114, my translation from Danish). The winds and tides of his time certainly swept many onto these same high seas. The rising tide of antiquities went hand in hand with a boom of interest in vernacular histories and natural history, as well as the codification of vernacular languages in the period following the Reformation – all of them undertakings steeped in ideology. The intellectual curiosity invested in these projects is directly tied to a sense of living in a world unmoored, in times of uncertainty and agitation. The particular projects, however, into which this intellectual curiosity is channeled represent efforts to ground empire in history, soil, and the divine.

The work that secured Ole Worm’s reputation among Europe’s literati, more so even than his museum, is a large compendium on runestones in the Danish kingdom (which at the time included Norway and the district of Skåne in the south of present-day Sweden, as well as the Atlantic territories of Iceland and the Faroe Islands). It was published in 1643 under the title Danicorum Monumentorum Libri Sex. The focus on runestones as historical monuments – as material relics and revelations of antiquity – is a conscious reproduction on a national scale of the Renaissance fascination with monuments and artifacts from classical antiquity. It is also in keeping with the early empirical practices of knowledge production characteristic of these times, the materialistic “acts of comprehension” previously discussed. For this undertaking, Ole Worm dispatched sketchers all over the kingdom to make accurate depictions of the monuments and their runic engravings (Randsborg 1994, 136). The core material, however, were reports from rural deans and vicars, submitted according to a royal ordinance to the office of the chancellor – an official who worked closely with the king and took care of the business of government.

On August 11, 1622, a letter was sent to all the kingdom’s bishops from the office of the chancellor with instructions to collect and send historical documents and parish descriptions from the priests in their respective parishes. A short missive signed by King Christian IV (1577–1648), which lays out the directive in general terms, was followed by a detailed questionnaire. The questions were arranged under six headings and inquired about all kinds of historical documents, notable localities and their alleged origins and meanings, customs, and calendars in the
runic writing system. In addition, the priests were queried about the location of any and all runic letters in their parish and asked to transcribe them (Hens 1972, 11).

With the chancellor’s office both as the point of origin for these instructions and the return address for the reports, it is clear that Denmark’s chancellor from 1616–1639, Christian Friis of Kragerup (1581–1639), played a central role in this initiative. In a report to the Danish Folklore Archives on “Traditional Material before 1817,” Henrik Andreas Hens notes that questionnaires “had already been used several times to collect statistical data” (Hens 1972, 11, my translation). This correlation does not, of course, diminish the novelty of putting the questionnaire method in the service of antiquarian pursuits. However, the parallel is suggestive; the study of antiquities was in this case modeled on statistics, the science of the state and its administration, and I would suggest that this parallel carries well beyond mere method, that it sheds a light also on the social objectives of this survey.

While the extent of Ole Worm’s involvement with these questionnaires is uncertain, they have traditionally been linked with his name (they were in fact published in the 1970s under the title Præsteindberetninger til Ole Worm, “Priests’ Reports to Ole Worm;” Jørgensen and Sørensen 1970–1974). It seems likely that he played an important role in their making, and we do know that the responses wound up in his office.

The Chancellor’s Great Joy in Antiquities

H.D. Schepelern makes much of the fact that Worm’s museum was not patronized by the Danish king: “During his stay in Kassel he cannot have failed to realize the importance of princely support to collecting activities, but on returning to Denmark found no similar attitude on the part of Christian IV” (1990, 84). “In spite of that,” Schepelern goes on to tell us, “he shouldered personally the task of forming a museum in Copenhagen, and not until after the death of Christian IV in 1648 did he benefit from any direct royal protection, maintaining close contacts with the new King for the last six years of his life” (ibid.). One might add, here, that after Worm’s death, his museum was incorporated into the Royal Kunstkammer, founded a few years prior by the new king, Frederik III.

I have no compelling reason to doubt Schepelern on this count, though we do know that Ole Worm enjoyed King Christian IV’s support in at least some of his projects, notably the initiative to collect historical-ethnographical information through questionnaires. However, for some mysterious reason (perhaps a misplaced desire to make Worm’s efforts seem greater through his isolation?) Schepelern never mentions the intimate relationship between Ole Worm and Christian Friis of Kragerup, the chancellor of the Danish state. Worm and Friis were in fact close friends and partners in all things historical. The chancellor was a learned man in his own right, deeply invested in history and the antiquarian project, and had done the “grand tour” of Europe roughly a decade before Ole Worm (Degn 1988, esp. 9–14, 178–180). Not only that, they also lived next door to each other, bumping into one another on a daily basis (ibid., 107). Moreover, Ole Worm was the physician of the chancellor’s children (ibid., 109). And the two shared a passion for antiquities, art, and science (Hens 1972, 11–12). Worm’s correspondence, furthermore, reveals time and again that he carries on communications with learned men on the chancellor’s behalf (cf. Degn 1988, 106–107). Worm, likewise, could count on the chancellor’s support in the pursuit of knowledge, including arranging all sorts of deals for Worm’s informants on antiquities. The following passage may serve as an example, from a letter to the Icelandic parish priest Magnús Ólafsson at Laufás, dated May 22, 1632 (Schepelern 1965–1968, I:261, my translation from Danish):

“I have again discussed your situation with our high Mr. Chancellor: if it suits you to give your parish over to your son on tolerable conditions, namely that he take on the duties of the office and make do with the salary he now receives, while you receive the revenues as long as you live, then he promised to work out with your governor Rosenkrantz [who was in charge of Icelandic affairs for the Danish crown] that your wishes be seen as legitimate, and that

Ethnologia Europaea vol. 33:1; e-journal. 2004. ISBN 87 635 0169 4
others be disillusioned of any hopes of succeeding you. He requested, meanwhile, that I ask you to collect for him all the old historical poems, as many as can be found, that you present them in Danish translation, with reference to the Skjøldung legends, as they are called, and that you send them to him; instead, he promised not to betray your son’s needs. [...] I cannot tell you how great a joy this great man takes in the sorts of things that contain our antiquities, and how he seeks to make them known and of use to everyone, and how much he loves those, whom he sees are taken with this interest.”

We learn from later correspondence that chancellor Friis and the royal governor of Iceland do indeed work things out to Magnús Ólafsson’s advantage, and Ole Worm spurs him on:

“...you can see from this how your interest in antiquities has made such an important man attached to you, and how grateful he is to you for the service you have rendered us. I ask you to take care to stay henceforth in his good graces; as ever, you will find me a reliable intermediary” (Schepelern 1965–1968, I:342–343, my translation from Danish).

The “old historical poems” requested by the chancellor refer to ostensibly historical literature – primarily sagas and eddas – recorded in Iceland in the thirteenth century and rediscovered as a result of the reengagement with vernacular history and antiquities in the Scandinavian Renaissance. This literature provided very nearly the entire written documentation of Scandinavia’s medieval history. Hence, antiquarians such as Worm and chancellor Friis regarded Iceland as a repository of Danish history and were anxious to access all the Icelandic sources they could get their hands on. The “Skjöldungs,” in which they express particular interest, are – according to some of these sources – the Danish royal lineage, named for Skjöldr, Denmark’s legendary first king.

The chancellor’s great joy in antiquities, and his efforts to “make them known and of use to everyone,” should thus be seen in the light of contemporary efforts to legitimate empire through historical grounding – the major impetus for the rise of vernacular histories in the post-Reformation period. Such were the “storms” that drove Ole Worm “out onto this deep ocean of antiquities.”

As to the Stories You Call Skiöldunga Saga

The “Skjöldung” material, however, proved elusive. Magnús Ólafsson at Laufás copied various manuscripts for Worm, and tried as best he could to bring his familiarity with medieval literature to bear on the problems with which Worm presented him. In 1635 he even composed a long poem honoring the chancellor, Christian Friis drápa (Degn 1988, 113). Yet he was of no avail in recovering the “Skjöldung legends”: “As to the stories you call Skjöldunga Saga, I do not recall having read it, nor do I know where it may be had” (Schepelern 1965–1968, I:273, my translation from Danish). Ole Worm’s primary collaborator in Iceland was Arngrímur Jónsson (qtd. earlier in connection with Worm’s catalogue), known as “the learned” in his own country owing to his position as Iceland’s first humanist to publish in Latin and first historian to write for an international audience (Benediktsson 1957, 71). Arngrímur and Ole Worm were in fact introduced by chancellor Friis, who wrote to Arngrímur in 1626 and asked him to help Worm to get a handle on the “old” language and literature (Degn 1988, 113). With the support of Ole Worm, moreover, Arngrímur obtained a grant towards his studies from the chancellor in 1628, the revenue from seven church estates in Iceland for the rest of his life (Benediktsson 1957, 23). When it came to the “Skjöldung poems,” however, Arngrímur was also in the dark: “As far as I am able to see, they have not been heard of here, much less heard.” Significantly, he holds out hope that perhaps they may still be recovered in oral tradition, embodied in a fragile old lady in the most remote corner of the island, already on the margins of Creation:

“But quite recently I heard that on our most distant coasts there lives a wise old woman, who is not unknowledgeable about antiquities
of that kind. And if she is still alive, I will send a messenger, and a poet at that, who can ask her about such things, although time constraints have not yet permitted me to do so” (Schepelern 1965–1968, I:268, my translation from Danish).

Oral tradition notwithstanding, Arngrímur further suggested that the term “Skjöldung poems” might not in fact, as Worm and Friis thought, denote poetry about the royal lineage of the Danish kingdom. Rather, he advised, the term “Skjöldung” was more likely used here in its connotational capacity as a kenning, a poetical device common in the medieval literature, by which reference to a particular king, Skjöldr in this case, could stand in for any king. Thus, Arngrímur explained, “Skjöldung poems” might simply mean poetry about kings, and not necessarily Danish ones at that (Schepelern 1965–1968, I:267–268).

The notion that a “Saga of the Skjöldungs” or “Skjöldung poems” existed at all was actually based on an inference from Ynglingasaga and Ynglingatal, prose and poetic narratives, respectively, tracing the Swedish kings from the inception of that neighboring kingdom. These texts are found in Snorri Sturluson’s Heimskringla, an early thirteenth century work. Ole Worm had this manuscript printed in 1632, as a contribution to the history of Scandinavia (Schepelern 1965–1968, I:260).

Historical Distinction

This brings us, in fact, to a critical point about the antiquarian project in early modern Scandinavia. Much like other aspects of the enterprise of collecting, it was integral to the cultural politics of the state. Led by Worm, the Danish antiquarians were in fact jostling with their Swedish counterparts for control of Scandinavia’s past (cf. Benediktsson 1957, 50). There was a veritable race to write the history of the North, to document its monuments, and to claim it, much as new lands were claimed across the oceans. This was a matter of enormous consequence, for the locus of enunciation would be decisive for who would stand at the center of that history, and who would be relegated to the margins.

This rivalry was one aspect of a centuries-long struggle between the Danish and Swedish monarchies. The period from the Reformation until the early eighteenth century was characterized by constant strife between the states of Europe and for the bulk of this period, Denmark and Sweden were each other’s principal opponents. During this period, the longstanding cold war between these kingdoms was interrupted seven times by armed conflicts that lasted a total of 29 years. During Ole Worm’s lifetime, King Christian IV – who early in his reign described Sweden as “the bad neighbor” – waged war against Sweden twice, losing lands, prestige, and power in the process and gradually surrendering the dominant position in the Nordic region to the Swedish empire (Larsson 1999).

The colder parts of this war concerned, among other things, the culture and history of these northern parts of Europe. In Sweden, a special office of State Antiquary was established in the early seventeenth century as “part of a conscious quest for historical distinction” (Randsborg 1994, 138). The first to hold the new office was J.T.A. Bure, Worm’s Swedish counterpart in all things antiquarian, who also wrote extensively on runes.

In a letter to Ole Worm from February 15, 1629, praising his work on runic monuments, while adding that he could learn a thing or two from J.T.A. Bure, the Swede Johannes Narssius warns Worm to “beware of counting anything as Danish antiquities that is Swedish; otherwise, a great, though friendly, war will result” (Schepelern 1965–1969, I:167, my translation from Danish). The point to be stressed here is that what counted as Danish and what as Swedish was plainly up for grabs in this period, as political borders shifted back and forth. Possession and control of the past was thus one aspect of the political and territorial conflict between these two Nordic kingdoms. This rivalry bears witness to a keen awareness that the truism that the victors write history is equally true when stated in reverse; those who control the past have a leg up on the future.
Conclusion

To sum up, then, the social practices of collecting, cataloguing, and surveying serve as points of convergence for a wide range of forces in early modern Europe – cultural, political, and economic. These include early forms of capitalism, empire building, power-claims and legitimization of monarchs, and the emerging positions of power for scholars, to name some. In the last analysis, to study these early modern modes of inquiry and reflexivity is to study the ways in which knowledge and power intertwine.

The life and work of Ole Worm provide a critical glimpse of these modalities of knowing. Worm’s multiple projects of collection/comprehension – of naturalia and artificialia, of runic monuments, of antiquarian erudition (through surveying), and of historical sources – demonstrate in meticulous detail the various facets of empirical social and cultural research in the early modern period. Beneath the variety, however, we see the self-same logic repeating itself and reflecting the logic of political expansion and centralization in empire building and the constitution of absolute monarchy, grounding that logic all the while in vernacular history and soil.

Meanwhile, Worm’s copious correspondence, his “grand tour” of Europe, and his collection of notables in his museum and catalogue testify to his participation in the networks of knowledge and prestige that criss-crossed the European continent, created by and consisting of the new technicians of knowledge, the virtuosi, whose emergence in the Renaissance marks the rise of the (secular) scholar to prominence as a third power in European societies, alongside the royalty and the clergy. This historical emergence ushered in a new phase in the associations of knowledge and power, summed up in the concept of “virtue.” To pursue virtue was to fashion oneself as a body of knowledge, to gain command of the world through the gift of comprehension. To become virtuous was to lay claim to power through knowledge which itself was already a rehearsal of power relations (through collection and surveillance) and a simulacrum of the political processes of centralization (within the kingdom and through colonial relations) and expansion (into new domains of everyday life and into the New World). In the words of Ole Worm, once more, “to seek unbeaten paths is the best way to find virtue.”

Notes

1. I should add that, according to colleagues who specialize in this area, this is a truly exceptional passage and Ole Worm seems to be a unique figure among the Renaissance virtuosi. The hands-on approach expressed in this quote and the pedagogical impulse with observation as a central method are rarely attested in contemporary works. I thank Dominik Collet for impressing this point upon me.

   This passage should be supplemented with the only other one in which Worm speaks directly of the pedagogical rationale for assembling the museum and of the value of direct observation as a complement to reading. This second passage is in Worm’s preface to his Museum Wormianum:

   “Then I began to ponder the options available to the intelligent, and to think of ways in which a collection of the most varied and beautiful phenomena of nature might be brought together and brought to the youth, so that through it the youth could be brought up from the quicksand and darkness of errors and into the clear light of day and the most beautiful meditation of God’s works. From the moment I first began to teach natural science in this royal academy, I therefore avoided neither expense nor difficulty, but began to form a not inconsiderable gem-cabinet of natural phenomena. My goal was to be able to present it for the observation of everyone who felt attracted to nature, and to explain the various phenomena in such a way that I gave an overview of their names, nature, qualities, description, and use, to the extent that it was possible to research this from the best and most reliable authors, and thus to open them an easier way to nature’s other secret chambers. This enterprise of mine was to many people’s liking and these were untiring in supporting my efforts, so that in the course of a few years my gems grew to the dimensions displayed in this book” (qtd. in Schepelern 1971, 216, my translation from Danish).

2. That same year, 1626, Arngrímir sent the chancellor a manuscript of Snorra-Edda, a manual of Scandinavian mythology from the early thirteenth century, which Christian Friis gave to his friend Ole Worm, whose name the manuscript now bears: the Codex Wormianus (Degn 1988, 112).

3. The “Saga of the Skjöldungs” was in fact reconstructed and published in 1982 by Bjarni Guðmason (based on his dissertation from 1963) primarily from texts from the 1590s recorded by none other
than Arngrimur Jónsson. The fact that Arngrimur (and his learned colleagues in Iceland) flat out claims never to have heard of such a saga in 1632 casts rather serious doubt on the point of that exercise.

4. I would never have thought to look at Ole Worm had it not been for the encouragement and enthusiasm of Roger Abrahams, who, in turn, owes his interest to the late Danish folklorist, Bengt Holbek. In addition to Abrahams, I would like to express my gratitude to Dominik Collet, John Lindow, Allan Pred, and Mark Sandberg for their generous critical comments on various drafts of this article.

References


Shrines of the Nation

During the 19th century a new kind of monumental buildings are erected in Europe: the museums. They shoot up all around the major European cities concurrently with the establishment and organization of the nation states. The museums are shrines for the nation’s treasures of historic relics and objects of art. The new buildings are fashioned in such a way that the visitors are encouraged to feel solemnity and awe. They are lead through pompous portals and up imposing staircases made of precious stones. In the halls of the museum, the objects are placed on pedestals or in glass cases. They are to be contemplated, but not to be touched by profane fingers.

The visitors to the museum are expected to show the appropriate respect; conversation must be held in a low voice and unnecessary noise is to be avoided. There is a striking resemblance between the churches and these new places of worship.

Where the older cabinets of curiosities were exclusively for the privileged few, the new museums are open to the educated public, whose enlightenment and culture they are meant to promote. It is a development that begins in the second half of the 18th century, the same time that the all-embracing museums increasingly have to give way to specialized collections, especially in the field of natural science. By the end of the century the first historical/culture-
historical special collections appear, only to become arguably the most important type of museum after the turn of the century.

That this had to be is evident if you look at the museums of the 19th century in a wider perspective, because that century must be characterized as the quintessentially historical century. In the self-consciousness and cosmology of that century, the historical perspective plays a role that has never been greater. This is the case in research, where a phenomenon was explained by throwing light on its history; in architecture and design, where a deliberate use of stylistic traits from other periods increasingly becomes the standard; and last but not least in the nation-building that was the agenda behind a great deal of the art and science of the time. History is one of the most important means of welding the different elements of a nation together, and it is here the new museums have their most important purpose.

However, the historic museum was not a constant entity; it changes throughout the century. The national museums or Sammlungen vaterländischer Altertümer, which were created during the national romantic enthusiasm at the beginning of the century, were almost entirely concentrated upon prehistory and the Middle Ages. It was with artefacts from these early ages that the deep national roots of a people could be documented. It was not until around 1860 that the interest in collecting was expanded to encompass the Renaissance, and by the end of the century it was this period that formed the centre of attention in cultural history. To a large degree, however, this expansion of the field of interest to later periods was put into effect by the foundation of some new kinds of museums.

Descendants of the Great Exhibitions

Many different factors form the basis for the new museums that appear in the last third of the 19th century. But their emergence and dissemination must predominantly be seen in relation to another important cultural phenomenon of that period: the great exhibitions. Like many of the other cultural innovations of the century, we find the first tiny steps towards this new institution in revolutionary France. But the great leap forward happens with “The Great Exhibition” in London in 1851, which became the first of a series of world exhibitions that were to leave their mark on the second half of the century. The English took their turn again in 1862, but it was the French who became the main organizers of world exhibitions. Paris was the host of world exhibitions in 1855, 1867, 1878, 1889 and, finally, in 1900. In between the French, there were an Austrian “Weltausstellung” in Vienna and two American: one in Philadelphia in 1876 to celebrate the centenary of the Declaration of Independence, and one in Chicago in 1893, to mark the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America.

However, the world exhibitions were not the only ones. The idea caught on all over the western world, and the global exhibitions were accompanied by an ample supply of regional and national exhibitions. When the exhibition fever culminated around 1900, hardly a year went by without one or more great exhibitions taking place. And the amount of visitors was growing steadily. In the case of the world exhibitions, it began with 6 million in London in 1851 and ended with 50 million in Paris in 1900. At the same time, the exhibition programme in itself was altered or expanded along the way. What started as a purely economical concern, a competition between the nations of who had the most outstanding production of commodities was gradually turned into something that to a large degree has to do with culture and ideas.

The great exhibitions were to leave their mark on the world of museums in several ways. Firstly, they turned the museums into something more than just a collection. The exhibitions can be seen as the first media for “visual communication”, and the technique, the “exhibition language”, that was developed by their organizers was at least partly adopted by the museums. Of course, this is especially true of the museums that more or less arose as a direct result of the exhibitions. Time and time again, we find that when a considerable amount of objects had been procured for one of these temporary arrangements, there arose a will to preserve them and make them accessible to a future public. You could say that there was a desire to make the exhibition permanent. There is hardly a country
where you cannot find examples of museums that were established in that way. In some cases, the exhibitions have also been used to pave the way for a desired or planned museum. As a rule, this was the case with regional, temporary or topical fields of interest that were found to be covered insufficiently or not at all by the existing collections, and which therefore should lead to the establishment of a new museum.

Permanent Exhibitions: Museums of Applied Art

The earliest and most direct example of this relation between exhibition and museum is the type that has been named museum of applied art. Already during the preparations for the Great Exhibition in London 1851, the organizers were preoccupied with the question of how to ensure the quality of the products under the new means of production. The prime mover of the exhibition, Prince Albert, thus stated that it was necessary to get “fine arts and beauty applied to mechanical production”.

When they were taking stock of the results after the exhibition, the English had to admit that although England was superior to the rest of the world on a technological level, the English production of furniture and articles for everyday use failed, especially when compared to the French luxury production, which was influenced by genuine craftsmanship. This confirmed the feeling of a stylistic decline, but it also strengthened the will to do something about it. What had previously been secured by the apprentice system in the guilds now had to be carried on by the aid of special craft schools. Another means was to make the exhibition permanent by creating a collection of high-quality examples, where the craftsmen and manufacturers could find inspiration.

Such a collection was not only meant to include choice examples of modern applied art, but also of historical objects representing the styles of the different historical periods. The reason this was seen as an important aspect of such a collection has to do with the fact that we are in the age of historicism, where it was deemed not only legitimate, but also commendable to use styles and decorative elements from the arts and crafts of former times. A third important element of such a pedagogical collection was to include a section that displayed the different materials and techniques that had been or might be used.

The next year, these considerations resulted in the foundation of the great South Kensington Museum, which was later renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum. And the idea also found favour on the continent. With inspiration from South Kensington, a large number of museums were established in Central and Northern Europe. Their content and limitations could vary a great deal, but it was the same idea everywhere. Art or technical schools were affiliated to many of them, but all were meant to serve the educational purpose: to bring about good quality craftsmanship and good taste (Mundt 1974).

It is interesting to observe how the interplay between exhibition and museum several times repeats the story of the Great Exhibition and South Kensington. It is often the impression of one’s own country’s inadequacy at one of the great exhibitions that becomes the driving force or at least the argument for the foundation of a national museum of applied art. After all, the idea behind such a museum was that it was to remedy the misery, and strengthen the country in question in the international competition (Stoklund 2003, chapter 8).

Folk Museums

The museums of applied art were supported by a strong international movement, and therefore they became institutions with certain common traits. It is more difficult to find the common ground of the museums, which we here have chosen to refer to as folk museums. Some of their premises are the same as the museums of applied art. They are also indebted to the great exhibitions in both content and form. And, to a great degree, they are projects for the education of the people, but here the aim is not as much to develop good taste, but rather to create a popular national revival. As the name denotes, they display traditional folk or peasant culture, but not exclusively. Some of them have expanded
their subject matter to become general museums of early modern history that also throw light on the culture of other classes. Finally, it must be noted that folk museums and museums of applied art sometimes overlap. The latter frequently contained collections of folk culture, whole farm house rooms for instance, while several of the folk museums, on the other hand, saw it as their object to stimulate a revival of woodcarving, weaving or other forms of rural crafts.

What ties these museums together is – as the name indicates – the so-called folk culture, a concept that was created by the national Romantic Movement in the beginning of the 19th century, and ascribed with the significance of being the true and uncorrupted culture of the nation, which deserved to be revived and nurtured. In the beginning, however, it was predominantly the oral traditions of the rural population that was the object of interest and collection.

It was not until the second half of the century that the material manifestations of folk culture really came into focus, and the interest among other things resulted in the new museums.

The time lags in the interest in the two sides of folk culture are evident in the following manifesto from the opening of the German folk museum in Berlin 1889, which deserves to be quoted in the original language:


In this beautiful list, a museum programme is outlined, which would be able to paint a comprehensive picture of the life and culture of the peasant class. However, it was probably few of the early folk museums that were able to follow such a programme. At any rate, it was often folk costumes and other picturesque cultural aspects that came to forefront.

Even though these museums are largely established as a result of the same conditions and the same objectives, they all have their own profile, which to a large degree must be linked to the personalities that laid the foundation of the collections. It is true in all museum history that you cannot ignore the individuality of these collectors and pioneers, but it is a situation that is especially pronounced with regard to the folk museums. In order to understand these strange institutions and the cultural environment in which they were conceived, it is worthwhile to focus on their creators. We have chosen to have a closer look at four of these museum pioneers: the Swede Artur Hazelius, the Dane Bernhard Olsen and the two Germans Rudolf Virchow and Ulrich Jahn.

Artur Hazelius (1833–1901)

It is only natural to begin with Artur Hazelius, who quite rightly has come to be seen as the real creator of the institution: folk museum. In 1873, in Stockholm, he founded the first museum of this kind, and, in 1891, this was followed by the renowned Skansen, which in several European countries came to be synonymous with the actual concept of the open-air museum.

Artur Hazelius was born in Stockholm and grew up in a respectable middle-class family. His father was an officer with strong patriotic interests who made sure that his son was familiar with life in the countryside by sending the boy away on a sort of boarding school with a vicar in Småland. He later widened his knowledge of the Swedish landscape by means of the romantic walking tours, which were fashionable at the time.

In the beginning, Artur Hazelius, who was trained as a philologist, exercised his strong desire to contribute to the national revival of the Swedish people by means of the language.
Hazelius got engaged in the work for a spelling reform, and he worked hard to supply the general public with good-quality popular writings. It is a bit unclear when his idea of communicating the national through a museum is conceived, but the idea of saving the peasant culture in a society undergoing a transformation and modernization has its breakthrough on a journey in 1872 in Dalarna, where he also acquires the first costumes for his collection. After that, however, things happened rapidly, and already the next year, he was ready to open his Scandinavian-Ethnographic Collection in Drottninggatan in Stockholm.

The innovation of this collection is partly that the peasant culture is brought into a museum for the first time, and partly that experiments are made with new forms of presentation, for instance the recreation of peasant rooms with wax dummies in traditional costumes. The story of Hazelius and his so-called dioramas has been told several times, but it is repeated here because it is important for understanding the form and content of the emerging folk museums.

The general public interest in the so-called folk or national costumes was aroused in the first half of the 19th century by popular series of costume pictures and genre paintings in the “Düsseldorf” style. There are some examples of wax dummies with folk costumes on display at the first world exhibitions, but it is not until Paris 1867 that this was systematized. That year, the exhibition committee requested that all the participants send wax dummies with “costumes populaires” to the planned exhibition. Surprisingly, these exhibition objects were placed in a newly created section that was meant to include “objects that could help to better the physical and moral condition of the population”. Here, the costumes were supposed to symbolize such national, popular values as were deemed important to uphold, but also to serve as an inspiration for handicraft and domestic industry, which this section was meant to stimulate and promote.

Folk museums in embryo? Visitors to the Paris World Exhibition 1867 admire the Swedish folk costumes, which are arranged in the decorative partition wall of the Swedish-Norwegian section. From Illustreret Tidende 1867.
The strong support that the French initiative received demonstrates that the time was ripe for such a new exhibition element. France presented no less than 42 costume dummies themselves; Russia displayed 12, Austria-Hungary 11 and Spain 8 (Wörner 1999: 145f). However, the Swedish and Norwegian costumes attracted a very special attention. They were displayed behind glass in niches, in a decorative partition to the Swedish-Norwegian section (p. 25), and when they received such considerable popularity from the visitors it was due not only to the life-like qualities of the dummies, but also to the fact that they had been arranged in small narrative groups. The wax dummies had been created from life models by sculptor Carl August Söderman, and the displays were based on popular paintings with scenes from the country life. In fact, the costume groups themselves appeared as “three-dimensional genre paintings” in full scale (Jonas Berg 1980; Stoklund 1993, 2003, chapter 9).

The success of Söderman’s costume dummies was repeated at the following world exhibitions in Vienna 1873 and Philadelphia 1876. But Hazelius also seized upon the idea, in which he saw a communication potential, and used it in an expanded form for the new museum in Stockholm. Söderman’s dummies and the “three-dimensional genre pictures” were maintained, but now the small narratives were acted out in recreated peasant rooms in the form of dioramas with an open wall facing the audience. The idea for this must have come from the so-called wax museums or panopticons, which were appearing all over Europe at that time.

The next step was taken at the world exhibition in Paris 1878, where Hazelius had the Söderman wax dummies return to the world exhibition in their expanded diorama form. Not only was it popular with the visitors, for instance the heart-rendering scene, “The Little Girl’s Last Bed”, but he also managed in that way to present his new museum concept to an international audience.

In the following years, Hazelius worked on realizing another idea: the creation of a museum with complete houses on display in the open air. He might have found the inspiration for this in King Oscar the 2nd’s collection of historical buildings, which was established on Bygdøy near Oslo in the 1880s (Hegard 1998). However, it...
might be worthwhile to have another look at the Paris exhibition in 1867. This was the first time a park with national pavilions had been created alongside the great exhibition hall, an arrangement that would later become the common practice. To a large degree, these initial pavilions represented the vernacular architectural styles of the different countries. Sweden was represented by a copy of the famous Ornäsloft from Dalarna, which was well-known from the story of Gustav Vasa, and Norway by a recreated medieval loft-store from Telemarken (Stoklund 1993, 1999).

It is interesting that Hazelius’ initial modest proposal for an open air museum only included three buildings: the historic Ornäs house, a Swedish loft-store and a Norwegian stave-church, all intended to be copies (Grandien 1991). However, already in 1885, Hazelius acquired the first original building, a house from Mora in Dalarna that was to become the first of many original houses in the open air museum, which opened at Skansen, outside Stockholm, in 1891.

Meanwhile the museum in Drottninggatan, which changed its name to the Nordic Museum in 1880, was growing. It had primarily started as a collection of folk costumes, but it soon achieved a far wider scope. Hazelius had planned a separate museum building opposite the open-air museum at Skansen, and in 1888 the work commenced. However, it would take almost 20 years before the building could finally be opened. Artur Hazelius died in 1901 and thus never came to see his dream of a gigantic museum palace realized. Even though the original plan was heavily curtailed, it is still the 19th century notion of the museum as place of patriotic worship, a grand shrine of the nation, that was realized here. The central hall of the museum has been kept, with “dimensions the size of the largest churches” and a gigantic sculpture of the country’s founder, King Gustav Vasa. In an obituary in 1901 for Artur Hazelius, his visions for a museum was articulated in this way: “He saw this hall open and wide with an airy perspective, framed by the colourful rural images, by views from the most beautiful parts of the Nordic countries [the dioramas]. He heard the sound of songs in praise of the great memories of the mother country, he saw an enthusiastic youth gathered in there, under the white banners surrounding the statue of King Gustav” (Medelius et al. 1998: 107, my translation).

Meanwhile, Hazelius had realized his ideas of gathering the Swedish people for patriotic celebrations in the open-air museum, Skansen. Here, he had not only created a collection of buildings, but a sort of general picture of Sweden that also tried to show the flora and fauna of the different areas of the extensive country. And, here, he wanted people of all kinds to come and have fun and be edified. At Skansen people gathered on the 6th of November, the day of King Gustav Adolf’s death, and the 6th of June was celebrated as the day of the Swedish flag for the first time. It was at Skansen that Hazelius really expressed his scenographic talent.

It was clearly the national revival that Hazelius saw as the museum’s most important concern. But as it grew big, the museum got a staff of scientifically trained employees who had a view of the museum’s objectives that was somewhat different from the old founder. These divergences became obvious after the death of Hazelius, when they were planning the installation in the new museum, which was opened in 1907. Some of the older employees wanted to maintain the visions of the founder, while the more scientifically oriented would prefer the exhibits arranged according to function, age or typology. The final result was that the popular presentation with the national overtones was continued at Skansen, while the Nordic Museum in the new building was “made scientific” (Medelius et al. 1998, Installationen).1

Bernhard Olsen (1836–1922)

Like Hazelius, Bernhard Olsen was a city child, but he was born in Copenhagen to more humble circumstances. His father was a porter in one of the student hostels at the University of Copenhagen, and this was as close as he came to the academic world. His artistic talent lead him to an education as an illustrator and xylographer, and for many years he was a frequent supplier of drawings for Illustreret Tidende (The Illustrated News); for instance he made drawings of scenes from the war with Prussia in 1864, in...
which he took part as an officer. These abilities, combined with a keen interest in the cultural history of clothing, lead him to a position at the Royal Theatre as a costumier. At the same time, in 1868, Bernhard Olsen was appointed artistic director of the Tivoli Gardens amusement park, a position he was to hold until 1885. In his long period as director, the inventive Olsen was to leave his mark on the time-honoured institution. New buildings were erected, the gardens were renovated, and he arranged a versatile programme of celebrations, festivals and exhibitions, where an educational element was often intertwined with the entertainment.

The position as artistic director meant that he was required to monitor the developments in the European entertainment industry, and one of the places where you would meet the latest innovations in this field was at the world exhibitions. Thus, it was at one of these exhibitions at Paris, in 1878, that Bernhard Olsen first became acquainted with Hazelius and his new ideas for a museum. However, there was another attraction at the exhibition that in terms of communication held more appeal for him than Hazelius’ dioramas, and that was the Dutch room from Hindeloopen. Here, the visitor did not have to remain outside looking into the rooms through the missing fourth wall, instead he could enter into the room itself through a door, and, once entered, in a way he became part of the past himself (de Jong & Skougaard 1993).

Olsen followed this principle when he got the opportunity to arrange a “section for the peasant class” at a large exhibition of arts and crafts in Copenhagen. This section was predominantly meant to exhibit folk costumes and handicraft, but Olsen had also succeeded in acquiring and recreating a series of complete interiors, fitted out with persons in regional costumes, but also
open to the public. These rooms were recreated in the new Danish Folk Museum that he opened in 1885, next to Tivoli.

In the same building, he had established the first wax museum or panopticon in Scandinavia, and here it was the diorama principle he used. He seems to have found some of the inspiration for this at the Brothers Castan’s Panopticon in Berlin, which was founded in 1874 and was the first to gather the dummies in narrative groups. Bernhard Olsen used the same idea in his wax museum, which he himself characterized as “a plastic newspaper as a companion to the graphically illustrated news.” Depictions of current events and famous personalities of the day were predominant, but Olsen also found room for more historic presentations, such as a scene depicting traditional peasant life on the island of Amager, featuring an image borrowed from a well-known genre painting. Another example of such a “three-dimensional genre painting” was the Norwegian painter Tidemand’s “A Killing at a Feast”, showing a scene from Western Norway. Here the room that framed the event was created with “beams from the almost 400-year old Nesheim farm” from Hardanger, as the catalogue describes it (Rasmussen 1979: 84–85; Skougaard & Varnild 1994).

These examples show the close relations that existed between the museum and the entertainment industry of the time. But they also explain why Olsen’s museum in some respects took another direction than Hazelius. The difference is the most pronounced if you compare how the two pioneers realized the idea of an open-air museum.

The museum that Bernhard Olsen opened north of Copenhagen in 1901 was initially called “The Museum of Buildings at Kongens Lyngby”, and that was exactly what it was: a collection of buildings. Even though Bernhard Olsen, who had a keen interest in gardening, could not resist creating some gardens that had no direct relation to the buildings, there were none of the other elements that characterized Hazelius’ Skansen. Rather, it is more likely that Olsen associated such elements with his former workplace, Tivoli, as it was here and not in the open-air museum that Bernhard Olsen excelled as a scenographer and organizer of festivals.

A peculiar aspect of the Danish open-air museum in its initial form was that it exclusively
consisted of buildings from the former Danish provinces east of Öresund and from Schleswig, which had been occupied by Prussia in 1864; and, added to this, a copy of a house from the Faroe Islands. There were two reasons for this rather one-sided choice of buildings. It was partly because Bernhard Olsen felt that the peasant houses in Denmark were too modern. He wanted to show the older stages in the historic development of the houses in his museum, and it was necessary to cross the nation’s recent borders to find them. “But they are selected from the lost countries not only because the most primitive types were to be found there, but also because the youth of this country must be taught about all that used to belong to Denmark, to strengthen the memory of what has been lost and pave the way for the spiritual rallying of the scattered, which is the only form of reconquest that I can imagine” (letter from Bernhard Olsen, translated from Rasmussen 1979: 131–132).

Thus, in this programme, a robust national revival is combined with a perspective of a cultural historical evolution. Even though Bernhard Olsen’s professional background is as an artist and a scenographer, he is from the beginning aware that his initiative also has a scientific purpose. Already in 1879, when he had organized the section of the exhibition of arts and crafts that eventually became the Danish Folk Museum, he wrote in a letter to Hazelius that he had “managed to include the historic-ethnographic science in the exhibition programme” (Rasmussen 1979: 14).

As a cultural historian he was self-taught, but his contemporaries praise him as a knowledgeable museologist, especially in the field of the history of clothing. As the managing director of two museums he did not have much time for a literary production, but nonetheless, he has left behind a considerable amount of articles about cultural history that bear witness to both a scientific versatility and an impressive knowledge of details.2

Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902)

The third in the series of museum pioneers is a personality with a completely different background, but just like Bernhard Olsen it was also for him the meeting with Artur Hazelius and his museum that got him started. The year was 1874, and the occasion was a congress about archaeology and (physical) anthropology in Stockholm, in which Rudolf Virchow took part. The participants of the congress were invited to the opening of a new section of the one-year-old Scandinavian-Ethnographic Collection in Drottninggatan. Immediately, Virchow was captivated by the new form of museum that had been created here, and he dreamed up the idea of creating something similar in Berlin.

It was medicine that was Virchow’s real field of knowledge, and he is seen as one of the key figures in the history of medicine. His main contribution was the development of the so-called cellular pathology as a substitute to the older humoral pathology, which is to say that he altered the explanation of the causes of a disease from disturbances in the body fluids to cellular changes. However, he covered several other fields, for instance social medicine, which became a popular topic in the mid 19th century. The interest in the connection between diseases and society lead him to politics, and he ended up in the Reichstag, where his liberal views made...
him collide with Bismarck, who is even said to have challenged him to duel.

Rudolf Virchow’s path to the field of cultural history went through medicine, or to be more precise through another of the specialities that were making great strides in the last part of the century: the physical anthropology. Virchow was preoccupied with the history of the evolution of man and the potential of archaeology to illuminate the question of race and its changes over the years. He personally participated in several archaeological investigations, amongst others the excavation of Troy, lead by the controversial Heinrich Schliemann, and it was due to his efforts that the rich finds of Schliemann were acquired for Germany.

At the time, the step from archaeology to ethnography was a small one, and Rudolf Virchow got actively engaged in the establishment of a Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin (Völkerkunde=ethnography). The folk museum, which he found the inspiration for in Stockholm, he had initially imagined as a subdivision of the ethnographical museum. However, lack of space made this impossible, and instead, in 1889, an independent Museum für deutsche Volksstrachten und Erzeugnisse des Hausgewerbes was opened in temporary premises elsewhere. The name of the museum makes it clear that here – as in Stockholm and Copenhagen – it was the folk costumes that were the main components of the museum. However, the manifesto from the same year, from which we have already quoted the opening paragraph, calls for more comprehensive collections, which were to present a wide-ranging picture of the daily life in all parts of rural Germany, “in order to demonstrate their still existing popular characteristics in costumes, house design and products of domestic industry, where possible exhibited in complete room arrangements with plastic figures, in the way it has been done in the Hazelius museum in Stockholm” (Jahn 1889: 337, my translation). The reason why folk costumes gained such prominence is probably connected with the fact that they were symbols of the traditional peasant culture that were easy to understand, and, in addition, guaranteed crowd-pullers.

As a matter of fact, it was completely different sides of folk culture that was the main interest of the founder. As a natural scientist with an interest in evolution, Virchow was primarily concerned with the manifestations of primitive culture, which pointed backwards towards a prehistorical connection. He found such manifestations in the articles for everyday use and especially in the buildings of the peasants, which received his particular attention. The interest in rural houses can be traced back to two aspects of his other activities: his studies in social medicine, which he carried out in Silesia in connection with a typhoid epidemic, where he thoroughly studied the housing conditions and habits of the rural population; and the archaeological studies of house-shaped urns, the forms of which he believed he could rediscover in the later peasant tradition. Virchow does not leave behind a large body of work in the field of ethnology, but nonetheless he did publish a few smaller treatises on forms of tools and types of houses.

Considering his interest in the prehistoric roots of the peasant culture, it is understandable that Virchow worked to create the foundation for a Deutsches Nationalmuseum für Altertümer und Volkskunde. However, the plan was never carried out and neither was the suggestion of turning the folk museum into an open-air museum in order to make room for the collections. Rudolf Virchow died in 1902, without having found a satisfactory solution to the practical problems of the museum.

Ulrich Jahn (1861–1900)

Artur Hazelius and Bernhard Olsen were both managing directors of the museums they had founded. Evidently, such a thing would not be possible for a man like Rudolf Virchow whose main efforts lay elsewhere. He would have to be content with being a prime mover, organizer and fund-raiser, and therefore his achievements as a museum pioneer would not have been possible without his younger co-founder, Ulrich Jahn.

Ulrich Jahn’s academic background was in the field of philology, just as it was for Hazelius, and just as it would be for a couple of generations of German ethnologists or Volkskundler. He took his doctorate with a thesis that was central to the Volkskunde of the time with its interest...
in the history of religion: “Die deutschen Opfergebräuche bei Ackerbau und Viehzucht”, and he collected a large body of traditional legends and fairy tales from his native Pomerania. He is said to have had a brilliant ability to get in touch with ordinary people, an ability that was to benefit him a great deal later on, when he was collecting material for the museum.

Ulrich Jahn met Rudolf Virchow at an anthropology congress in Stettin in 1886, and, at the instigation of Virchow, Jahn moved to Berlin, where he became one of the prime movers in planning the folk museum. In arrangement with Virchow, he acquired a “test collection” from Rügen, which was exhibited in the panopticon in Berlin, and which was highly instrumental in getting the ball rolling. It was also Ulrich Jahn who subsequently wrote the aforementioned programme (Jahn 1889), which was sent out in an expanded version as a questionnaire to local contacts. Meanwhile, Jahn continued collecting and arranging the displays in the museum. Central to the first exhibition was a Sorbian peasant room from Spreewald, featuring wax dummies in folk costumes. The wax dummies had been supplied by the director of the panopticon, Louis Castan, who was a member of the board of the museum.

However, the small museum in Berlin with the incessant lack of space did not offer enough possibilities for the dynamic Ulrich Jahn. In 1891, he got engaged in a German Exhibition in London, to which he had recreated a “North Frisian” house with two living rooms that he beforehand had found panels and furniture for in the village of Ostenfeld in Schleswig. This whetted his appetite, and in the following years he conducted very comprehensive collections all over Germany with the intention of participating in the world exhibition in Chicago in 1893. The collections were funded by a committee that included several big financiers and had Rudolf Virchow as its chairman. These preparations resulted in one of the largest attractions of Ulrich Jahn’s German Village at the World Exhibition in Chicago 1893. It was a part of the so-called Midway Plaisance, and, besides a reconstructed castle, a town hall and some farmhouses, it included restaurants, beer saloons and music pavilions. From Wörner 1999.
its kind at the Chicago exhibition, the so-called German Village, consisting of no less than thirty-six buildings, including a reconstructed town hall, a romantic castle and typical farm houses from different parts of Germany.

The large collections that Ulrich Jahn obtained for the exhibition had in advance been reserved for the museum in Berlin. However, the transportation back to Germany dragged on, and Jahn himself never really returned to the museum. He had discovered much better prospects in other parts of the world, and he ended up settling in London as an antique dealer. There was a rupture between him and Virchow, and afterwards Jahn withdrew all the objects he had acquired for the London exhibition in 1891 from the museum, including the two living rooms from Ostenfeld, because they legally belonged to him. He later sold these objects to Bernhard Olsen, and they are now an important element of the Ostenfeld farm at the Open Air Museum in Sorgenfri (Stoklund 1999).4

Between Scenography and Science

Hopefully, this small sketch of four museum pioneers has given an impression of the motley world, in which the earliest folk museums were formed. Together, the four very different characters represent all the currents that merge in the folk museum phenomenon. Artur Hazelius is the great national revivalist, for whom the museum acts in the interest of a greater cause. However, he is also a fabulous collector who establishes the greatest and most vigorous of the folk museums. Bernhard Olsen is an artist and a professional scenographer who turns into a competent cultural historian. Rudolf Virchow is the scientist who predominantly sees the museum and its collections from a scientific perspective. His right-hand man, Ulrich Jahn, begins as a researcher in traditional Volkskunde, but ends up as an organizer of exhibitions and an antique dealer. They are all great patriots, and in the rhetoric that accompanies the new museums the national chords are vigorously played.

The examples demonstrate the close connection with the great exhibitions. Not only do the museums employ a form of visual communication that had been tested beforehand at the temporary exhibitions. But in the construction phase the pioneers also use the exhibitions as opportunities to introduce the new museums and their potential. However, the problem with this close interaction is that the museums are not only influenced in form, but also in content by the exhibitions. The early folk museums present the same idyllic picture of the traditional peasant culture and a happy and carefree rural population that artists had created in the genre paintings, and reproduced in the exhibitions. And the fact that peasant rooms populated by dummies entered a great number of the museums around 1900 is ultimately a reflection of the bourgeois worship of home and family, which culminates in this very period (Stoklund 1999).

However, the four biographical sketches also demonstrate that from the very beginning there has been a duplicity in the objectives of the folk museums. The nationally inspired staging of traditional peasant life walks hand in hand with the awareness of laying the foundation for a scientific exploration of European peasancies. Besides the staged scenes from traditional peasant life, the museums also hold systematically classified collections, which is evident already in the woodcut of Hazelius’ first museum (p. 26). The two very different ways of presenting exhibits do not always coexist peacefully, however, sometimes they are in a bitter fight about what the right objectives for a museum should be.

We have seen how the systematic, scientific school came out victorious when they moved into the Nordic Museum in Stockholm in 1907, whereas Hazelius’ popular staging of life-like images of folk life was continued at Skansen. In Denmark, the question of the objectives for a museum had been raised ten years before by the director of the National Museum, Sophus Müller, who delivered a broadside against the new “interior, exterior, and park museums”, as he calls them, phenomena that ought not to be counted among the museums. A real museum is a place where artefacts “are arranged and treated according to scientific principles” (Müller 1897). There is no doubt that scientific principles to Sophus Müller meant typological ordering and evolutionistic interpretation.
The Danish cultural historian, Troels-Lund, was one of the people who took the side of the new folk museums. He pointed out that the same kind of dualism could be found outside the museums in written cultural history. On one hand, there were the specialists who studied the origins and development of isolated phenomena, and, on the other, there were those who brought times past back to life with large-scale cultural pictures, as he had done in his own work “Daily Life in Scandinavia in the 16th Century” (Troels-Lund 1879–1901; cf. Stoklund 1989). In a letter to Georg Karlin in Lund, founder of another of the early folk museums in Sweden, Troels-Lund tries to encircle the essence of a new, alternative way of writing cultural history:

“If I should point out what annoys the other side and causes its dislike – be it in books or in museums – I would in one word call it illusions. The ability to agitate imagination, to evoke an illusion corresponding to a past reality, is as well the strength as the weak point of the new way. In this true and false – or at least uncertain – will meet in close unity. For it cannot be denied that in the linguistic picture and in the museum-made interior or exterior, there will – how well and truthful it might be made – be something extra beside the single elements from which the mosaic has been put together. This extra is the view of the producer and the corresponding illusion of the reader or spectator. In my opinion, this is the most noble and most ethereal oil of history, without which the whole is rather worthless. But, at the same time, it is the red rag which infuriates those of the opposite opinion. And rightly so, for to them historical research is only analysis, and what can and should be obtained are only critically determined details and single objects. To us, the objective is a synthesis, the picture as a product of its parts or at least assembling all parts into a whole” (translated from a letter quoted in Bringéus 1992: 64–65; cf. Christiansen 2000: 89).

In the 20th century, the museums undergo a professionalization that to a great degree prioritizes the systematic, scientific side of the work. In several generations of museum officials there can be detected a puritanical attitude towards the communication aspect, and a recoiling from the staging of the past that the early folk museum pioneers practised as an important part of the museum work.

In the last few decades, however, we have seen a change in the attitude both among the museum officials and cultural historical writers. For many it is once again acceptable to use the imagination to make the past come alive, in order to create a more comprehensive picture and to maintain people’s attention. However, this also means that, today, a hundred years later, the balancing act between scenography and science that we have encountered among the early museum pioneers has gained a renewed interest.

Translated by Søren Stoklund

Notes

1 There are two older biographies of Artur Hazelius: Böök 1923 and Berg 1933; this chapter is predominantly based on Bringéus 1974; Grandien 1991; Börnstad 1991 and Medelius et al. 1998.
2 This biographical sketch is based on Rasmussen 1979.
3 The chapter on Rudolf Virchow is based on Ackerknecht 1957; Steinmann 1964, 1967 and Müller 1992.—The German Volkskunde Museum in Berlin was in 1999 reorganized under the name Museum Europäischer Kulturen.
4 The chapter on Ulrich Jahn is based on Weinhold 1900; Steinmann 1964, 1967 and Müller 1992.

References


Müller, Sophus 1897: Museum og Interiør. In: *Tilskueren*.


Rasmussen, Holger 1979: *Bernhard Olsen. Virke og værker*. København


Towards a Post-colonial and a Post-national Museum

The Transformation of a French Museum Landscape

Bjarne Rogan

In most Western countries museum issues are being debated as the 21st century begins, but in few if any places has the discussion been as loud and stormy as in Paris. Several of the biggest national museums are closing, to reappear in new forms, as amalgams, with new contents.

This article is an attempt to survey a drama with several parallel acts. It treats the ongoing changes in some anthropological and ethnological museums, a distinction that is not clear in a country where (social) anthropology and European ethnology are but two faces of the same coin. We shall also pay visits to Paris biggest museums for fine art and natural history, because the ties between these museums are closer than we often acknowledge.

There are at least four main wefts in the warp: one concerns paradigmatic changes within the scientific disciplines, another is new ways of representing the self and the other – whether from distant cultures or from a not so distant past – a third is changing public taste and market mechanisms, and the fourth concerns political power.

The debate on power and representational issues is common to the former colonial nations. What impact did the museums once have on colonial policy? What have these power relations meant for the interpretation of objects from the colonies and for the overall understanding of these cultures? What transformations of meaning are the artefacts subjected to when displayed in the West? How should museums exhibit such objects today? And in general, how ought the museums to address colonial history and its legacy? It has dawned upon the museums that...
they do not stand outside time and historical processes, as neutral recorders, but that they have been and still are committed participants. This insight has had considerable consequences for French anthropological museums. Important for the current changes in several European museums of ethnology and cultural history are the issues of pluralistic societies, homogenizing and differentiating forces, the problem of identifying ‘national cultures’, supranational structures and the new European economic-cultural construction. Other important background factors in the closing of the French national ethnological museum are the absence of a late nation-building period based on popular culture of the kind which took place in several other European states, and a traditional French centralism under attack from re-cent decentralization policies. Furthermore, a new museum law (2002) has added to the debate.

A Highly Improbable Scandinavian Scenario – and French Reality

Seen from the Northern fringe of Europe, one might draw the following scenario: the national Ministry of Culture decides that the national ethnological museum (Skansen in Stockholm, Frilandsmuseet in Copenhagen, or Norsk Folkemuseum in Oslo, all of which are situated in capitals on the east coast) is to close and to be replaced, on the west coast, by a new museum – not for the national culture, but for European and North Sea civilisations. Furthermore, the biggest anthropological museums in these capitals are also ordered to close, to fuse and to transform into museums of primitive art and civilisations. And finally, very influential politicians decide – against the pronounced will of the scientific staffs – that the national museums of fine art, by definition dedicated to Western highbrow art, have to include primitive popular art from the Third World.

Improbable? Yes, certainly, with perhaps one exception: the Museum of World Cultures (Världskulturmuseet) that is currently being planned in Gothenburg. In the case of France, however, all these actions are now decided or have already taken place. The closure of the two venerable anthropological museums in Paris is a fact and the new creation – le Musée des Arts et Civilisations (MAC, now called Branly) – will be inaugurated in 2004/05, in a new building on a prestigious site on the Quai Branly, as neighbour to the Eiffel Tower. Its front looks onto the river Seine and faces le Musée de l’Art Moderne on the opposite riverside – as if modern art and ‘primitive’ or ‘ethnic’ art have made a rendezvous. The price label amounts to around 200 million Euros. And meanwhile the French President has ordered the recalcitrant fine art museum le Louvre and its exasperated director to hold a permanent exhibition of ethnic art.

In spring 2000, the Ministry of Culture decided that the national museum of French popular culture, le Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (MNATP), be restructured. The decision means moving from a protected (and almost forgotten) position on the western outskirts of Paris to a lighthouse position at the mouth of Marseille’s old harbour. The ancient fortress of Saint Jean, together with a new building on the mole, will house the new museum on a dream site in the midst of a busy harbour. Its name, le Musée de Passage, foretells flexibility and versatility (and hopefully not ephemerality!), whereas the full subtitle – le Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (MCEM) – announces a considerable change both in its geographical extension and museological programme. Even this project will cost close to 200 million Euros, and the inauguration date is fixed for 2008/09. Since 2002, the first pilot team from MNATP in Paris has been in place in Marseille, preparing the transfer of the collections and a series of preliminary exhibitions.

In the same choir of museum voices, but much less loud yet, other institutions join in. Even in the national archaeological museum (le Musée des Antiquités Nationales or MAN), situated in a still more protected and forgotten place outside Paris, St. Germain-en-Laye, the staff has started thinking aloud about either its discontinuation and transfer of its collections to regional museums or whether to become a museum of European cultures – one of the arguments being that France, as such, did not exist in the prehistorical and historical period it covers.

French museum employees are ambivalent.
Some see the changes as the logical answer to outdated museum practices, while others fill the newspapers with critical articles, organise protest meetings and urge for strikes. The opposition is not unified: personal strategies and the defending of (too protected?) workplaces intermingle with (rather conservative?) scientific arguments and resistance to what is sometimes interpreted as a market-oriented heritage policy.

The present changes in these cultural and scientific institutions cannot be totally separated from political life in France. French presidents have had the habit of leaving posterity with memorials, and culture is an important field for posthumous reputation in France (unlike Norway!). Among the best known presidential projects are the great avantguard art centre *le Centre Georges Pompidou* and François Mitterrand's national library, nicknamed TGB or *la Très Grande Bibliothèque* – a huge expense in French cultural budgets. But all French presidents have also been museum builders. Giscard d'Estaing finished *le Musée d'Orsay* that Pompidou had initiated, and one of Mitterrand's cherished projects was the reconstruction of *le Louvre*. The present holder of the office, Jacques Chirac, has chosen the field of ethnic art. The result is the abovementioned Branly museum – for art and civilisations, a creation that owes its birth to a strange blend of political power, the media, new public tastes, and a change in scientific paradigms.

I shall present these museums one by one. A diagram (p. 40) will guide the reader through a messy terrain of institutions and acronyms.

Transformation I: From MAAO to Branly

This is the story of how a colonial museum became a museum of ethnic popular art and ended up as a museum of art and civilisations, in a constant effort to obscure or find ways to reconcile a disgraceful past.

Through most of the 20th century, Paris has hosted three great anthropological museums, one for Asian art (*le Musée Guimet*), one research centre and museum (*le Musée de l’Homme*), and one that covers African and Pacific art (*le Musée national des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie* – or MAAO). It is the two latter ones that are now being closed, moved, amalgamated and resurrected as President Chirac’s memorial.

MAAO, once called ‘the Colonial Museum’, is situated at La Porte d’Or near the Vincennes forest. It was born out of the Colonial Fair in 1931, and its doors will be closed in 2003.

Colonial fairs were staged from late 19th century until the interwar period, as a parallel to the world’s fairs (which often had their own colonial pavilions). Here the colonial powers met to present products, commodities and exotica from their colonies, natives and their villages included. The present museum building, an imposing edifice with friezes and wall sculptures showing colonial motifs, was the centre of the fair. From 1933 it served as a permanent museum, under the name *le Musée Permanent des Colonies*. This was the final phase of the colonial period, and the museum fully experienced the disintegration of the colonial empire. As early as in 1935 the name was changed to *le Musée de la France d’Outremer, The Museum for French overseas areas*. In 1960, when decolonisation was a matter of fact and the last colonial war was being waged in Algeria, poet and minister of culture André Malraux decided to give the museum a name that elevated its artefacts to the status of fine art: *le Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens* (MAAO). In this way the intellectual élite meant to escape from the colonial past and to situate the displayed cultures on the same level as Western cultures.

As seen from its name, MAAO has mainly been a museum of popular art from the Third World. Its permanent exhibitions are concentrated upon prestigious objects, ritual objects, religious and symbolic expressions, and not dioramas and contextual settings. Singular objects – beautiful, mystical, and strange – confront the visitor. The texts are limited; sometimes some lines about the cultural provenance or the ritual, sometimes only a word telling which missionary or officer donated the object. And of course no mention of the uncomfortable fact (which MAAO shares with many other anthropological museums) that many objects were probably stolen, looted or acquired by other dubious means. For many years MAAO has suffered from a low
number of visitors (except for schoolchildren visiting the crocodile park in the cave). Symptomatically, the greatest success lately has been the temporary exhibition (2001–02) on the Western, colonial gaze on native populations of the Pacific, a self-reflexive and self-critical presentation of how the West has perceived them as cannibals and hula-hula girls.\(^3\)

MAAO has for a long time been in the centre of a debate on ethnographic artefacts, ‘primitive’ or ‘ethnic’ art (or les arts premiers) and fine art, a debate that was opened as early as at the beginning of the 20th century. Several avant-garde artists (Picasso was only one among many) considered these objects on the same level as modern Western art, and this leitmotif leads directly to the present debate on the Branly museum.

The last seminar at MAAO bore the title “From a colonial museum to a museum of the cultures of the world” (1998). It was precisely the idea of the equal footing of the cultures of the world that Malraux and the intellectuals in the 1960s wanted to promote by the shift of name. But the museum has never really fulfilled this mission, partly because the building in itself represents a problem (with its artistic representations of the colonial empire). The main difficulty, however, has been the focus on anthropological artefacts as objects of art, a bias that served to emphasize the distinction between research and an aesthetic approach.

It is this cleavage that the forthcoming Branly museum—the Museum for Art and Civilisations—is supposed to bridge, by marrying the prestigious collections of MAAO and the research traditions of le Musée de l’Homme. For MAAO, the impending closure and subsequent integration in Branly may be seen as a natural development, and not as a dramatic or even traumatic break, as is the case for the more renowned Musée de l’Homme.\(^5\)

Transformation II: From le Musée de l’Homme to Branly

The next story is about how an anthropological research institution could end up as a museum of fine art—a scenario that has frightened many researchers. Newspaper reports from the field often bear headlines like “Strike”, “Crisis”, “Scandal”, “Civil war”, etc. But all do not despair. We shall start with a quick look at the history of le Musée de l’Homme (MH), for a better understanding of the present state of affairs.

Close to the Gare d’Austerlitz in Paris lays a complex of museum units. The succinct name is Le Muséum, or officially le Museum national d’histoire naturelle. Its roots go back to the 17th century royal medical garden, and over the centuries it has grown to a complex of museums (galéries) of palaeontology, mineralogy, zoology, a botanical garden, etc.\(^4\) A growing interest in the development of mankind, in the borderland between biology and culture, led to the establishment in 1932 of a somewhat different galérie—Le Musée de l’Homme. This passage from natural history to culture history is by no means an uncommon genesis of anthropological museums. At the present time, Le Muséum is being reorganised, and one of several pieces in this operation is MH.\(^5\)

In 1938 MH was moved to le Palais de Chaillot at Trocadéro, a palace built for the World’s Fair in 1937.\(^6\) A main problem has been MH’s administrative status, as this satellite consists of three departments or ‘laboratoires’: one for biological anthropology, one for prehistory and archaeology, and one for anthropology. The collections are important.\(^7\) These departments are subordinate to the director of Le Muséum, and their leaders have been compared to feudal barons “governed by some common interests and hard internal struggles”.\(^8\) It is the anthropological department, with its collections, that is to be transferred to Branly. This means that the library will probably be split.\(^9\) Another difficult issue is the request from the forthcoming MCEM (see below) to take over the European and North African parts of the collections, since MCEM’s focus is the Mediterranean region.

If organisational problems are part of the reason why MH is paralysed, another serious problem is the decline in research activities. MH has an almost mythical past in anthropological research history. With MH French anthropology shifted its basis from missionaries’ and governors’ reports and gifts to fieldwork observations and active collecting campaigns. Fieldworking French anthropology began here...
in the 1930s, with the long expeditions to Africa (Djibouti-Dakar) and the Pacific. The name of the museum brings to the mind celebrated researchers like Paul Rivet, Marcel Griaule, Michel Leiris, André Leroi-Gourhan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and others. In short, MH – and not the universities – was once the main locus of anthropological research in France.

Today however many will claim that research in the museum has for a long time been going downhill; MH has ended up in anthropological backwaters and many researchers have quit the institution. A scholar who has been a spokesman for this view is the anthropologist Maurice Godelier, who is also one of the proponents behind the forthcoming Branly museum. According to Godelier, MH has become a ‘ghost from colonial times’ for two reasons: the ministry of research and education has starved the museum through low budgeting, and – an even greater problem – MH itself has not managed to follow up the development of new intellectual paradigms in modern anthropology.

For the pragmatic Godelier, Branly opens up new possibilities. His vision is to establish a centre for research and teaching on objects and societies, “a post-colonial museum where the West may carry through a critical but distanced evaluation of its own history, without a sense of culpability...”. Godelier joined a small planning team for Branly, in addition to himself consisting of an architect (Jean Nouvel, who has designed the Branly edifice), an ‘aesthete’ (President Chirac’s friend, the antique dealer Kerchache), a museum curator (the director of MAAO) and a high-level civil servant (who has carried through the project on the President’s order).

Godelier has been the scientific face of a cultural construction that has been questioned by many. And many have wondered why a politically radical but highly esteemed researcher offered his services to a conservative president and to a museum of art. The critics accuse Godelier of having been too naïve, with reference to the commercial interests behind the project, interests which will probably give priority to economic and aesthetic considerations rather than to scientific ones. Godelier withdrew from the leadership team in 2000. If his critics turn out to be right, the whole anthropological establishment should also be blamed. To the anthropologists at MH, it was simply unthinkable that the museum would be discontinued and re-organised. They remained in their ivory towers and ignored opportunities to participate in a constructive discussion of how to form the new institution.

But the political authorities voted the creation of Branly, an architectural contest was announced, and the winning project was nominated in December 1999. An appropriation of 1.1 billion francs was granted by the conservative Juppé government in 1997 and confirmed the following year by Jospin’s socialist government – one of the more harmonious cases of agreement under the political cohabitation between a conservative president and a socialist government – and the construction phase has started. The debate on the museographic programme and the relation between aesthetics and science was periodically very heated, especially in 1999 and 2000, but the most critical voices seem to have acquiesced by 2002. It was Chirac who won the public relations war in the press. Journal headlines in 2000 were of the following type: “Chirac in his secret garden”, “Jacques Chirac attacked Culture via an original gateway”, “He gets his museum raised against the arrogance of the elite”.

An Intermezzo in a Museum of Fine Art – or Something More?

The third tale is about the French president, his favourite hobby and how he managed to make the public join his campaign against conservative museum curators and Western art taste. It illustrates the fact that scientific considerations are but one factor in the shaping of cultural institutions; strong societal interests – in this case represented by politicians, antique dealers, art collectors and the market – are part of the game.

President Jacques Chirac is an inveterate collector and amateur of les arts premiers or ‘ethnic art’. From the very beginning of his office, in 1995, he advocated the idea that ethnic art be included in the Louvre, a museum that had so far been closed for objects from the Third World. Chirac’s official argument was that the
exclusion of ethnic art from this prestigious museum contributed to the building of fences between the world’s cultures. The idealist side of his argument was that all cultures are on an equal footing. The idea met with strong opposition from the staff, and most curators were sceptical of this “mixture of antiques and fetishes”; the Louvre’s vocation was to display Western art, and the origin of this art in Greek, Roman and Egyptian antiquity an in the European Renaissance.¹³

The French press claimed that the idea of both the Branly museum and the Louvre exhibition did not come from Chirac himself, but was whispered in his ear by his friend Jacques Kerchache, a well-known collector and dealer of ethnic art. And it was this friend who was appointed ‘the aesthete’ of the leadership team of Branly. In the world of science and research – to the extent that they oppose the project – Kerchache is regarded as the devilish incarnation of the private collector who has got his foot into the museum world.

Reluctantly, the Louvre had to accept a permanent exhibition in one of its galleries, Le pavillon des Sessions, of 120 top objects of ethnic art, as a forerunner to Branly. The exhibition was inaugurated in April 2000 by Chirac himself, in some papers styled le président des Arts Premiers. The man who dictatorially and single-handedly did the selection of the objects was his friend Kerchache, a definite outsider in the Louvre. According to the press, the Louvre’s director, in other contexts one of the most colourful personalities of the French museum world, was exceptionally silent when accompanying the President at the preview. Needless to say that the exhibition was enthusiastically received by the public.

The Louvre exhibition was a victory with enormous symbolic implications for those who argued for the Branly museum. The presentation in the Louvre meant that ethnic African, American and Polynesian art¹⁴, for the first time in France, was really accepted as aesthetically equal to the best of Western art. “No hierarchy within art, no more than among cultures” was the obvious message. “Respect for other cultures” was Chirac’s repeated slogan in interview after interview. All parties saw this event as a cultural-political declaration of the greatest importance for the future museum landscape. The public were enthusiastic, and the newspapers came up with headlines like “Mayan statues and Zulu masks side by side with Mona Lisa” (Paris Match 13.4.2000), “The revenge of the Primitive” (L’Express 13.4.2000), “Ethnic art enters the Louvre by the front door” (La Croix 15.–16.4.2000). Even International Herald Tribune covered the event with “Bowing to Pressure, the Louvre Goes Primitive” (14.4.2000).

The leading French newspaper, Le Monde, brought up the big guns. From the editorial column the museum was abused for its Euro-centric world view: le Grand Louvre, the world’s biggest art museum, had been one of the last to cling to a Europe-centred cultural ideal. President Chirac was effusively praised for bringing to conclusion this “hopelessly out-dated quarrel between ‘exotism-aesthetes’ and fundamentalist anthropologists”. The editor took the occasion to broadcast his opinion of le Musée de l’Homme and its conservative staff: “The Louvre as well as the antiquarian museum [= MH] will from now on have to move out of the ivory tower and swallow their old taboos” (14.4.2000). Even the influential L’Express underscored the ethnocentrism of the Louvre and brought to mind that the Metropolitan Museum in New York inaugurated a wing for ethnic art almost twenty years ago.

The Louvre event reinforced an increasing trend in the public interest for this type of antiquarianism. The number of private collectors in the field has grown enormously, and the prices for African and other ethnic art have been soaring upwards during the last decade. The most expensive single item acquired by Branly on the market in 2000 cost around 20 million francs (3 million Euros). It is a widespread opinion that Branly, with its supplementary acquisition budget of 200 million francs for 1998–2004, is driving the prices upwards. The answer from Branly is that the American private collector market sets trends and prices and that the upward movement started as a result of the Metropolitan Museum policy in the early 1980s.

The exhibition in Le pavillon des Sessions is defined as a permanent exhibition. What will happen to it when Branly opens its doors in...
2005? The diplomatic answer from the director of Branly is that “permanent does not necessarily mean eternal”!

Transformation III: From MNATP to MCEM

The fourth story is as amazing as the preceding ones. Or how should one otherwise qualify the closing of the national museum for the national heritage, to the benefit of a museum for European, North African and Middle Eastern encounters?

The history as well as the destiny – or rather the possibilities – of the French national ethnological museum, le Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (MNATP), is closely connected to the MH-Branly complex. MNATP is the result of a series of offspring. As the mother institution, Le Muséum gave birth to MH in 1932. In 1937 the French collections were separated from MH and established as a museum in its own right, MNATP. The radical political climate under le Front Populaire (1936–38) was of great importance for the creation of this monument for national, popular culture. In 1972 MNATP moved from Trocadéro to a modern building in the Boulogne forest in West Paris.

For readers acquainted with North, Central and East European museums of popular culture, two characteristics should be mentioned. The immediately visible difference is the absence of an open-air department of the ‘Skansen’ type. Another important difference is the cohabitation with a good-sized research unit financed by the French research council, le Centre d’Ethnologie Française (CEF). This unit has for periods housed up to 20 or 30 researchers, in addition to the scientific staff of the museum, and thus – theoretically – offered possibilities for museum research that other European institutions could hardly dream of.

MNATP presented innovative museological activity during the first decades, under its legendary founder Georges Henri Rivière. But the museum stagnated in a rather fixed and nostalgic image of pre-war, agricultural France. Since the 1980s the institution has been in deep crisis. The reasons are complex, but some elements can be briefly listed (see below for a more thorough discussion):

• France is a strongly centralised society, where the countryside and its cultural forms never enjoyed any real status. Popular culture never provided material to the nation building process, as it did in several young nations.
• Metropolitan ethnology and folkloristics (as opposed to anthropology or the study of distant cultures) had to fight for academic acceptance. Only at a very late stage did Academia start looking at their own popular heritage as an object of study on equal footing with distant cultures.
• France is a nation of immigrants, for whom rural culture has little meaning, as opposed to urban culture.
• Tourists do not come to Paris to study popular culture, but élite culture (which grosso modo corresponds to fine art).
• Finally, the institutionalised separation of museum curators and researchers (see below) is often contra-productive for research in museums. The researchers tend to follow their own ways and to neglect the needs of the museum.

For all these reasons MNATP is a monument that may be torn down without great offence to the national feeling of the French.

The public turned their back on the museum – from 153,000 visitors in 1978 to between 30,000 and 60,000 in the late 1990s; “Pre-war rural France is no longer a success”, was the dry remark from le Figaro (14.12.99). The tourists are disinterested, and so are the inhabitants of Paris and the surrounding district. A newspaper humorously calculated that at the present frequency it would take 162 years for all the present inhabitants of Paris and Île de France to have visited the museum!

The relationship between the research unit and the rest of the staff is a general problem for French museums. With a scientific background, you can be either a curator who is responsible for collections, acquisitions, reserves and exhibitions, or a researcher – normally on a lifetime contract with the national research
council (CNRS), and free to move around if you find more interesting research projects in other units or institutions. Many in the latter group prefer to pursue their own tasks and projects, sometimes independently of the museum’s policy (cf. the debate in many countries from the 1980s on the cleavage between the ethnology practiced in universities contra museums), whereas others quit the museums for greener pastures elsewhere. From the point of view of the museum, the result is very much the same: a dysfunctional research unit. I would like to underscore that this is a general problem inherent in the structure that does not apply permanently or to every museum.

Many efforts were made through the 1980s and 1990s to refloat the ship. Seminars were arranged and a succession of directors strove to find solutions. The rescuer was Michel Colardelle, a researcher and professor of l’Ecole du Louvre with a past in the Ministry of culture, and thus not totally ignorant of what goes on in the ministries and the lobbies. The politicians were for a long time indifferent to MNATP and not willing to allocate resources to save a national museum – situated, as most of them were, in the Paris region. However, a recent law on the decentralization of cultural institutions made it possible for Colardelle to win acceptance for the relocation of the museum. Actually, the decision means closing the old museum and establishing a new one in Marseille: new with regard to the name, the museological programme and the field to be covered. When the terms ‘moving’ or ‘transfer’ are used, it is because the old collection will be transferred and those of the staff who want to move along are invited to do so.

The resistance to change has been very strong. In spite of the failing public and an intrascientific development that has enforced radical changes in the museological programme, it took a long time to gain acceptance for moving out of Paris an institution classified as a national museum – situated, as most of them were, in the Paris region. However, the majority of the staff has finally agreed to move along with their institution, just as the majority of the MH staff has decided to join Branly.

Today the operation seems to be assured, although the transition to a conservative government in 2002 has given rise to some anxiety. For Branly – the Parisian anthropological museum of art and civilisations – the situation seems safe: the construction works have started, and a conservative government will not oppose a conservative president and his prestigious project. And Chirac continues his campaign for ‘les arts premiers’: in October 2002 he proposed the establishment of another new section in the Louvre – devoted to Islamic art. The political arguments for this idea are not difficult to understand, in a world tormented by the growing conflicts between Western and Islamic cultures. There is every reason to believe that the President once more will see one of his cherished projects successfully carried through.

The agents working for the Marseille museum, however, have lost some nights’ sleep, as the newly elected conservative government has stopped several cultural projects already planned by the former socialist government. The reason is a tougher economic climate combined with ambitious plans for reducing public expenditure and important tax reductions. What has probably saved MCEM is Prime Minister Raffarin’s political dream: a new and much more comprehensive law on decentralization, proposed by his cabinet in October 2002. So much for the spectacular changes in the museum landscape. In the next two paragraphs we shall have a closer look at the contents of two institutions rising from the ashes of the old ones.

**Branly – a Post-colonial Museum?**

“Let us create a museum about the others, together with the others, without enclosing these societies in cages ... We want to transcend the guilt of the West, without denying the history ...” (M. Godelier, *la Libération* 20.4.99).

The hottest debate has taken place over the transformation of the anthropological museums, and the critics have been louder than the defenders. Those critical of Branly, often joining forces with those opposing MCEM, have drawn on a broad range of arguments, from the purely nostalgic ones (that the efforts of the founding fathers, like Rivet and Rivière, deserve eternal recognition and safeguarding), via the more
than dubious ones (that the planned changes will mean a dead stop to serious research and a coup de grace to heritage) to the more or less absurd ones (technical arguments against transport and storage of collections, quality of new reserves, etc.). Along the gamut of arguments in favour of status quo, the most legitimate ones seem to be those concerning working conditions for the staff, arguments that militant labour unions have presented with force.

The argument that rallies many of the critics is the difficult balance between research and aesthetics. The planned name of the museum at Quai Branly – *le Musée des Arts et Civilisations* – signals aestheticisation and the prioritisation of the expressive side of the object, to the detriment of context. It may easily end up as a museum on the collectors’ terms. The apprehension is not unfounded, given the present boom for collecting ‘ethnic art’ in France. Furthermore, the aestheticisation of objects from distant cultures may be interpreted as an easy way to evade the problem of representing the Other, a classic headache for anthropological museums.

The Louvre exhibition gave support to the sceptics. It is a purely aesthetic display, where the form aspect of the objects is cultivated. Masks and statues are mounted without any context, just as Western art, like Greek busts and Roman statues, are traditionally exposed. On the other hand, the visitor may enter an adjacent room and look up information on the objects. The defenders of Branly have been eager to stress that whereas this is a purely aesthetic exhibition, to be displayed permanently in the art museum of the Louvre, the future Branly intends to relate the objects to their cultures. According to them, Branly has a double aim: the visitor should be offered the chance to admire and to be moved by the most exquisite objects and immaterial expressions of other cultures, and at the same time have the opportunity to understand living conditions and thought patterns of these cultures (*Le Monde* 31.5.2000). The spokesmen for Branly argue that the aesthetics, and the technological and the functional aspects of objects, are on equal footing from a museological point of view; and they also, equally, serve as historical evidence.

It is this plurality of meanings that the Branly staff wants to give room for, and that many critical and even furious anthropologists do not believe in. The problem for the latter, on the other hand, is the positive public reception of the Louvre exhibition, and the extraordinarily effective criticisms of ‘ethnocentrism’ and scientific ‘fundamentalism’.

Maurice Godelier, once the scientific leading light of Branly, had to face several stormy attacks. His answer used to be that Branly’s goal was to recreate a *musee de l’Homme* – a museum of Mankind – intended to be both an outstanding teaching institution and a research centre in first division. His vision was an institution that combines four dimensions of the objects: their aesthetic aspect, their museographic career, their functional and ritual context, and the society they once were part of. And in addition, a fifth dimension which transcends these, in tune with the universal and existential problems of anthropology valid for all societies: about their forms of power, rituals, representations of wealth, death, etc., or in his own eloquent wording: “This museum shall combine the artefacts of Art and of Life; it shall combine the powers of Gods with the fact that Man, after all, eats his food with a spoon!”

The critics do not have much faith in Godelier’s vision. On the other hand, these critics get no sympathy from the authorities. The recurrent strikes among the MH staff and the often-repeated claim that the transfer to Branly (and to MCEM) puts heritage in peril are met with silence. The lack of a real dialogue is remarkable; one party sees the development as the rescue, the other – the minority, though – as a total disaster. Even the submarine *Koursk* was used as a metaphor for what was happening to heritage! To no avail: neither verbal criticism, nor strikes, reunions and protest demonstrations have managed to stop this post-colonial museum project.

**MCEM – a Post-national Museum?**

The working title of the forthcoming museum in Marseille is *Passages*, and the subtitle *le Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée* (MCEM). The name implies two new
perspectives, on the one hand the supranational and European, and on the other the regional (the Mediterranean): in either case a turning-away from the national. A thought-provoking change indeed for a museum originally dedicated to the national culture.

The arguments from those who promote MCEM is that the public’s disinterest in the present MNATP may be explained by the fact that the French today are confronted with an everyday reality and prospects for the future that are totally different from those prevailing when the museum was established. MNATP has suffered severe criticism for its outdated conception of national culture and its lack of understanding of European contemporary culture. According to some critics, MNATP has become a historical museum instead of an ethnological museum. The French have unequivocally become subjects of Europe, the French nation has become a highly pluralistic society, and the borders of France do not capture one cultural unity; its territory is the meeting place for myriads of different influences. The French daily have new culinary, religious, linguistic, economic, etc. experiences, which by no means correspond to the heritage that MNATP safeguards.

The old national project – it is claimed – has no future; the museums have to expand in time and space, to Europe and adjacent areas, and bring history into dialogue with the present. The vision is a multidisciplinary research centre which poses questions that concern people: about urbanism, sport and leisure, migration and immigration, food and feasts, myths, religion and confessions, fashion and the body, distribution of resources, mobility and unemployment, violence and terrorism, youth and old age, etc., and to present these themes in historical depth.

MCEM expresses a vision of a radically different museological programme (but much still remains to be developed). MCEM will cover the period from ca 1500 up to the present day, but concepts like ‘popular art’ and ‘traditions’ are felt to be insufficient for an institution which aims to feel the pulse of a pluralistic society where the tempo of change and the free flow of things and ideas have accelerated. An expression often used is le métissage culturel – the creolisation of culture. The choice of the term ‘civilisations’ in the name marks the museum as a centre for research on society rather than on traditions.

There is undoubtedly a tinge of political-strategic reasoning behind these arguments, which have been approved by French authorities. And the EU authorities will certainly applaud the toning-down of national identities and a corresponding focus on a European identity. And a Europe of regions will probably sound more interesting in EU ears than a Europe of nations. However, it is difficult to see that the creation of MCEM will be reduced to such motifs. The EU has never been a good project for French governments, left or right, and the French public opinion on EU matters is divided in two similar blocks. Furthermore, the transfer and transformation of MNATP was given rather low priority by the French authorities (in spite of the recent decentralization policy), and the EU funding in the project is insignificant.

There are in Europe today a group of museums that follow a policy of supranational identity building: the newly established Museum Europäischer Kulturen in Berlin, the forthcoming Musée de l’Europe in Brussels, and a still very loosely planned museum of European cultures in Torino, in addition to MCEM. Discussion of these museums is beyond the scope of this article. But MCEM differs from the others in one respect: the will to break down the understanding of Europe as a cultural unity and the (EU) notion of one European identity.

While one of the aims of MCEM is to reflect cultural similarities and dissimilarities in Europe, another is to break with a narrow European identification by focussing on the Mediterranean area, showing how the civilisations of North Africa and the Middle East reach far into Europe, not least through the melting pot that Marseille has been for at least two thousand years. A focus on cultural encounters across Europe’s external borders may help to break down rather than build up frontiers. How MCEM will cover the adjacent African and Oriental civilisations is not quite clear yet. A local network of museums and research units around the Mediterranean must be established. Also, further dialogue with MH
and Branly is required for a possible transfer of the North African collections, which cover the cultures of Magreb and Machrech. However, a splitting-up of MH’s non-European collections is still a bone of contention. So far, only the transfer of the European collections from MH to MCEM is assured.

“Museums ain’t what they used to be” ... Nor are Popular Art or Culture. Some Concluding Remarks

France has recently experienced a lively museum debate, with a focus on five of its big national institutions. The fate and the destinies of these museums are closely intertwined. They have all been drawn into a debate on representation and ideologies, they are part of a political discourse, and they are – rightly or wrongly – accused of lagging behind the general development of their scientific disciplines. The actual debate has revealed the political role of the museums and their participation in ideology production. What is perhaps more striking, to an observer from the North, is the direct intervention and the active role played by politicians in this renovation.

In general, the ongoing transformations in the museum landscape can be seen a corollary of new ways of understanding the nation, Europe, the Third World. Whereas national ethnological museums have been criticised for the use of popular culture for nation building purposes, with (false) national identities and nationalism in the wake, the anthropological museums have been accused of maintaining old power structures. Museums are power language: if one museum supports identity building by stressing the sunny side of one’s own culture, the other museum creates distance by presenting the Other’s heritage as strange or primitive.

This is a well-known rule, but seemingly it does not apply a hundred percent to the French pattern, and less today than yesterday. As for the anthropological museums, it is correct that they have for a long time been criticised for maintaining colonial relations and creating distance. The museum for the French ‘national’ heritage, however, has long since ceased to function as a mirror for national pride – that is, if it ever had that function? The museums that have played such a role in France are museums of fine art. Criticism of ethnocentrism and eurocentrism has been much more severe for the Louvre than for any museum of national popular culture. It is no exaggeration to say that what has been a very important element in the constitution of French national identity is fine art and bourgeois or urban traditions, not popular art and popular or vernacular traditions. This is one of the main reasons why the national museum of popular art and culture can be dismissed as a ‘historical’ museum and replaced by a new institution for ‘European civilizations’.

With this perspective in mind, one may ask if there isn’t a close connection between the French identification with fine art and the elevation of exotic popular culture to the status of (exotic) fine art. That is how anthropological museums tend to develop into museums of art from the Third World. For the ‘ethnic’ collections, the appreciation of the objects has since long been concerned with three aspects: authenticity, aesthetics and rarity (and not the artefacts’ function). This tradition explains why – in spite of some opposition – it is possible to establish a museum for ‘art and civilizations’ (Branly). It is easy to foresee that it will become a success as a museum of art. But it is more uncertain whether it will also be a success as a museum of anthropology (or ‘civilisations’).

For the same reason, MNATP was unable to succeed. It was based on two different logics, that of the popular object as an object of art, in a truly French tradition (among other things, for example, the display of ‘pure’ objects in the former study galleries), and on the other hand the logic of ethnology, i.e. popular culture as lived life. It could perhaps work for a historically distant society, like that of France up to the war, but not for an urban, industrialized, multicultural society like contemporary France. The forthcoming MCEM has certainly picked up this warning from the past. The challenge will be to manage to base the activities on one single logic: that of ethnology as a study of contemporary society in its historical dimensions.
References


Museum national d’histoire naturelle. Special issue of Connaissance des Arts, Paris s. a.


Other sources

MNATP’s scrap archives (containing several hundred newspaper articles).

Upublished reports and working documents on the MNATP/MCEM project.

Oral information from curators and researchers of the museums.

Notes

1 A new museum law (2002) will reorganise the French museums. Main changes are on the one hand the categorization as national museum of around 500 museum of art, cultural and natural history (only around 40 today), on the other hand better conditions for some of the private museums, but also less strict rules for declassification and alienation of collections. The most critical voices see this as part of a market-oriented policy that fits well into the Branly strategy.

2 Later ‘national’ was added and the name changed to le Musée national des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie.

3 Kannibals et Vahinés: Immagérie des mers du Sud.

4 Le Muséum itself has lately been through several transformations and ideological-critical debates (the relationship Man – Nature, evolution and ecology, research versus exhibitions, etc.), the story of which surpasses the scope of this article.

5 Concerning the criticism of Le Muséum, especially of the treatment of the collections, as well as the reorganisation, see i. a. the discussion in Nature vol. 362 (1993) and vol. 401 (1999).

6 At the same time MH took over after le Musée d’Ethnographie, which since 1880 had been housed by the old Palais de Chaillot.

7 The paleo-biological collection consists of 150.000 items, included 35.000 human skulls; the prehistoric-archaeological collection of 500.000 items, and the anthropological one of ca 250.000–300.000. The common library compromises ca 300.000 volumes.


9 The issue of splitting the library has been difficult, and the sole victory of one month’s strike in Nov.–Dec. 2001 was a (temporary?) promise that the library should not be split.


11 Maurice Godelier is a former directeur de recherche CNRS (the French research council) and currently directeur d’études (both positions correspond to a chair) at l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. Godelier has through most of his career professed a marxist orientation, but has recently described himself as a pragmatic regarding scientific theories.

12 The winner project has been presented in a
series of newspaper articles, and the architect Jean Nouvel’s proposition was positively received by the press (see i.a. articles in Le Monde 10.12.99 and l’Humanité 28.3.00).

13 It has been a French tradition to keep a broad range of museums with specialized and limited responsibilities, and not with thematically broad collections like that of i.e. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

14 Asian ethnic art was not represented, as the recently restored and renewed Musée Guimet in Paris (le Musée national des Arts Asiatiques) is responsible for this field.

15 The French research council – le Conseil National de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) – employs some 12 000–14 000 persons in full, lifetime positions. Half of these are researchers, the other half research technicians. Around 2 000 CNRS researchers work in the fields of social sciences and the humanities, and a considerable group of these in the research units of the museums. As free researchers, they can choose their affiliation and may also be associated with several research units.

16 Michel Colardelle has been councillor for Jack Lang, former minister of Culture.

17 A law on the decentralization of institutions of culture was passed around 1990, and the secretary of state who is responsible for museums and heritage questions carries the title ‘Secretary of state for heritage and cultural decentralization’ (le secrétaire d’État au patrimoine et à la décentralisation culturelle). Decentralization is a new trend in French politics.

18 The new law covers the decentralization of a series of functions, not only culture, to the 26 regions of France. Paradoxically the regions – whether the councils are socialist or conservative – are hesitant or negative to the idea of decentralization. The regions are afraid that the costs will have to be paid by them. The reform is so radical, in relation to the French tradition of centralization, that it is called “the new Revolution” – and many consider it too radical to succeed.

19 See Rogan 2003 for a discussion and comparison of these museums.

20 Se Cuisenier 1991 and Duclos 1992, for a more lengthy discussion and contradictory views of the clash of logics inherent in the MNATP museum conception.
The turn of the millenium has seen a new development in European museology: the creation of transnational, pan-European cultural history museums. Museum Europäischer Kulturen (MEK) was established in Berlin in 1999, and le Musée de l’Europe (MDE) in Brussels opened a prefigurative exhibition in 2001. Le Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (MCEM) has a pilot team in place in Marseille and plans to open its doors in 2008. Further, Torino has for some time been planning to establish a similar institution.

This phenomenon raises some questions. What are the motives behind these new cultural constructions? Do they spring from the same needs and do they have similar aims? As they are all situated in EU countries, one might ask: Are there political motives? Do they aim to break down national identities and to support trans- and post-national identity-building? If so, will a breaking-down of national identities necessarily mean a European identity, or will they perhaps support regional movements and regional identities? Or are the new museums mainly a corollary of an intrascientific development, of new trends in ethnology and adjacent fields?

A closer look at these institutions – real or planned – reveals both similarities and differences in background, in ideologies, and in museological programmes.

The Emerging Museums of Europe

Bjarne Rogan


Museums of cultural history have been regarded as effective instruments of national identity-building, as well as powerful symbols of nationhood. Nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe abounded with examples of museums that fulfilled this function.

At the turn of the millenium, however, we are seeing the beginnings of a new trend in European museology: the creation of transnational, pan-European cultural history museums. Museum Europäischer Kulturen (MEK) was established in Berlin in 1999, and le Musée de l’Europe (MDE) in Brussels opened a prefigurative exhibition in 2001. Le Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (MCEM) has a pilot team in place in Marseille and plans to open its doors in 2008. Further, Torino has for some time been planning to establish a similar institution.

This phenomenon raises some questions. What are the motives behind these new cultural constructions? Do they spring from the same needs and do they have similar aims? As they are all situated in EU countries, one might ask: Are there political motives? Do they aim to break down national identities and to support trans- and post-national identity-building? If so, will a breaking-down of national identities necessarily mean a European identity, or will they perhaps support regional movements and regional identities? Or are the new museums mainly a corollary of an intrascientific development, of new trends in ethnology and adjacent fields?

A closer look at these institutions – real or planned – reveals both similarities and differences in background, in ideologies, and in museological programmes.

The turn of the millenium has seen a new development in European museology: the creation of transnational, pan-European cultural history museums. Museum Europäischer Kulturen (MEK) was established in Berlin in 1999, and le Musée de l’Europe (MDE) in Brussels opened a prefigurative exhibition in 2001. Le Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (MCEM) has a pilot team in place in Marseille and plans to open its doors in 2008. There has been discussion, also, about the establishment of a similar institution in Torino.

Three New Constructions

Of the four abovementioned institutions, the Torino museum is lagging behind the others; plans for a museum with only temporary exhibitions and no permanent collections – showing “l’inevitabilità dell’Europa tra identità e diversità” – have been suspended. The recent election of Mr Berlusconi has given these plans a more uncertain future, since his regime is not especially sympathetically disposed toward European integration, nor to public cultural institutions. I shall therefore concentrate on the new museum in Berlin and the coming ones in Brussels and Marseille.

The idea that led to the present museum of
European culture in Berlin was conceived in 1988. The ongoing economic and political unification process in Western Europe and the striving for a European Union certainly served as a backdrop, but another event gave a strong impetus to the development, notably the tearing down of the Wall in 1989 and the fall of the communist empire. In the 1930s the national German collections had been separated from European and extra-European collections, in accordance with Nazi ideology, and the post-war division of Germany resulted in two Berlin museums for Volkskunde. The 1989 events made it possible to bring together – temporarily in Dahlem in Berlin – the national collections from West and East Berlin. Also, close cooperation between the Volkskunde and the Völkerkunde museums resulted in the transfer of the European (non-German) collections to the Museum für Volkskunde, which was transformed into Museum Europäischer Kulturen in 1999 (MEK, Dahlem). The European collections are still kept separate from the national German collections in the reserves, in anticipation of a new museum building in a more central place in Berlin. The aim, however, is the full integration of the collections.

The important steps, then, towards MEK have been the fusion of the East and West German ethnological collections in 1992, the addition of the European anthropological collections, the congress Wege nach Europa. Ansätze und Problemfelder in den Museen arranged by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde in 1994, and the great exhibition opened in 2000, Kulturkontakte in Europa: Faszination Bild. The topic of the present, opening exhibition is popular imagery through the centuries, based on the idea that “Bilder kennen keine Grenzen”.

In Brussels, the genesis of the new museum has been much shorter. An association was founded in 1997, on the initiative of the European Parliament, with the sole aim of planning the Le Musée de l’Europe (MDE). Contrary to what is the case for the Berlin and the Marseille museums, the Brussels museum will not establish any collections of its own and all exhibitions will be temporary, based on loans and relying heavily upon new technology and multimedia displays. The first step was an international congress in 1999 treating the topic of borders of and in Europe, and the second a prefigurative exhibition that opened in the fall of 2001, the subject of which was La Belle Epoque and the World Fairs from 1851 to 1913 – i.e. Europe’s short century of progress and optimism. The idea is to show European civilisation at its height, when the unifying forces seemed stronger than the differentiating and centrifugal forces – an illusion that was broken in 1914, when the ‘European civil war’ began. The message is clear: the new Europe now under construction has come further than at that time, because one new, paramount unifying force has been introduced: the political will to create a European union.

The prefigurative exhibition was inaugurated under the patronage of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union, just as the forthcoming permanent museum is a product of the new EU policy in the field of culture. The funding is European, and the museum itself is defined as a tool for European integration. As such, it is a product of the EU change of policy in the 1990s, “a shift in emphasis from integration, perceived as a rational by-product of economic prosperity and legal harmonisation, to more recent concerns with integration as a cultural process, and ‘culture’ as a political instrument for furthering that construction process ... [to] foster a ‘European identity’ that will extend integration into the more ‘cultural’ and psychological domains of everyday life” (Shore 2000:1).

The museum will focus on the concept of Europe and its history, the message being that the present European Union is less a recent political idea than the result of a long maturation process that has been developing over many centuries since the days of early Christianity.

In Paris, le Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires will soon close its doors, after 70 years of existence. The museum was created in 1937, when the French collections were separated from the other European collections of the anthropological museum at Trocadéro, le Musée de l’Homme. There is every reason to ask why the national objects were detached from the rest of the world’s cultural
heritage, in order to create a new, specialized museum for French popular culture – in a country where culture used to be synonymous with highbrow art and urban culture. There is no space here to enter into this discussion, but one important factor should be mentioned, notably the political context – le Front Populaire – that made this operation possible. Paradoxically, in the 1930s both the Nazi ideology in Germany and the socialist movement in France were disposed to emphasize the national culture, and to separate it from non-national and non-European culture.

Since 1967 the museum has been situated in the Bois de Boulogne on the western outskirts of Paris. To make a long history short: after a considerable success until around 1980, a decline set in. The number of visitors shrank to around one-third of their former numbers, research tended to dry up, and in general the popularity of the museum fell dramatically. The reasons for this crisis are numerous and complex, but a few factors should be mentioned. France is a strongly centralized society, where the regional popular culture has never been really accepted; French popular culture was never deployed as an instrument in the nation-building process, as was the case in several other nation states. Also, France is a nation of immigrants, for whom the culture of the countryside has never meant much. Furthermore, national ethnology (including folklore) had to struggle for acceptance as a scientific discipline, until eventually it found its place as a special branch of anthropology. Finally, there is in France an organisational and almost watertight division between curators and researchers, a division that has allowed museum researchers to follow their own interests rather than those of the museums which employ them.

The combination of all these factors has left the national museum of French popular culture in deep crisis. The museum will close its gates in Paris to be reconstituted in 2008 in Marseille, as a museum not of French national culture, but of European civilisations – in the plural. And there is one very important addition: it will also cover Mediterranean civilisations, i.e. North African and Middle East cultures. The full name of the museum is Le Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (MCEM).

The debate about the destiny and future of the French national museum of popular culture has been going on since the early 1980s, parallel to the deepening of the crisis. An important step was the 1993 congress in Paris entitled Rencontres européennes des musées d’ethnographie, another was the 1997 congress Réinventer un musée, when the idea of a European museum was launched. In the spring of 2000, the French government accepted plans for closing down the national museum in Paris and the revival – or creation – in Marseille of a new museum of Europe and the Mediterranean area.

We may distinguish two main causes, or rather two complexes of explanations, for the establishment of these three new museums. One set of causes points towards the object in question – i.e. Europe itself and new ways of conceiving European culture. The other must be looked for in recent changes within the sciences of culture. We shall look at the new museums (and mainly the French and German ones) in relation to these two sets of explanations.

Homogeneity or Differences? A Fresh Look at Europe

In an important paper at the Paris congress in 1993, Krysztof Pomian – who was later appointed scientific director of the Brussels museum – gave a broad overview of European cultural history. He argued that Europe throughout its history has been torn between diversity and uniformity, an argument that was picked up by the architects of the new museums of Europe.

Europe is synonymous with diversity – in matters of language, audibly as well as visibly. In addition to the audible landscape of around fifty languages, there is a visual linguistic landscape, where signposts and posters in Latin letters, in Cyrillic, Slavic, Hebrew, Arabic, and other even more exotic alphabets, remind us of this diversity. Then comes the diversity of confessions and religions; of vernacular architecture, of architectural styles and building materials, of urban and rural settlement patterns, of agricultural landscapes; of the uniforms of soldiers, policemen and postmen and railway employees; the diversity of food and
local dishes, of meal systems; of daily life habits and customs; of home interiors, of window curtains; of churchyards and funeral habits; of behaviour in public and rules for politeness, and so on.

Everyone who has crossed Europe will nod in recognition: Europe is diversity, Europe is marked by numerous cultural frontiers, some of which coincide, whereas others cross each other; some are easily discernible, while others are more difficult to grasp; and, finally: some play a major role in the definition of local or national identity, while others pass by unnoticed. And some are pan-national, like several trait complexes separating Central Europe from Eastern or Western Europe.

But the separating forces have not been allowed to work undisturbed. Other forces work towards the uniformity of Europe, permitting the introduction of elements that have contributed towards the homogenisation of material and spiritual life, of usage and habits. The spread of technology has been one such factor; if we stick to recent times only, it should be sufficient to mention the role of innovations like the steam engine, of electricity, of electronics and the revolution in communication technologies. Other important unifying forces through history have been the spread of Christianity, the use of Latin and the institution of universities, and the interdependence and solidarity of the national elites – intellectual and social – since the 17th century. Today, the liberal European market guarantees a more or less free flow of people, of goods and of ideas, and the standardisation of products. And even if restrictions still exist, migration is probably more important than ever.

These forces of uniformity, whether they are called globalisation or something else, have certainly led to the breaking down of frontiers, but not necessarily to full homogenisation and the disappearance of cultural differences. It is easy to show that all these major centrifugal forces have led to the creation of new differences. Christianity was cleft many times through history, to end up in several major branches and a great variety of confessions and denominations. In spite of the homogenisation of the European elites from the 17th century, the following century produced more cultural differences than resemblances, ending in the 19th century nationalisation of politics and economics, and the extolling of national independence and self-sufficiency. And the free flow of goods today has had as one of its results local specialisation and revitalisation of traditional products. On every level, probably, it is possible to show that the forces of uniformity have resulted in the creation or reintroduction of new cultural differences – within and across national borders. Or as stated by Pomian: the cultural reproduction of differences takes place all the time, thus guaranteeing that the gloomy vision of one grey, uniform future – often predicted and warned against – is clearly unjustified (1996: 48). The fear of a loss of cultural identity in a changing Europe seems totally unfounded and is due to a defective understanding of what culture is and how it works.

Recurrent Problems of European Ethnology and Museology

Similar trains of thought have been picked up and further developed by spokesmen for the new European museums, like Korff, Karasek and Tietmeyer in Germany and Lévi-Strauss, Colardelle, Chiva, Guibal and others in France. But what are the consequences of these insights for cultural history museums?

In short, that contemporary culture – just as much as historical processes – should be the object of study and the responsibility of the museum. Furthermore, a reappraisal of comparison as the obvious methodological tool, and finally that neither national collections in ethnological museums nor European collections in ethnographic or anthropological museums are in themselves sufficient bases for research and exhibitions.

Let us start with the latter part of this problem. There are many national museums which keep rich historical collections of national or regional objects. But in a Europe where culture contacts have been so rich during at least two millennia, where cross-fertilization is a central principle, the cultural history of a given nation cannot be adequately studied and presented only in a national perspective. Or as stated by Karazek and Tietmeyer (1999: 14):
“... it is a fundamental insight that cultural expressions, and above all the cultural history of a state, cannot be seen detached from the common development in Europe. A [German] museum of cultural history with only a national orientation can understand neither the history, nor [contemporary] reality, nor the future of Germany.”

This parallels the debate in the 1970s and 1980s that led to a name change in many university institutions, from Volkskunde to European Ethnology or corresponding terms. For the museums, it took another couple of decades before we began to see the consequences.

Because the museums are restricted to national or regional objects, meaningful research and successful exhibitions require cooperation on bilateral or multilateral level. However, bringing relevant objects together from separate collections in different countries is always a cumbersome, time-consuming and expensive operation.

On the other hand, the European collections that exist in quite a few cities (Berlin, Paris, London, Basle, etc.) contain items from several European nations or ethnic or cultural groups, but as a rule they are severed from the national collections of their own countries. Comparison and contextualisation are performed in other ways and in other perspectives than when different national museums collaborate. A lack of deeper knowledge of one’s own culture is a hindrance to a more thorough contextualisation and a better understanding of phenomena and processes that may appear both at home and in other cultures. Part of the solution in Berlin as well as in Marseille has been to merge the national and the European collections in the same museum. This operation does of course not exclude the other remedy, that is, cooperation between museums in different countries.

The debate has been especially intense in France lately, because of the abovementioned crisis concerning the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires (as well as concerning the anthropological Musée de l’Homme, for the same reasons). As pointed out by many French ethnologists, the problem is twofold: the public has turned its back on the museum, and a majority of the professionals – i.e. ethnologists and anthropologists – are looking in other directions. The reformation of the museum is trying to deal with these two major problems. An ethnological museum for France, like that for any other modern European country, cannot restrict itself to studying and presenting the rural and artisanal heritage of prewar France. A museum for the French society that neglects urban France, industrialized France, multicultural France, xenophobic France, France as a modern society of consumption, of immigration, of unemployment, of new leisure habits, of modern technology – has failed its mission – or, at least, that is the verdict today, by most French ethnologists and anthropologists.

Furthermore, if one acknowledges that Europe has a tangled history, there is little logic in the self-imposed limitations – in space as well as in time – of a traditional ethnological museum. When a new Europe is being constructed, at least partly as a repudiation of a history full of violence, and when nostalgic and extremist attitudes find their justification in misunderstood national identities, it is imperative to situate French popular culture in its European context. To do this, one has to look both further back in time as well as to contemporary society. To mention only one of several strong influences on French society, the Muslim one: the cultural history of France cannot be appreciated without taking into account the Muslim impact since the late Middle Ages, just as Muslim immigration – legal and welcomed, as well as illicit – has profoundly influenced France in the 20th century, and still does.

Because France has profited from extensive contacts with the regions around the Mediterranean – North Africa and the Middle East – Europe is an artificial unity, if a cultural sphere to which France belongs is to be defined. For France, with its long Mediterranean coast, the ocean has not defined the limit of the known world but, on the contrary, has served as a means of contact over thousands of years. The most important harbour, Marseille, has been and still is a cultural melting pot. Hence the decision to situate the new museum in Marseille and to define its mission as covering European and Mediterranean civilisations, under the
provisional name of *le Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée* (MCEM) The term *civilisation* has been explicitly chosen to escape from connotations that cling – at least in French – to terms like *culture (populaire)* and *tradition*. The term is supposed to imply a multidisciplinary approach to aspects of the societies in question that are simultaneously social, religious, moral, aesthetic, scientific and technological.

To sum up: what we can observe in the case of some of the most important ethnological museums is partly a parallel to what has happened to European ethnology at large over the past two decades: a change in thematic foci and methodological approaches. In the museums, there is – partly as a consequence of the opening up and the unification of Europe – a growing awareness of the fact that national borders are very arbitrary delimitations of the object of study. To grasp cultural diversity and similarities, contacts, traditions and change, the museum must widen the scope geographically. Furthermore, that the other self-imposed limitation, the temporal span – beginning and ending with early modern (rural) society – has been a hindrance to the understanding of both historical processes and present day society. Both Berlin and Marseille want to transcend the traditional threshold of the Reformation and cover the Middle Ages, as well as the present, globalized society.

The Anthropologisation of European Ethnological Museums?

This development raises several questions that cannot be fully answered in this brief sketch of the changing museums of Europe. For ethnology in general, as practiced in universities or other research centres, an anthropologisation of the discipline has taken place. Will the same happen in the museums? If so, what will be the status of the physical object, and of material culture, that is the foundation of museological activities? Even if material culture has lately regained a strong position in anthropology, it is mainly due to a theoretical interest in the non-material qualities of the object. In anthropological museums there has been a clear tendency in recent years to stress the aesthetic aspects of the object, to the detriment of functional, contextual and even symbolic aspects. In western anthropological museum exhibitions, exotic objects are displayed in the same way as are works of art in art galleries. The temperature of this debate is still high in France, in the wake of the reorganisation of *Le Musée de l’Homme* into *le Musée des Arts et Civilisations*. Also, the permanent anthropological exhibition in the art museum *le Louvre* has provoked much consternation.

In the case of the Berlin museum, the relation between ethnology and anthropology has been explicitly discussed, as the cohabitation of the *Völkskunde* and the *Völkerkunde* collections and the national and the European rapprochement have been going on for some years. The policy of *Museum Europäischer Kulturen* is “to develop neither an expanded European ethnological museum nor a museum for European anthropology in its traditional meaning, but to combine ethnological and anthropological elements in a reasonable blend, within a European framework.” The result of this plan is not clear, as the museum has not yet obtained a new building, a prerequisite for the reorganisation of the two collections. The opening exhibition, on European *Bildlore* from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, is a chronological and comparative presentation of diversity, contacts, and influences in the field of (popular) iconography. Thematically, it may be regarded as a rather traditional exhibition, but the impressive geographical span and its methodological basis, comparison in space and time, makes it an interesting attempt to merge different disciplinary traditions. It certainly deserves the label ‘European culture history’.

In the case of the Marseille museum, the planning of the museological programme was one of the main tasks in 2003, taking place when this article was written. The debates so far have focussed on the contemporary multicultural, creolized, fluxional and migratory European societies, even if the historical dimension is regarded as an important axis for the forthcoming museum. The challenges, however, are largely formulated in a context of modern social anthropology, or as its director states:
[The museum] “has adopted an anthropological perspective ... The ambition is to start with social phenomena which can be identified through tangible and intangible cultural elements both present and past, using them to gain understanding of an area considered as coherent (with an economic system, historic past and religious scriptures) but which has always produced diversity” (Colardelle 2002).

It remains to be seen how the issue of the tangible culture elements – the material object – will be treated in this anthropological frame. The question of aesthetics and the object has been asked, but not yet answered.6

Some Concluding Remarks

The three museums of Europe, as discussed above, are borne out of common needs, they are all situated at highly symbolic places in Europe, but they also demonstrate differences.

The acknowledgement of Europe as a complex and composite culture area – with a common history, formed by forces of diversity and homogenisation, and constituted by cultural elements that cannot be understood in isolation – is shared by all the three museums, as is also the comparative approach.

Situated in Berlin – once the symbol of a divided Europe, the Museum Europäischer Kulturen (MEK) now symbolizes the building of bridges between East and West, the contacts between Germanic and Slavonic cultures. Le Musée de l’Europe (MDE) occupies a correspondingly central position in the very heart of the European Union, as close as possible to the European Commission’s headquarters. Le Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (MCEM), on the other hand, has chosen Marseille, perhaps Europe’s most important city for contacts with African and Oriental cultures, a melting pot and a doorway to other cultures.

These geographical positions also imply different geo-political aims. The most restricted scope seems to be that of the MDE in Brussels, with its focus on the history of the idea of Europe and on the political construction of the European Union, thus concentrating on the geographical area of the present member countries – i.e. on ‘Latin Christianity’, thus far to the exclusion of Orthodox and Islamic Europe.7 The MEK in Berlin, on the other hand, covers the whole of what is geographically defined as Europe. Its first (and present) exhibition unveils a museum preoccupied with studying similarities as well as differences – ethnic, regional, national – along deep historical lines, on the basis of largely traditional ethnographic material. The geographical limits of Europe are unquestioned; national frontiers, however, are played down, and regions and culture areas are emphasized. How ‘pro-European’ is this project, in a largely ‘pro-EU’ Germany? The project is political in the sense that the old internal frontiers are subordinated, and the construction of the European Union certainly forms an important backdrop. But it is by no means a ‘pro-EU’ project in the way that MDE is.

The MCEM in Marseille follows other aims. With its additional – if not primary – focus on the Mediterranean region, it challenges the idea of the unity of Europe. The arguments are the same as we have seen above against the arbitrary delimitation represented by the national borders. But MCEM also insists upon the fact that the processes of diversity and homogenization, contacts, and influences take place across the Mediterranean region, between European, African and Middle Eastern societies. Or if one likes: MCEM combines the conception of a Europe without national frontiers, the deconstruction of Europe as a cultural unity, and a special focus on one multi-national region which far transcends Europe. In doing so, the museum denies the existence of one European identity, an idea cherished by some bureaucrats in Brussels.8 The museum replaces the notion of national culture by other concepts, notably regional, supranational and transcontinental.

The three museums all acknowledge both the importance of a historical perspective and the necessity of bringing the past into dialogue with contemporary culture and society. Still, the disciplinary approaches are not identical. To put it very briefly: if the MDE in Brussels, led by eminent university historians, focusses on the political history of (a limited part of) Europe, with the clear aim of its function as a ‘history
book of Europe’, the MEK in Berlin is the exponent of a total European cultural history, based on ethnographic material in a comparative perspective. In contrast, MCEM in Marseille presents itself as a centre for Euro-Mediterranean (social) anthropology, with a historical perspective.

So much for these three new museum constructions, which – it should be stressed – all strongly advocate the deconstruction of the notion of national cultural borders. The obvious question then, in the wake of the ongoing process of expanding the European Union, is what will happen in the new East European member countries. After the upheaval of the communist empire, the homogenizing efforts of the Soviet occupation regimes have been – as far as I can see – replaced by fervent claims of diversity and national differences. We are witnessing nation-building processes more or less similar to those of the 19th century in Western Europe. How can we reconcil this development with the growing awareness in many present EU countries that national borders represent arbitrary and obsolete delimitations? This is one of the cultural thrillers of tomorrow that deserves to be followed closely.

Notes

1 This was also the title of the contribution of Nils-Arvid Bringuéus to the 1994 congress. See Neuland-Kitzerow & Ziehe (eds.) 1995.
2 I have dealt more thoroughly with this theme in another article in this issue (p. 37ff.).
3 In 2003 the museum was baptized Le Musée des Passages, with MCEM as an undertitle.
4 A special case is offered by the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest, where extra-European collections side with collections from Hungary and adjacent areas (Fejös 2001). The rest of Europe, however, is – as far as I know – not a responsibility of this museum.
7 According to Colardelle 2002. What will happen with the extension of the European Union to countries in Eastern Europe, remains to be seen.
8 Also European migration cultures elsewhere in the world.
9 It is difficult to see that the creation of MCEM can be reduced to EU motifs. The EU has never been a good project for French governments, left nor right, and the French public opinion on EU matters is divided in two similar blocks. The situation is not so clear-cut as in Germany.

References


**Other sources**

MNATP’s scrap archives (containing several hundred newspaper articles).

Uncublished reports and working documents on the MCEM museum project.

Oral information from curators and researchers of the museums.

My best thanks to professor Reg Byron for helpful assistance as language consultant.
Confronting the Logic of the Nation-State
Transnational Migration and Cultural Globalisation in Germany

Regina Römhild


The article explores the increasing gap between the cultural dynamics of transnationalisation in Germany and the national self-perception of the German society. While concepts of “in-migration” (Zuwanderung) and “integration” still stick to notions of the nation-state as being a “container” embracing and controlling a population and a culture of its own, the various processes of material and imaginary mobility across the national borders contradict and challenge this notion as well as its political implications. By drawing on the transnational life-worlds and the cultural productivity of migrants, anthropological research has made important contributions to render visible this challenge. It is argued, however, that an all too exclusive focus on migration may, in fact, rather conceal the wider effects of transnationalisation and cultural globalisation on the society and its cultural fabric as a whole.

Dr. Regina Römhild, Institut für Kulturanthropologie und Europäische Ethnologie, Universität Frankfurt, Gruneburgplatz 1, DE-60323 Frankfurt a.M.
E-mail: roemhild@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Katja is 16 years old. She lives and goes to school in Frankfurt, in a quarter called “Gallusviertel”. Katja and her parents immigrated as “ethnic Germans” (Aussiedler) from Usbekistan, a former republic of the Soviet Union. Katja, however, would not perceive herself as German; many of her friends, she says, “are Russians as well”. And moreover, a major part of her personal network is “Russian” – including cafés and clubs as well as other relatives all over Germany, but also back in Usbekistan, in the village of her grandparents. At school, Katja shares the classroom with, in her words, “Turks” and “Yugoslavs”. One of her girlfriends, however, is Armenian – an important differentiation in Katja’s eyes, since the girl’s first name and appearance could easily be interpreted as Turkish. Yet, Katja insists on keeping some distance to Turks – although some sentences earlier, she had quite naturally counted the Turkish boys among her peer-group.

This first glimpse at Katja’s life-world (see Bergmann, Henrich, Kämper & Sprenger 2003) may illustrate what I want to describe and analyse in more detail in the following: the transnationalisation and cultural globalisation of German society due to the long-standing presence of immigrants and their social and imaginary engagements with the wider world. Katja and her peers are one of the reference points to the “transnational cultures” in the Frankfurt area that were the subject of a research project at the Frankfurt Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology. With that project, we linked on to concepts of transnational research (see, e.g., Hannerz 1998) which are widely discussed in an international anthropological discourse – but as yet rarely employed in both public debates and scholarly research on migration in Germany2. Here, migrants are still widely believed to enter a “German” cultural landscape to which they
have to adapt by way of “integration”. Their presence may render the fabrics of the society a “multiculture”, as the major narrative goes – still, that multiculture is perceived in localised terms: fixed within the confines of a German nation-state (see Vertovec 2001). That logic not only still informs the current politics of “integration”, it is also the implicit ingredient of those research agendas that tend to think of society and culture in terms of physically bounded, clear-cut territorial entities (see Pries 1997; Welz 1998).

From the perspective of transnational research, however, migration proves to be a project of mobility that connects people and places across national borders. Here, the main focus of research has been on migrant networks and diasporas spanning the globe and, thus, creating deterritorialised “transnational social spaces” (Pries 1997) and diasporic identities (Clifford 1994). Still, the further effects of transnational migration on the societies involved have as yet not received the same empirical attention. But transnational relationships, as Paul Kennedy and Victor Roudometof (2001) point out, are not confined to the firsthand social practice of migrants and diasporas. Rather, they have to be “understood as manifestations of broader social trends ...; they are extending into and shaping the lives of people engaged in many other kinds of associations, clubs and informal networks as well as into cultural life at large” (p. 2).

Transnational migration not only mobilises migrants and their cultures; it also mobilises the cultural worlds of those resident citizens believed to be the “sedentary” backbones of the nation-states.

Extending the transnational paradigm into the wider context of immigration societies, entails, as I will try to show, a rather radical shift in perspective: It leads away from territorialised views on “multiculture” and “integration” and towards acknowledging the deterritorialising effects of a cultural globalisation perpetuated by the migration of people, things and ideas across distances. What comes into sight, then, are processes that challenge the nation-state at its most essential logic: that of being in control of a people and a culture of its own.

Realities Against the German Idea of “Integration”

In contemporary Germany, Katja’s transnational way of life is not uncommon at all. And yet, it contradicts the official prospects of integration and co-residence in the immigration society. “Integration”, as it is still perceived also in more recent studies (see, e.g., Straßburger 2001), refers to the degree in which immigrant minorities adapt to a social and cultural landscape apparently dominated by a German majority. From that perspective, successful integration is measured in terms of cultural and social similarity between resident Germans and immigrants (ibid., 15). Katja, however, is connected to a transnational network, including “Russians” and non-Russian co-migrants; she prefers “ethnic”, i.e. non-German, clubs for meeting her friends. From a German outsider’s perspective, such orientation is widely considered an obstacle or even a wilful refusal of integration. Similar critique is directed at migrants who continue to make use of their non-German languages, engage in political or religious issues of their home-countries, read and watch non-German media, travel back home more regularly or even commute between the countries on transnational pathways. All these practices seem to confront the German idea of integration that expects people to settle in and stick exclusively to their new, German home.

Immigrants live in Germany, but also inhabit worlds of their own which are not confined to Germany. This notion seems to provoke deep anxieties in the German public. In an influential lead of the German journal Der Spiegel (4.3.2002), immigrants were accused to act against integration and establish “parallel societies” apart from the German mainstream. These “opaque”, uncontrollable communities based on other rules and strange customs are, then, considered potential refuges for criminals, terrorists and drug dealers. Behind such anxieties, however, lurks the ideal of the imagined community: the national home designed after the format of the small, face-to-
face world of the village. When it comes to culture, globalisation is widely understood as a threat to apparently solid common roots and identities. Yet, the home without globalisation, as it is invoked in such imagination, is rendered fictional by everyday reality.

In fact, Katja and her peers do live partly in "parallel societies" – if that means that their life-worlds are not only located in Germany and not only shared with Germans. Nevertheless, such life-worlds obviously belong to and shape contemporary social and cultural realities in Germany. Most of Katja's peers come from immigrant families as well. They have either immigrated with their parents or were already born in Germany. Katja feels at home in the Gallus quarter although she liked Höchst more, another part of Frankfurt, where she used to live before: There, she says, are more of the Yugoslav and Russian hang-outs where she likes to go to meet her friends. Both quarters, Gallus and Höchst, are former workers' neighbourhoods still telling of the Fordist past of industrialisation and now above average inhabited by immigrants. Here, Katja's experience of being an immigrant is quite common. In her everyday context, it is not felt so much that elsewhere the “native Germans” claim majority rights. From Katja’s perspective, her classmate Anika is the exception to the rule: Anika was born in Germany as a German. In the multi-ethnic classroom, Anika, the native German, represents a minority. Many German parents prefer to send their children to other, less ethnically mixed schools outside the Gallus neighbourhood. From a German perspective, Katja’s school is stigmatised as being part of a multicultural “ghetto”; a position with low expectations for good education and social advancement. Anika’s mother tends to intervene whenever she thinks that her daughter gets caught up in some apparently ethnic discrimination. Anika’s classmates, in turn, strike back. When conflicts arise it may well be that Anika is named “potato”.

Whenever it comes to defining oneself against others, nationalities are an important category. But the migrant youth tends to meet again on the grounds of a common experience of immigration despite of different countries of origin. The youngsters may, for example, talk about who is going where to visit his family during the holidays. Katja has been in Usbekistan. She was happy to see her grandfather there. Still, she now disapproves of the Usbekian village life since she has come to appreciate the many more possibilities to move about in metropolitan Frankfurt. The prospects of Usbekian youth seemed depressing to her. Up to now, Katja does not think of returning to that Usbekistan. She locates her future in Germany: After taking her intermediate school certificate she wants to become a professional receptionist.

Like Katja, many others are connected to social relations outside Germany. They may travel along these lines physically or by using the manifold means of communication, and sometimes in their imagination only. All of them deal with their own migrant history and with the places from which they or their parents have left. It is here, in this Germany inhabited by many others with similar experiences of the world that Katja feels at home.

A recent study (Straßburger 2001) explored the current state of “integration” in Frankfurt. Integration was, again, defined as “cultural and social rapprochement between immigrants and native Germans” (ibid., 15). From that perspective, it seemed that the Gallus quarter is quite an integrative place: Here, the study found advanced progress in “social integration”, meaning that a considerable part of the immigrant population “participates in the social networks of the native citizens” (ibid., 25). These results, however, do not reflect Katja’s everyday life: Native Germans do not play any major role in her social networks and those of her parents and peers. Rather, Katja is integrated in one of those microcosms of the immigration society that have become typical for urban life in Germany. Such integration may be called “self-integration”, to use a term of cultural scientist Mark Terkessidis: In Germany, migrants have to create own strategies to find themselves a social place in the society.

The German ideal of integration construes two manifest groups that are deemed to interact in terms of an “intercultural communication”: resident Germans on the one hand, and non-German immigrants on the other. The diverse
projects of self-integration, however, do not address Germans as interactive partners in the first place. Rather, they create forms of intercultural communication between migrants of the same as well as of different nationalities. Focussing, as it does, on only one of the many transnational intersections, the German perspective dismisses and renders invisible these other intercultural dynamics and their contributions to the German cultural landscape.

Katja’s life-world confronts this national model of a two-way integration between Germans and non-Germans. She has come to Germany claiming the special status of ethnic German immigrants (Aussiedler) that is only granted to members of the German minorities in countries of the former “Communist Eastern Bloc”⁴. According to that immigration policy, Katja and her parents are Germans with full citizenship rights and German passports. However, Katja counts herself among the “Russians” in Germany, in her eyes she is a migrant like most of the others around her. Many of her classmates are born in Germany, but still considered “Turks” or “Yugoslavs” from a German perspective. And yet, they may also think of themselves in the same terms, although they may, at the same time, make use of the new immigration law and become German citizens by passport. Here, the apparently clear categories of non-German immigrants and resident Germans become blurred. On the one hand, migrants are also to be found on the side of the Germans: among them ethnic German immigrants, naturalised foreigners, and mobile native Germans who spend much of their professional or leisure time beyond the borders of the nation-state. Immigrants, on the other hand, may be living in Germany in the second or third generation. They are a stable component of German society to which they contribute in many ways, be they students, employees, employers, politicians or artists.

Comparatively, the number of “sedentary” Germans is decreasing – those Germans that still serve as the ideal of the national integration model. Less people than ever, though, will spend their whole life in the place in which they were born once. Transnational mobility has become quite a common feature of professional careers in a globalising economy. In Frankfurt as elsewhere, multinational companies organise the global exchange of high-skilled migrants: On their way up the career ladder, German professionals move and work abroad, while foreign specialists render the local workplaces international (see Hintze, Mann & Schüler 2003). Another entry to a transnational existence is provided by tourism: As many other northern Europeans, Germans increasingly tend to establish second homes (see King, Warnes & Williams 2000; O’Reilly 2000; Römhild 2002; Waldren 1996) and family relations through marriage (Waldren 1998; Welz 1997) in the Mediterranean south.

However, not only migrants experience the transnationalisation of their lives. Increasingly, the world draws near also to those locals who do not move themselves. Generally, it enters local life-worlds by way of media and communication technology. More specifically, workplaces tend to transnationalise not only by way of an internationalisation of local staffs, but also by way of an enlargement of workspaces due to the globalisation of information, communication and economic relations. One such workplace at an international advertisement company has been studied ethnographically in the Frankfurt project (see Hintze, Mann & Schüler 2003). Here, the local marketing of global brands as well as the global marketing of local products require transnational know-how of diverse consumer cultures. Youth and leisure cultures, in general, are central resources for transnationalising local life-worlds. In Frankfurt, the Salsa disco has been one of our examples (see Papadopoulos 2003). Not only in terms of music and dancing, Salsa has become one of the major global popular cultures for aficionados/as from all over the world. In Frankfurt, Latinos/as, Germans and semi-Germans meet and identify on this ground, thus negotiating, practising and inventing Salsa culture on German dance-floors.

All these processes transcend and counteract the common ideal of an “integrated” society confined to a national territory. Rather, the migration of people and cultures is but one factor of the disintegration experienced by late modern societies in general, and it is one of the
major resources for the current globalisation of German culture at large.

Transnationalising the National Container Model

Ideally, nation-states are imagined as stable entities confined to a physical territory inhabited by a socially and culturally coherent resident population. This idea rests on the notion of states and societies as being territorial “containers” each keeping hold of its people and its culture (see Pries 1997; Vertovec 2001: 5). From this perspective, movements across national borders come as a threat to that apparently stable order. Sedentarism is the ideal of the container model, while mobility is considered the exception to the rule: an irregular state that has to be overcome in order to get back to normality. In that logic, migration has to be either a temporary project with fixed dates of arrival and return or an irreversible one-way travel from one container to the other, thus keeping the destabilising effects of mobility to a minimum. The main efforts of the nation-state vis-à-vis migration focus on effectively controlling mobility across its borders. These efforts especially include to fix on the national ground those mobile subjects who have managed to pass the border check points.

Migration, however, challenges the “nation-state-as-container” model in that it acts against its geopolitical effectiveness. The history of the “guest-workers” (Gastarbeiter) in Germany is but one example for the fact that projects of migration cannot be fully controlled by nation-states. Initially, the German system of “guest-work” based on the expectation that projects of migrant workers would return back home after having their work done. But most of them decided to stay in Germany. Then, it was expected that those who stay would settle and integrate exclusively in their new German home. But also this expectation was not met in the desired way: The first generation of labour migrants did not break off the connections to their countries of origin in the Mediterranean. Rather, they kept contact with their families and, furthermore, continued to participate in local social and economic relations also from the distance of their migrant homes in Germany (see Giordano 1984). While the logic of the nation-state considers such transnational networking as irrational, disloyal and disintegrative, it proves to be a rational practice, even a proper survival strategy, from the perspective of migrants facing unstable, discriminating conditions of work and existence in the “host-countries” (see Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton Blanc 1997). For the German labour migrants, this holds especially true: For the long time of their being in Germany, they and their children were, officially, still identified as “guests” whose permits of residence depended on the decision of their “hosts”. Only in 2002, Germany belatedly accepted its factual status as an immigration society and discussed an immigration law that initiates first steps to facilitate applications for permanent residence and naturalisation for at least some of the migrant population.

However, the pan-European relations created by migrant networks across the national borders have widely remained invisible and, as such, unacknowledged. Beatrice Ploch (2000) reports on such relational practice in Cariati, a town in the Italian south. Cariati is connected to Germany by its emigrants and their participation in both places. Every year, at least once during the summer holidays, the migrants return to their hometown, visit their families and bring along money and ideas from Germany. Many of the newly built houses and the local construction sites are witnesses of their active presence in Cariati although being away most of the year. In turn, local feasts and other main events are co-ordinated with the migrants’ travel schedules in order to provide for their participation. The temporary returnees do not, as it is often maintained, enter the local scene as estranged “tourists”, but rather as fully engaged actors in the local public. Their being estranged from the local Italian culture due to their experience in Germany must, in turn, be considered a specific transnational cultural knowledge that challenges local discourses and practices. My own research in the south of Crete (Römhild 2000) provides another example of the migrants’ contributions to local life and development. Here, the coastal villages suffered from economic poverty thus forcing their
inhabitants to emigrate. Today, the same places are favourite destinations of a more sophisticated alternative tourism. This development would practically not have been possible without the migrants who invested in these projects both economically and conceptually. As elsewhere in the Mediterranean, part-time and permanent return migrants play a major role in creating “authentic” scenarios for cultural tourists (see Boissevain 1996), thus making use of their transnational cultural competence in terms of a “reflexive traditionalism” (Welz 2000).

These and other projects of transnational migration have contributed to the development of “multiple modernities” (ibid.) in the European “periphery”. Furthermore, the traffic of people, goods and ideas across the north–south-divide has fostered a “Europeanisation from below” which creates imaginary landscapes and topographies rather different from those designed at the drawing pins of the European Union (see Römhild 2000). International migration is always a transnational project as well: It connects societies and cultures, thus rendering permeable the nation-state “containers” for the travelling of people, things and ideas.

The idea of return accompanies migrants on their routes although it may not be – at least not fully – realised. As an option, however, it creates imaginations and unconventional practices of a transnational social and cultural participation. Since migration is a multi-generational project, the experience of transnational relations and transnational households is not restricted to the first generation of immigrants. Very often, the children of the former “guest-workers” have been raised in Germany and in their parents’ country of origin, they have been to school here and there. Thus, also the second generation has, for the most, acquired first-hand knowledge of more than one society and cultural cosmos. And also they have created therefrom their own ways of positioning and identifying themselves in transnational social spaces.

According to the logic of the nation-state, however, such inhabiting of more than one home is a critical, even pathological exception to the rule. It is considered a tense state requiring a resolving decision. Not incidentally, migrants and especially their children were, for a long time, believed to suffer from a fundamental identity crisis resulting from their shift from one culture to the other. Migrants, it was held, carry with them their “original” culture as a relic of that shift; the “baggage” (Vertovec 1996, 51) representing those primordial cultural roots which contrast to the cultural environment in Germany and, thus, produce feelings of estrangement and cultural conflict. According to the container model, culture is essentially relative to its territorial origin. Thus, alien cultural baggage must be considered problematic because of its apparent incompatibility with the “host culture”. It has to be either “erased” by way of assimilation or, more moderately, toned down by rendering it an appropriate contribution to the more folkloristic fabrics of multiculture. Not only assimilatory but also multicultural concepts of integration reproduce the nation-state-as-container model when they insist on the acknowledgement of common “core values” and “shared cultural meanings” (see Vertovec 2001: 9), thus reconstructing the imaginary of a national community spanning cultural differences.

As long as the physical shift from one society to the other is not complemented and finalised by an appropriate cultural shift, migrants were believed to have not really arrived in Germany. The common image of migrants as being torn between two cultural worlds and being stuck in a state of “in-between-ness” resulted from that notion (see Soysal 1999). Whole sectors of social work and intercultural education dedicated themselves to help migrants out of that apparently pathologic state by attempting to provide them with a new sense of belonging and new cultural roots in Germany. Behind such endeavour, however, lurks the actual cultural misunderstanding: It is the illusion of the sedentary that one needs to settle in one territory and one culture in order to find a final answer to the question of identity.

Sites of Cultural Globalisation

“We are Frankfurt Turks” is the programmatic title of an ethnographic study by Sven Sauter (2000). The statement is used by second generation migrants in order to describe their
self-positioning in a transnational cultural space which has no name in the language of integration. The pathway to that positioning leads through critical examinations of both the conditions of migrant life in Germany and the cultural world of the parents. As in the process of adolescence in general, “origin” and “belonging” are the main categories of that examination. Consequently, the Frankfurt Turks – as well as other “German Turks” – develop their own understanding of being Turkish: one that does not recall the rural heritage of their parents (as the first generation of “guest-workers” has often come from economically marginal areas of the Mediterranean) but rather expresses a self-designed marker of difference vis-à-vis the might of “Germanness” in this society. Frankfurt is the place, which requires or, also: enables that creative negotiation of origins and belongings. Being a Frankfurt Turk is a collective project involving many others with similar experiences. And it is not as much an “ethnic” project as it is lived and expressed within the wider context of contemporary German youth culture.

Such ways to identify with the city are common practice in all urban centres of migration. In Germany, they apply as much to Berlin as to Stuttgart, Munich or Offenbach. For Frankfurt, Gaby Straßburger (2001) has surveyed quantitative data: Two thirds of the young migrants asked in the study consider themselves Frankfurters, and about half of the respondents – some of them equally – feel attached to their parents’ countries of origin. Only one third, however, label themselves German. Does this mean, as it is suggested in the study’s report, that the “majority of the respondents are bounded to the German host society” (ibid., 25)? Is the city the lowest common denominator, enabling integration into German life – if not on national, then on local grounds at least? The Frankfurt Turks speak against this interpretation: Their Frankfurt is not German; it is not the city as part of the national republic they connect to, but rather the potentially transnational, cosmopolitan metropolis that provides the social and the cultural space for projects like theirs. While the German state seems to be still attuned to restricting itself to a national self-definition, its cities, at least, are about to turn into global cities not only in economic but also in cultural terms.

Migration produces cultural globalisation. Locally, that translates to cultural pluralisation. The global connects to the local in diverse ways, thus fostering rather than levelling out the proliferation of cultures and differences (see Hannerz, e.g., 1996). Ayse Caglar (2001) and Levent Soysal (1999) present some views onto German scenarios of cultural globalisation in their respective studies on German-Turkish youth culture in Berlin. Here, German-Turkish Hip-Hop and Rap represent only the most spectacular developments that are, meanwhile, also acknowledged as part of the musical avant-garde by a mainstream German audience. The hip-hoppers, however, create their own connections to an Afro-American youth culture. Its cultural expressions are appropriated to and merged with local codes and styles. Band names like “White Nigger Posse” represent these imagined connections and express the experience of the fans to be the “blacks of Germany”. Berlin’s Kreuzberg and New York’s Brooklyn become virtual neighbours in a global cultural relationship. In the Frankfurt club scene, the young German-Turk known by his artist name “Tolga” illustrates still other musical ways to connect to the world (see Akkaya & Tews 2003). Tolga has come to perform Reggae after having been inclined to Hip-Hop before. Today, he creates his original compositions in a global network of Jamaican, north-American, German and Turkish musicians. The records are produced in both Germany and Jamaica, and in both places Tolga has become popular among the respective local fans of transnational Reggae music. Tolga connects to Jamaica on biographical grounds: There, he experiences invisible links between the colonial history of the Caribbean island and his own history – that of the Turkish labour migrants in Germany. His music draws on and expresses these links, thus translating and mixing different cultural “roots” to one imaginary musical source. World connections such as this one rely on transnational imagination providing for the creative recombination of distant origins and experiences in new cultural spaces.

Today, migrants, especially of the second
generation, increasingly make themselves heard in the German public where they engage in the political discourse with own positions. Their spokespersons are musicians, film directors or writers such as Feridun Zaimoglu who has rendered presentable the “kanak sprak” – a poetic version of migrant idioms (see, e.g., Zaimoglu 1995) – by his essays addressed to the bourgeois mainstream readers of German newspapers and weeklies like Die Zeit. Politically, the network “Kanak Attak” which serves as a platform for intellectual and grass-root migrant voices gains considerable attention for its provocative performances and interventions. Expressions of migrant opposition, however, are “aestheticised” and toned down by the interests of mainstream consumers. The language and the culture of the “ghetto kids” have, therefore, long passed the barriers of the ghetto on their way to enter and contribute to popular German culture.

While these more spectacular expressions of hybrid alterity are widely acknowledged, they may turn the perspective away from other, still invisible forms of cultural globalisation in Germany. Ayse Caglar (2001) contrasts the Berlin Hip-Hop scene with other, less known sites of German-Turkish culture: Cafés and clubs emerging right in the expensive spaces of the central city, thus positioning themselves within the urban mainstream rather than in the marginal outskirts of the migrant-dominated neighbourhoods. The clients of these places, however, are German Turks, many of them business people or other middle-class professionals who prefer to listen to Turk Pop as it is played as well in similar places in Istanbul or Ankara. The stylish ambience of these locations does not quote the ghetto, nor does it recall arabesque folklore. Rather, it re-imagines Turkey as an urban, modern, and European place in the world. Clubs like that exist in other cities as well, but the German public rarely notices them. The German “multiculture”, instead, produces and prefers other paradigmatic locations: e.g., that of the proverbial Greek around the corner staging Souvlaki, Sirtaki, Bouzouki and other requisites of tourist imagination. Such places dedicated to the taste of the established multiculturalism attract German, but rarely Greek customers. Young Frankfurt Greeks disapprove of this invented nostalgia. They prefer other places resembling Saloniki or even New York-style urban Greekness rather than the prototype of a Mediterranean village.

Beyond Im-migration: The Perspective of a Transnational Germany

It is in such locations and social networks that the transnationalisation and the cultural globalisation of Germany take place. There are a lot more of these – still waiting to be acknowledged as a constituting part of contemporary German cultural dynamics. Many of these practices are rendered invisible because of their irregular and “illegal” status: among these the circular migration of eastern European non-EU-citizens who are forced to transcend the borders of “Fortress Europe” by way of tourist visa or au-pair-contracts (see Hess & Lenz 2001; Cyrus 2000). Other practices, however, are still as invisible although they unfold on legal grounds. Here, it is the neglect of research agendas and immigration concepts to recognise and adapt to the de-territorialising effects of migration on the German cultural dynamics at large.

In Germany, the image of the unskilled “guest-worker” with rural Mediterranean origins has dominated and shaped the common perception of immigrants for a long time. Such perception has put forth paternalist implications inscribed in the integration model: Migrants and their cultural “baggage” are considered a pre-modern, even “uncivilised” challenge to the German society which, in turn, is enabled thereby to think of itself in terms of a modern, democratic epicentre of western, European civilisation. This polar view has been re-invoked in the recent debates on “integration” fostered by the threat of the events on September 11, 2001. Migrants, again, are subsumed under the label of the “uncivilised” Other, now with the Muslim fundamentalist in the front of that image. This focus not only blanks out the factual differentiation of the migrant population that has substituted the dominant role of the former “guest-worker” by a heterogeneous spectrum of high- and low-skilled immigrants and refugees as well as the socially diverse descendants of
the labour migrants. The focus on the threatening migrant Other has also called forth new phantasmata of the omnipotent nation-state effectively controlling its borders and the population confined within them. It is an illusion, however, to believe in the success of such efforts to lock up the national “container” against the world. The experience of national as well as EU-European policies to close down the frontiers shows that all such endeavour only provokes the invention of new strategies to overcome the set borders. In fact, national and European politics of separation coproduce the practices which, then, set out to cancel their effects (see Rogers 2000). And it is even more difficult to control ideas that travel along with people but also on their own via communication channels. The confrontation with a globalised terrorism may rather be seen as but one, though extreme, experience of the irreversible entanglement of western societies with the contradictions and conflicts of a global hegemony.

Transnational anthropology has contributed to revise the vision of the controllable immigrant who ends up as an immobile wanderer fixed onto new national grounds. Still, the new image of transnational mobility as a stable project in its own right can be misleading when it is restricted to the migrants’ life-worlds only. Here, the predominant focus of transnational research on migration studies comes as a problem since it tends to create the impression that it is only the migrants who move while the societies involved remain untouched by that mobility in their midst and across them. Such impression, however, only reenforces the notion of the container state that provides for the set order of those settled within. From an enlarged perspective, migration is only one, though major force of mobilising the cultural and social fabrics of the societies at large. It seems, thus, necessary to grasp of migration as being a dependent as well as an influential part of more general processes of transnationalisation that all contribute to deterritorialising local life-worlds whether in economical, political or cultural terms. This also entails that migrants need to be counted among the regular personnel of the social formations under study. A rather exclusive focus on migrant networks and diasporas, instead, contributes to the common construction of migrants as being the exceptional mobile Others to the regular, sedentary residents of the nation-states.

The transnational cultures in which migrants engage unfold on deterritorialised grounds, meaning that they draw on multi-local and even imaginary sources and relations. At the same time, however, they localise on the social grounds of the nation-states, thus contributing to their cultural pluralisation and globalisation. Being localised in the social fabrics of German culture at large, transnational migrant cultures are not confined to the limits of what multiculturalism grasps as the diverse microcontainers of “ethnic communities”. Rather, they tend to become the cultural stuff that is communicated and made use of for the invention of new “communities of ‘taste’, shared beliefs, or economic interests” (Kennedy & Roudometof 2001: 22). World cities, with their high numbers of diverse personnel from all over the globe, are especially predestined to become transnational “market-places” (see Hannerz 1996, 127 ff.) in that they facilitate the availability of cultural material from other locales for the “improper” use of mixing and matching, thus transforming the “authentic” into the “creolised” or “hybrid” (see Römhild 2002).

While some of that cultural material may be re-cycled and commodified in line with the interests of popular culture, other such material appears to be less appropriate to the demands of the market, thus remaining in the realm of the invisible practices of migrant and exile communities (see Akkaya & Tews 2003). Cultural globalisation is, thus, a selective and hierarchical process of featuring some at the expense of other cultural connections to the world. Transnational cultural brokers or “expressive specialists” (see Hannerz 1996, 130) play a crucial role in communicating, blending and commodifying local cultures of diverse origins for the cultural market-place of the global city. Such expressive specialists may contribute to the emergence of transnational cultures from very diverse backgrounds: They include, e.g., the German director Wim Wenders whose film “Buena Vista Social Club” has laid the ground for the current German “salsamania”,...
or Feridun Zaimoglu whose “Kanak Sprak” has spread out into German and semi-German inventions of kanak comedy and music as well as into everyday idioms, or spiritual leaders who provide for the transnational communication of religious knowledge into the German esoteric landscape or localise transnational religions such as Islam or Buddhism for the use of migrant believers and German converts (see, e.g., Hoffmann 1997).

Transnational cultures localise in synagogues, meditation centres and mosques, in classrooms and workplaces, in organisations and initiatives, in clubs and bars. Here, the separation between migrant and non-migrant actors becomes blurred. At the workplace, transnational professional cultures (e.g., in the IT- or advertising business) emerge which create and draw on their own “local” knowledge transcending the national codes and languages of their personnel. In political networks, not only migrants engage for the sake of their home countries but also Germans connect with non-Germans across national borders in long-distance issues movements such as NGOs (see Blank 2003). And finally, the sites of youth and leisure culture provide many possibilities to link up to transnational cultures on local grounds, be it in the Salsa disco or in the informal networks of neighbourhoods and peer-groups.

Still, it would be misleading to think that cultural globalisation resembles the common notion of “intercultural communication” as taking place in ethnically mixed settings providing for a face-to-face understanding of “Otherness”. Rather, much of the impact of transnational migration on the German cultural landscape takes more indirect, informal routes, which shape the everyday experience of all residents without necessarily being localised in personal relationships. The emergence of transnational “socioscapes” (see Albrow 1997) links people to different parts of the world, thus creating virtual neighbourhoods on a global scale, while local neighbours inhabiting diverse socioscapes may be, literally, worlds apart from each other. The transnationalisation of life-worlds, thus, does not diminish but rather proliferates diversity and anonymity in local relationships. And, apart from a common vision of “multicultural” harmony, also apparently distant conflicts enter the local on transnational pathways.

Processes of transnationalisation and cultural globalisation challenge the nation-state’s claim to represent the only social frame-work and the only source of belonging for its citizens. With respect to migrants, dual citizenship is one suggestion discussed as a possibility to appropriate their legal status to their transnational lives and identities (see Vertovec 2001: 12 pp.). Since migrants, however, are not only inclined to co-connect to their original homelands but, furthermore, develop multiple and even imaginary transnational allegiances it may be more adequate to think of “flexible” (Ong 1999) or “post-national” (Soysal 1994) notions of citizenship. Still, a similar question can also be posed with respect to the “native” residents of nation-states: In what way does their social framework and their sources of belonging change due to the transnationalisation of their national homes? The request for “integration”, originally meant to address migrants only, may turn out to challenge the natives as well: How are they prepared to adapt to and integrate in the changing, heterogeneous and contradictory world around them?

Notes

1 The project “In-between spaces – diagonal connections. Transnational cultures in the Frankfurt area” was part of the “Learning by researching” programme at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology. Under my direction, 16 student researchers went out to study eight fields, which covered as diverse transnational settings as a multi-ethnic peer-group or the urban Salsa scene, the globalised workspaces of an international advertisement company or the ideas and strategies of the constructors (architects, city planners, investors) of Global City Frankfurt. Fieldwork was conducted in summer and autumn 2001. The results of the project are to be published in 2003 in the Institute’s series “Kulturanthropologie Notizen”.

2 For a critical view on German migration studies from a transnational perspective, see Pries 1997.

3 See Terkessidis’ statement in the German daily taz, 12.1.2001.

4 For more details on this specific immigration policy, see, e.g., Römhild 1998; 1995; 1994.
References


Hofmann, Gabriele 1997: Muslimin werden. Frauen in Deutschland konvertieren zum Islam. Frankfurt a.M.


In popular discourse, it is usually assumed that capitalism is an economic system based on rational principles, and as such, personal relationships fade in significance relative to skills, ingenuity and market demand. Similarly, a classic distinction in economic anthropology contrasts economic systems based on reciprocity that are characteristic of uncentralized societies and market-based economies in centralized societies.1 Whereas reciprocity involves personalized exchanges that are often categorized as gifts, market economies involve impersonal exchanges of commodities (Gregory 1982). The relationship between giver and receiver is central in the former, while bonds between exchange partners in market economies (a cashier and a customer at Wal-Mart, for instance) end as soon as money is exchanged for the items purchased. Nevertheless, ethnographic studies that view exchange patterns “on the ground,” from the perspective of individuals living and working within such systems, usually reveal that reciprocity among social connections continues to function within market economies (Basch et al. 1994; Day 1982; di Leonardo 1984; Halperin 1990; Lomnitz 1977; Rapp 1978; Singerman 1995; Stack 1974; Yanagisako 1977). As Lomnitz contends:

“The enduring importance of social connections and influence peddling in societies as different as Mexico, the US and the Soviet Union attests to the fact that reciprocity as an economic force is today very much alive. Moreover, the practice of reciprocity is found alongside market exchange in all strata of urban society, from the very poor to the very rich” (1977:4).

I examine these processes in a very particular context – in postcommunist Poland as state socialist structures were replaced by market-based structures throughout the 1990s. My purpose is fourfold – first to examine individuals’ “ways of using” networks within the context of larger institutional structures. To do so, I focus on everyday exchanges of gifts, favors, and recommendations, and identify the patterns that emerge in a variety of social actors’ choices. Second, I consider the continuities and changes in the tactics individuals use as market capi-
talism replaces state socialism. In particular, I examine the varied tactics of urban and rural residents that reflect their relative access to opportunity within the emerging market economy. Third, I show that networks are likely to remain integral to economic exchanges in that they provide a means of access to opportunities, and they tend to provide some guarantee of trustworthiness between exchange partners. Thus, I explore the instrumental, affective, and ethical dimensions of network-based exchanges. Finally, I consider how continued reliance on social networks is shaping post-communist Polish society, and in particular, contributes to material and social inequalities in Poland.

Consequently, the data presented here contribute to the understanding of a number of theoretical issues. First, the transition from state socialism to capitalism in Eastern and Central Europe provides a vivid context in which to view the ways that people adapt to social change. I view institutional reforms from the perspective of everyday lives: how Poles adapt long-standing cultural patterns to new circumstances, and how they reshape these patterns so that new meanings emerge. Second, I show that networks of intimates and reciprocal exchange are often not displaced by market economies in state societies, but rather remain an integral component of these centralized structures. Third, I consider ways of using social connections within market economies. In particular, I view the ways in which manipulation of social networks becomes a means by which social inequality is produced and reproduced in market economies. Although manipulation of social networks remains the primary means by which groups on the margins, in this case the rural underemployed, gain entrance into the market economy, people who are “better connected” tend to gain greater profit from their connections, thus contributing to an increase in income disparities (Boissevain 1974; Lomnitz 1977; Singerman 1995; Watson 1994). I focus on what Michel de Certeau calls “tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong” (1984:xvii). Tactics are not institutional, conventional, or “proper.” Nor are they intellectualized ideas about appropriate courses of action. Rather, they are the spontaneous actions taken by those without recourse to official avenues of power. Tactics involve the weighing of a whole range of factors as they come together in a given moment. Reciprocity among social networks encompasses a variety of tactics that help to provide security and some degree of personal control in unsure circumstances. Thus, social networks comprise an important social arena for the exercise of personal agency.

My study adds to a growing body of scholarship that views state and even global political and economic structures as they shape and are shaped by “on the ground” experiences of individual citizens. Studies based on fieldwork conducted in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union before 1989 include Borneman (1992), Hann (1985), Haraszti (1978), Ries (1997), and Wedel (1986); studies based on more recent fieldwork include Berdahl (1999), Berdahl et al. (2000), Ledeneva (1998), and Pesman (2000). The life stories I describe here are based primarily on fieldwork conducted during the summers of 1999 and 2000 in the form of interviews and informal discussions with Poles who were in high school during my original fieldwork in 1992–93, and who were in their mid-twenties and just beginning their working lives in 1999 and 2000. At this age, they were particularly in need of the things that networks help people acquire: employment, education, and housing. Because of my focus on everyday practices, I also documented the manipulations of networks that I observed, even if the subjects of these exchanges were individuals outside of my primary research group. These observations suggest that my claim about the continued significance of networks applies to more than the generation at the center of my study. I work with urban residents of the thriving cultural and academic center of Krakow, and rural residents from the economically depressed southeastern region of the Bieszczady Mountains. As Pine (1995) points out, differences in regional histories and local economies contribute to varied responses to socialism and post-socialism in Poland. My fieldwork in two regions allowed me to witness the sharp distinction between urban and rural residents’ access to
educational and employment opportunities, whether by means of formal pathways or through social networks.

A number of studies have documented the significance of social networks in state socialist countries (see Gilliland [1986] on Yugoslavia; Ledeneva [1998] on Russia; Lampland [1995] on Hungary; Platz [1999] on Armenia; Sampson [1985–86] for an overview of the informal sector in Eastern Europe; and Wedel [1986, 1990] on Poland). They have tended to attribute dependence on social networks to specific features of state socialism, such as the ineffectiveness of the distribution system that made it necessary for individuals to gain access to scarce goods through informal means (see also Haraszti 1978). Watson stresses that particularistic relations posed an important challenge to state hegemony “where a friend of a friend might offer a better chance of getting what was needed than reliance on the channels of central distribution” (1994:4). Janine Wedel’s (1986) study of Poland describes such innovative schemes as line committees, in which people who wanted consumer items that were only sporadically available, such as refrigerators, organized their own waiting lists for them. Everyone on the list was required to wait in line for specified periods. The items would be sold to the people who were next on the list, regardless of who was on line when the delivery actually came. This tactic, controlled by consumers themselves, was a way of introducing a little more security during a period in which it was never known when deliveries would come, or how much would be delivered. Wedel also explains how “favors” were periodically exchanged among acquaintances – someone who worked in a factory might “acquire” some left over paint and then sell it or give it to an acquaintance. Later, he might ask that acquaintance if she could help him acquire a rug, or imported food, or medical advice.

My study shows that Poles continue to depend on connections despite the fall of communism and the introduction of market driven forces. On numerous occasions, when I asked whether networks continue to be important in Poland, I was told “wszystko zale¿e od znajomoœci” (everything depends on connections). Respondents elaborated with stories about such varied practices as arranging their children’s enrollment in good schools, sharing answers on exams, recommending friends for jobs, getting gifts from relatives abroad, helping friends establish themselves abroad, sharing childcare duties with family members, getting good hospital care, and taking over the rights to cooperative apartments from grandparents. These stories reveal that networks are not used for access to scarce goods nearly as often as they were under state socialism, but they continue to be used to gain access to scarce opportunities. This is especially true for services that were formerly provided by the state, such as employment and medical care.

Under state socialism, the state was the primary employer and essentially guaranteed employment for all citizens. Indeed, the full employment policy together with the inefficiencies of the distribution system made it illegal to be unemployed. In effect, industries operated with a surplus of labor to insure rapid production when supplies were available, but this also meant that employees sat idle when critical supplies were lacking (see, for example Verdery 1996). Many spent their free time while at work making up for the failures of the system; while a coworker covered for them, they went shopping, or they used materials and equipment from their place of employment to do freelance jobs. Many viewed their official jobs as the place where they gained access to materials and connections that they could use to their advantage in the unofficial economy. By contrast, efforts to establish a self-regulating market economy in the early 1990s led to the closing or restructuring of unprofitable businesses, and the reintroduction of unemployment in Poland for the first time in forty years. At the heart of reforms was a radical shift in the ideology that governed the state’s responsibility to its citizens. No longer was the state the paternal caregiver – indeed, the heavy-handed policies of the state socialist system were perceived to have crippled the Polish economy. Instead, trust was placed in the free market, and unemployment tended to be regarded as an unfortunate, but necessary, price to pay.

Surveys conducted by the Polish Center for
Public Opinion Research (CBOS) reveal that already by the early 1990s, youths accepted that employment should not be guaranteed, but they also expressed greater concern about unemployment than any other social problem (Czarnocka et al. 1992). Similarly, while still in school, most of my respondents said they worry about unemployment. Although for many, their concerns were not borne out by their or their parents’ experiences, the registered unemployed increased from 11% to 16% of the working population between 1991 and 1993, with percentages considerably higher in rural areas. Employment rates decreased to less than 10% by 1997, but by 2000 they were back up around 14%, and continued to climb to 18% in 2002. Generally, only 5% of urban residents collect unemployment compensation, in contrast to 20 or more percent in rural areas. These percentages are only rough indicators of actual unemployment rates, however, because they measure the registered unemployed. On one hand, the percentages are artificially high because many find unofficial intermittent or seasonal work. On the other, the figures fail to include the chronically unemployed, the thousands who collect disability pensions from the state, women who have stepped out of a job market that increasingly favors men, and people who are officially categorized as farmers even though they can not earn enough from their farming to live. Thus, it was in this climate of concern about employment that Poles turned to their social connections for help acquiring the information, skills, and training needed to find or maintain jobs within the market economy.

The movement toward a more monetized and commoditized economy, I contend, does not mean that social connections decrease in importance. Rather, particularly in the case of postsocialist economies, efforts that were formerly made to relieve the problems of distribution endemic to state socialism have been replaced by efforts to gain access to sources of reliable income such as a good job. It is through personal social connections that Poles turned to their social connections for help acquiring the information, skills, and training needed to find or maintain jobs within the market economy.

The Graduation Trip

While in the Bieszczady Mountains in 2000, I accepted Pani Kasia’s invitation to take a drive with her as a welcome break from my writing. By good fortune, the drive gave me the opportunity to observe some of the exchange patterns that I was seeking to make sense of in my field notes. Pani Kasia explained that she was taking some coworkers to pick up their high school equivalency diplomas. These women work at a high school in the small town of Lesko, the locus of my ethnographic research since 1992. When we met after lunch, Magda and Ewa were visibly excited. They were dressed in skirts, jackets, and high heels, and their hair was specially done up for the occasion. Pani Kasia wore a fancy outfit herself. She was picking up her sister’s diploma, she explained to me, and there was going to be a small graduation ceremony. It became even clearer that I had stumbled into a special event when, as we departed, the principal of the school where the women work stopped us to offer his congratulations and to make sure the graduates got flowers for the principal of the school that was issuing their diplomas. Magda assured him that we were on our way to the florist, and that she already had a big box of Bon Ami chocolates, a bottle of Zuborówka vodka (an herb flavored Polish specialty), and a carton of apple juice (the traditional mixer for the Zuborówka).

As we drove, the ladies decided that they definitely needed flowers not only for the principal, but also for the school secretary, and two of their teachers. After a little debate, they agreed to give a gift to their wychowawcza (like an advisor or home room teacher), even though...
they had never met him. In the end they got six bouquets, including an extra one for anyone they might be forgetting. While the florist arranged the flowers with colorful ribbons and shiny paper, Ewa bought five more large boxes of chocolates at a nearby shop. All this occurred in an exuberant flurry of activity, their gifts becoming more and more extravagant as they talked. In total, the three of them spent close to three hundred zloty ($75) on gifts, roughly the equivalent of one third of a monthly salary. Their generosity even extended to me (much to my embarrassment). While the elaborate bouquets were made, I admired the plants, flowers, and planters in the shop. Pani Kasia complimented some tiny carved planters, and when I agreed, she offered to buy me one. I told her it was entirely unnecessary. But Magda overheard our conversation and joined in, insisting that I choose the one I like best. I continued to refuse, but before leaving, they chose one and gave it to me. Pani Kasia said to me, “When you are back home, you will look at this and remember us.”

When we finally reached the school, it turned out that the graduation ceremony was on the following day – Pani Kasia had been told the wrong date when she had called. The principal was quite impressed by all the flowers and gifts, though, and suggested they be stored in the basement until the ceremony. Spirits remained high despite the error. Only Magda expressed some regret that she would not be able to show off her diploma to her coworkers on the following day. She joked, “they are going to think I lied about graduating, and that I just wanted to take the afternoon off.” Pani Kasia assured them that she would drive up again the next day and pick up the diplomas for them (neither Magda nor Ewa own a car).

Over the course of the afternoon, I learned that the women getting diplomas had all attended the school where Magda, Ewa, and Pani Kasia now work, but had for one reason or another failed to take their final exams (matura). Now, nearly twenty years later, they all felt the need for a high school diploma because of changes in the job market. For over a year, Magda had been working as a secretary in the principal’s office, a job that usually requires a secondary school education. Because Magda had been a trustworthy employee in the school cafeteria for a number of years, the principal asked her to take over when the former secretary was caught stealing from the students’ health insurance fund. At first, the move from cook to office worker was overwhelming for Magda, but she adjusted quickly, and has enjoyed learning how to use computers. Still, she felt as though she needed to finish her degree if she wanted to keep her job. Similarly, Ewa hoped to move from cleaning lady to a more responsible position, and Jola wanted to go to college so that she could get a job as an accountant.

Pani Kasia also told me that because of education reforms, the three women would lose the opportunity to ever earn a high school diploma unless they enrolled in a program right away. The high school they originally attended (and where Magda, Ewa, and Pani Kasia now work) does not have what is called a zaoczny program, for working people who typically attend classes one or two weekends per month, and it was not financially feasible for the school to organize a program for just three students. Thus, the women enrolled in a program at another agricultural high school that was an hour away by bus (it took just a half hour by car). Though I was not told explicitly, Pani Kasia made some comments that suggested that their boss pulled some strings to get Magda, Ewa, and Jola in the program. Also, although the ladies talked about doing some assignments for their teachers, they do not seem to have attended any classes.

The way that Magda, Ewa, and Jola got their high school diplomas reveals a functioning system of informal rules about reciprocal exchange, even in negotiations with a state institution. The women made use of a number of network-based tactics to gain access to opportunities—via gifts, favors, and recommendations. None of these tactics are new, but they are being used in new ways, to obtain the credentials that are necessary to remain viable workers in an economy where employment is no longer guaranteed by the state. Below, I describe in more detail the particular tactics used in this and related cases.
Gifts or Bribes?

One challenge for studies of exchange networks is the question of categorization. What occurs in the realm of practice rarely maps neatly onto conceptual categories, even in cases where conceptual categories are clearly differentiated. Specifically, whereas Poles make unambiguous distinctions between gifts (prezenty) and bribes (łapówki) as abstract concepts, it is much harder to draw the line between them when examining everyday situations. The graduation trip exemplifies this difficulty. Do the items given to the school officials constitute gifts or bribes?10

Hospitality is one of the few positive traits that young Poles associate with their nation (Galbraith 1997).11 People feel pressure to reciprocate favors and gifts as an essential way of expressing hospitality, marking personal relationships, and strengthening social networks. Patterns of reciprocity described in the seminal work of Marcel Mauss (1967) help to explain the processes associated with gift exchange in Poland. Mauss emphasized that the bond between exchange partners is perpetuated by a mutual obligation to repay gifts, and he recognized the economic selfinterest that underlies the maintenance of these relationships. However, as Bourdieu (1977a, 1990) points out, uncovering the underlying structure of gift exchange does not necessarily help to explain the phenomenon very well. Instead, Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of timing in gift exchanges—the delay in return is essential for establishing social relations and for determining the power dynamics of the relationships established. Another danger of studies that focus on the instrumentality of reciprocal exchange is that they all too easily disregard or underemphasize the affective and moral dimensions of gift giving. Being well connected contributes to positive self and social identities, and as such tends to be intrinsically valued. As Kipnis (1997) explains in relation to guaunxi exchanges in China, the formation of relationships is simultaneously the means and the ends of reciprocal exchange. Similarly, in her analysis of Russian blat, Ledeneva (1998) points to the “web of gratitude” that binds exchange partners together (see also Simmel 1950).

In contrast to gifts, bribes (łapówki) usually lack the positive moral, affective, social dimension, and tend to be regarded as purely instrumental.12 Such exchanges tend to be viewed as evidence of the corruption that plagued state socialism and continues within the capitalist system.13 Discourse on bribery, whether reported in the news or discussed by respondents, usually involves afery (scandals) in which wealthy or politically influential people manipulate their connections in ways that are deemed illegal. These individuals use their privileged position to gain even more money and power. Extrapolating from Bourdieu, the timing of bribes is such that instrumentality is made obvious, thus canceling out any relationship that might be formed by the exchange. Specifically, bribes typically precede the granting of service, and there is little delay between the initial exchange and the item given in return. For the Poles I know, bribery remains conceptually clear but experientially distant. They usually told me about the experiences of someone they know, or described hypothetical cases, and the few respondents who admitted to taking part in such exchanges were ambiguous about whether the exchange constituted a gift or a bribe. Similarly, while 68% of those surveyed by CBOS said they know of a friend or relative who arranged something by means of bribery, only 19–20% admitted to doing so themselves in the past four years (Falkowska 1999, 2000). In addition, over half of those who said they do not give bribes agreed with the statement, “A present from someone for services provided is only a token of their esteem and good will.”

When my respondents talked about bribes in more immediate contexts, they described efforts to gain permits, passports, or other official documentation from state officials. The flowers and chocolates that were given to the school officials during the graduation trip, by contrast, seem to fall somewhere between gifts and bribes. They were talked about as gifts, and even more significantly, their timing marked them as gifts—they followed rather than preceded the favors that were granted. However, they might be considered bribes in that they were given to people in administrative and professional positions and it is unlikely that the association
between parties will extend beyond this particular favor. For the graduates, the flowers and chocolates cancel out their obligation to school officials. Other connections are reinforced by the exchange, however. The graduates’ obligation toward Pani Kasia and their boss, the people who made the arrangements with the other school, remain part of a more longterm web of exchange that extends beyond the graduation trip. Additionally, concern shown by the graduates’ boss that gifts be brought to the graduation suggests that he felt obliged to the principal of the other school; this obligation is probably not cancelled out by the gifts, but rather might need to be reciprocated by some favor in the future. It is also important to note that the school officials bent the rules to help these women gain access to high school diplomas, something that should be attainable through clear institutional pathways. This points to a factor specific to state socialism and its legacy—all too often, the state does not provide what it claims it should. Such cases lend a kind of moral expediency to those who have to finagle to get what they need, even if it involves something that is usually prohibited, such as bribery. Exchanges such as those given by the graduates, intermediate between gifts and bribes, remain a tactic for greasing the wheels of the bureaucracy.

Another example helps to illustrate how such intermediate exchanges are used to gain better medical care. Zosia, a young woman who lives on the family farm and works in a neighboring town as a store clerk, criticized doctors and nurses for not only accepting, but also expecting bribes from patients. At the same time, she recognized that low wages are at the root of such practices, and she sympathized with the demands of nurses who were on strike at the time. Zosia had just spent a week in the hospital after falling down the stairs (she was in her eighth month of pregnancy at the time), so I asked her whether she had given any apówki to get better care. Zosia said no, of course not. But then she explained:

“I left chocolates at the hospital, but I don’t think that this is a bribe [lapówik]. The nurses were very nice to me. Maybe it’s because I know I will be in the hospital again soon, and they will respond to me differently. The girls in my hospital room said I should give the nurses something.”

Zosia called the chocolates she left behind a present, to thank the nurses for the care she received. The nurses neither demanded nor expected anything; she gave them something of her own free will. Zosia made much of this distinction, as did other respondents. Had the nurse expected or demanded something in exchange for care, it would have been viewed as a bribe, but because the giver chose what and how much to give, it is considered a gift. If, in turn, she received better care when she had her baby, it was an outgrowth of her relationship with the nurses, not a direct exchange for the chocolates. Nevertheless, Zosia’s comments also suggest that she felt some degree of obligation to give the nurses something, partly because she thought they might expect something and partly because she was advised to do so by the other women in the hospital room. In this case, the timing of gift and counter-gift is complicated by the ongoing relationship between Zosia and the nurses. Most of the nurses already know her from the store where she works. She has seen how they struggle to make ends meet, and, unbeknownst to her boss, she has allowed them to make purchases on credit until their next paychecks. In short, the chocolates were one in an ongoing series of gifts and favors between Zosia and the nurses, reflecting and perpetuating relationships of mutual obligation.

As in the above examples, gift objects are often given as an expression of thanks for non-material recommendations or favors. Although chocolate, coffee, and alcohol are no longer scarce commodities as they were under state socialism, they remain symbolic objects of exchange. This may be seen in the items Magda, Ewa, and Pani Kasia purchased on the graduation trip. Magda got a good brand of Polish vodka, and unusual imported chocolates. The other chocolates they bought were not imported, but came in large decorative boxes. Decorative packaging was also a central aspect of the bouquets they bought. Once the women decided on a price per bouquet, the florist carefully positioned the flowers, added greenery, and then tied them with colorful ribbon, the ends of which she curled and draped around
the flowers. Then, she placed the bouquet in a sheath with a clear plastic front and a reflective back, and tied it with an attractive bow made of thicker ribbon. All this attention to detail helps to mark these objects as symbols of gratitude and respect, not as commodities or bribes. The style in which the exchange is made helps to veil the instrumentality of exchanges (Bourdieu 1977a, 1990).

Before saying more about bribes, the serendipitous addition of a gift for me, the “foreign guest” on the graduation trip, warrants explanation. Although I know Magda and Ewa less well, Pani Kasia has been a valuable friend and helper since my first trip to Lesko in 1992, and my interactions with her have taught me much about gift exchange. Perhaps she sees me as a potential source of opportunity because I am American, but if I were to try to reduce our relationship to one of instrumentality, she would no doubt be offended. Similarly, Pani Kasia has helped me in more ways than I could enumerate, but I spend time with her because I like her. Because we define our relationship in terms of friendship, the potential for material gain or access to information remains a subtext – it is never clearly defined nor does it need to be. In fact, such reluctance to acknowledge any expectation of utility becomes a defining feature of relationships forged through gift exchange. On the occasions I have given Pani Kasia something to thank her for one thing or another, she has insisted she wants nothing from me. At the florist shop, she made clear what she hopes for in exchange for her gift – that I will think of her from time to time. Thus, she emphasized the importance of the relationship that the gift was intended to represent.

While there is no doubt that manipulation of relationships for personal gain occurs all the time, self-interest is not enough to explain what goes on in the kinds of exchanges I have described here. Other scholars have helped to account for the affective, social, and ethical dimensions of exchanges among social connections. Bourdieu states that because the return is delayed, and may not even occur, gift exchange depends upon the partners’ sense of honor and responsibility. It is key to recognize that exchanges of gifts and favors do not follow standardized rules; rather people figure out in each situation what is most appropriate based on the particular circumstances and the relationships involved. Kipnis explains:

“As both Pierre Bourdieu (1977a, 1990) and Annette Weiner (1976: 220–222) argue, resorting to “rules” as an explanation detemporalizes practice, and time is central to gift giving. The time lapse between gift and countergift defines gift giving as a social form. It is the possibility that a gift might not be reciprocated that gives the gift its moral weight. Social custom, the relationship between giver and receiver, or even the lives of the parties involved could end or change abruptly during the time lapse between gift and countergift. Consequently, gift giving produces a contingent social field rather than reproduces a static social structure and is an art rather than a science” (Kipnis 1997:58).

In sum, the obligation to give, receive, and reciprocate must be understood as a fluid process motivated by social and moral factors that often obscure the reciprocal structure of exchange. I return now to bribes, another form of exchange that fails to fit neatly into the categories of gifts or commodities. Although the dynamics of gift exchange can be difficult to uncover, bribes tend to be concealed under even deeper layers of secrecy. Nevertheless, a number of respondents made the generalization that “everyone gives łapówki.” When I followed up with the question whether they themselves have ever given a bribe, however, most claimed that they never have and never would. It seems that few call what they do bribing, but rather describe the exchanges in which they are involved as gifts. For instance, Jurek, an architect in Krakow, explained:

“I have only given one łapówka in my life – in the district office when I got approval for a project, I gave a woman cognac so that things would go faster. But I didn’t give it [to her] in the office; I went after her when she left work. She didn’t want to take it… but I think it helped. But I don’t think that is really a bribe. For me it isn’t a problem. It would be a problem if she expected me to give her something.”
Jurek described the cognac alternately as a bribe and then as not a bribe. His uncertainty illustrates the ambivalence Poles feel about these kinds of arrangements. He stressed that he gave the administrator the cognac outside of work hours and he doesn’t even know if it had any effect on the way she handled his case. He also described her reluctance to accept the cognac, which suggests she neither demanded nor expected anything special from him. Even the token separation of place and time in which the cognac was given and the permit granted insures that the exchange appears voluntary, and thus can be viewed as gift exchange rather than bribery.

To the extent that bribes were made necessary by the inefficiencies of the state socialist system, or at least were permitted in that system, it could be inferred that they would become less common with the establishment of capitalist businesses. However, on June 4, 2001, the Polish electronic newspaper, Donosy, reported that according to the World Bank, Polish firms designate up to 2.5% of their profits annually for bribes. A couple of urban respondents who work in business pointed out to me that certain types of exchanges that would in the past have been considered bribery are now becoming institutionalized as formal business transactions, especially among the most wealthy. Jurek continued his discussion of bribery as follows:

“Bribes are becoming so-called “consultation fees,” right on written agreements. You even pay taxes on them. When I worked in a firm that sold tiles, the boss told me to suggest a bribe, that is he didn’t call them bribes, now they are called “consultation fees.” He suggested 2–3% from the client, for placing the order. Either you write it on the agreement, or it is informal, under the table. This happens the most on the highest levels.”

The above example reflects continuities in the interpretation of state socialist and post-communist experiences perhaps even more than continuities in the practices themselves. Clearly, contractually agreed upon consultation fees bypass some of the uncertainty and moral ambiguity of incentives that are passed under the table. Nevertheless, Jurek equates them with bribes, and says that mostly the wealthy profit from them. He thus perpetuates certain assumptions dating back from state socialism that associate wealth with ill-gotten gains.

I was also told by others that bribes continue to function as they did under state socialism; goals are achieved by giving something of value to individuals in positions of power. Grzesiek, a computer repairman in Krakow, explained how he was prepared to put into motion a chain of prestations, ranging from vodka to large sums of money, in order to get an exemption from military service. Because he doesn’t know anyone of sufficiently high rank and influence, he would have to “hire” someone to deliver the “gifts” to the appropriate officials in order to get his exemption. When I asked him where he would get the money to do so, he admitted that, luckily, his mother was able to arrange for him to get a medical release from a doctor she knows. He then assured me that he really has a medical condition that would make it difficult for him to serve. Thus, his story tells more about the idea of bribery than about an actual incidence of bribery. Ewelina, a law student in Krakow, explained why she failed to get a place as a day student (which would have meant she did not have to pay tuition), “Every year a certain number of places go to the children of wealthy families who use their influence to get into the free program. I know because I saw the test results of some of my classmates, and they got in even though their scores were lower than mine.” Although Ewelina claims that this practice is very common, the journalism student I hired to transcribe my interviews told me that he thinks she exaggerated, and what she describes is actually a rare practice.

To sum up, these stories reveal a relatively clear articulation of what bribery is conceptually, but actual practices and examples are much harder to pin down. Moreover, the circumstances in which such exchanges are made are also changing as the market economy takes hold in Poland. Leaving aside the gray areas, bribes are things that other people give. And certainly nobody admits to demanding a bribe of others. Most avoid the label because they consider bribery a bad thing to be associated with. Besides
the unethical implications, giving a bribe places the giver in a position of weakness relative to the receiver—bribes are rarely equal exchanges because the receiver has privileged access to desired services. Although these social inequalities may also be present in gift exchange (as in the relationship between the graduating women and school officials) they tend to be obscured by the form of the exchange that emphasizes a mutual relationship. However, to the extent that bribe-like exchanges remain necessary for getting by during difficult economic circumstances, they tend not to be scrutinized too carefully nor judged too harshly.

Recommendations and Favors

Above I have shown that gifts are often given in reciprocation for favors that help people acquire services and opportunities that were formerly provided by the state. As the Polish state has relinquished control of the economy, the recommendation (polecenie) or help (poparcie) of a friend or a family member has become a central means of obtaining employment, especially in rural areas where very few jobs are to be found. Below, I discuss more situations in which Poles rely on social networks for recommendations and favors, and I explain why these exchanges persist even as Poland becomes more integrated into a market-based global economy.

Simply put, employers tend to trust those they know more than they do strangers. This is how Magda got promoted from cook to secretary—the principal of the school considered her trustworthiness, affirmed by several years of responsible employment, a more important qualification than secretarial skills. Poparcie (support or help) may involve little more than the distribution of information. When I asked how they found their jobs, many told me that a friend had informed them that there was an opening and suggested they apply. In other cases, relatives asked their employers if there were any positions available for their kin. Some employers even asked their employees to recommend someone who could fill a vacant position. Connections do not guarantee employment, but they do provide that extra advantage for those with little experience. As one Krakow resident said, “if someone is hopeless, clearly not even znajomości (connections) will help him or her, but if someone is good, znajomości play a very big role.” Respondents explained to me that relatives and acquaintances tend to be more trustworthy, in part because they feel a social pressure to be competent workers so that they will not embarrass the person who recommended them. In a related fashion, those who recommend someone for a job feel a sense of personal responsibility for the performance of the person they recommend. In short, trust is a primary motivation for people to turn to social networks; a known entity, even when hired through a string of connections, tends to be considered a better bet than someone who is unknown. Extrapolating from Humphrey and Hugh-Jones’ (1992) work on barter, more explicitly commercial exchanges that nevertheless fall somewhere between gifts and commodities, exchange partners take responsibility for their own and others’ satisfaction out of a sense of moral obligation. Furthermore, it is in their own self-interest to protect the trust others place in them since their reputation is what assures others that they are worthwhile exchange partners (see also Anderlini and Sabourian 1992).

Recommendations remain significant in urban areas, as well, especially for those seeking employment in desirable professions such as acting, law, and banking. Aneta was studying film at the Jagiellonian University when she met a German director at a family party who invited her to be his assistant. Since then, she has produced a variety of fast-paced, youth-oriented television programs, and recently, she has become, in her own words, “a super-independent producer of very independent films.” Aneta is in an exciting, profitable, and as she describes it, very closed business. Just as she got her first job by meeting someone who took a liking to her, she continues to get work at the recommendation of friends, and to hire her friends to do projects with her. Aneta emphasizes the positive aspects of arranging things through networks:

“If I try, for example, to buy something… let’s say cassette tapes… from someone who was
recommended to me, there is contact between people. It isn’t like a McDonald’s, where everything is the same for everyone. This is a side of Poland that I like. People help each other. Something for something. You feel obligated when someone helps you. But still, you do it out of friendship.  

Aneta says polecenia (recommendations) are central to the entertainment industry, and she would not consider hiring anyone she did not know, or who was not recommended to her. She says her name also opens doors, since most people have heard of her uncle who is a famous artist. Nor does money replace the need for social networks. On the contrary, social networks provide the means for obtaining work, and thus making money, especially for young people just beginning their careers. Her comments also reflect a reaction against the market, which she thinks homogenizes cultural difference and depersonalizes exchanges. Correspondingly, she characterizes exchanges among social connections as a distinct feature of Polish identity.

Ewelina, a law student from Krakow, describes her world as a place where networks remain essential. She explained a problem that a number of respondents noted – the only way to get a job in fields such as law or banking is to have experience, but the only way to get experience is by knowing someone who will hire you before you have experience. She herself expected to get her first job at the public utility where her father works. Indeed, he arranged for her to fill in part time for a woman who went on maternity leave. Ewelina was given a low salary and a temporary contract (umowa z lecenie), which means that the firm does not have to provide benefits nor pay as many taxes. As an added bonus, however, Ewelina gained access to data for her master’s thesis on the privatization of state utilities. She told me that even if she does not really do anything important, the job works to her advantage because future employers will view it as experience and thus be more likely to hire her. Ewelina also pointed out the negative side of getting her job through connections. She said she feels like people have their eye on her and so she has to work extra hard and do everything better than most. For this reason, she never takes breaks so that no one will have anything negative to say about her performance.

According to my respondents, the one place where connections do not seem to matter much is at large foreign firms. These firms have not been around long enough to be linked to the already existing hierarchies of influence, nor for employees to have the authority to hire their friends and family. Jobs in such places are considered highly desirable because they tend to pay very well. Applicants must go through a rigorous series of written applications, interviews, and in some cases even exams. There are many applicants for every position, and even those who are hired usually start as trainees or assistants who must prove themselves before being promoted to prestigious, well paying management positions. Poles in their mid-twenties with degrees in law, economics, or business are the most sought after by foreign firms. Nevertheless, the choices of my respondents are limited by the fact that most business headquarters are in Warsaw, making relocating a prerequisite to finding employment with most foreign firms.

Geographic mobility remains difficult in Poland for a number of reasons. First, there is a shortage of housing in cities; second, setting up a new household is prohibitively expensive for most; and third, there is a strong cultural value placed on locality. In other words, all things being equal, most Poles would rather remain where they are. There are psychological and economic dimensions to this reluctance to move, both of which are rooted in networks. People value the emotional bonds they have with family and friends, and they also depend on these relationships for mutual assistance. Thus, when people do move, they usually go where they have connections that, at least initially, will provide them with a place to live and perhaps a job. Due to historic migration patterns, residents of the Bieszczady Mountains are as likely to move to the United States or Italy as Warsaw or Krakow; geographic distance matters less than social networks. Among Krakowians, regional pride is so strong that few want to seek employment elsewhere.

Of all the young Poles I know, Basia’s experiences most closely approximate the ideal of
social mobility in the new capitalist economy. With this comes benefits, in the form of financial and personal freedom, but also trade-offs, in the form of distance from the place and people with whom she most closely identifies. She grew up in Lesko, and was raised by her mother, a nurse, after her parents divorced. Basia had the szczęście w nieszczęściu, the good fortune in bad fortune, that her father died when she was a young teenager, leaving her with an education subsidy from the state that enabled her to pay for tuition at the first private business school in postcommunist Poland. Armed with her MBA, she moved to Warsaw and enrolled in a postgraduate program in Public Relations, which meant that she continued to receive her education subsidy. Without this state funding, she would not have been able to afford the high rent in the city.

Basia put into practice her business school training, and sent out dozens of applications to potential employers. After a number of months, she was hired as an office assistant in a foreign firm where the working language was English. She and her boss felt an instant rapport. He was impressed by the quality of her resume, her letter of intent, and her English. At the end of her first year, her coworkers elected her “employee of the spring.” Shortly afterwards, she was offered a position as head of product promotion. With this advancement came greater autonomy and responsibility, as well as double the salary and a company car. Thus, Basia has managed to establish herself by getting just the skills that are valued in a globalizing capitalist system – training in business, management, public relations, and English. When I asked Basia’s mother how she feels about her daughter living on her own so far from home, her mother responded, “What would she do in this hole-in-the-wall?” Though Basia feels nostalgic for her small town in the mountains, she agrees that she would have no chance of using her education or of making a decent living in Lesko.

Ironically, it was Basia who told me about an article she had recently read in Polityka, a weekly news magazine, about the importance of connections for finding a job. She said it helped her realize how unusual her own job history is. The article reports:

“And so it is – connections, and even better, family ties. Nearly 60% of students believe that success in life depends on it. And that is not only the opinion of students. Last year, 90% of those asked on a CBOS [Public Opinion Research Center] survey “What influence do connections and favors have on success and fortune in life” responded “a lot” or “very much.”” (Miecik and Niezgoda 2000:4)

The article makes the further claims:

“Specialists of the job market assure us: looking for work through family and acquaintances is not immoral. Rather, it is a professional method for any job search, and very popular and recommended in the USA. This is difficult to understand in Poland, where the majority of the population grew up with the certainty of equal access to employment. It was possible to maintain these conditions more or less when state enterprises dominated and the majority of positions were provided by the state. Under the conditions of the free market and private ownership, it is impossible to protect the dogma of a “fair” distribution of work (Miecik and Niezgoda 2000:4)."

“Who gets the best job is most often decided by social position, access, connections, accident, and rarely – as our observations show – the ability to create for oneself or the actual value of one’s education. Our job market, immature like all of Polish capitalism, has not developed ways of producing and promoting talented young people... The method “na wuja” (through uncle), good as always, has one basic flaw: not everyone has an uncle (Miecik and Niezgoda 2000:9)."

The article reflects popular perceptions of Poland’s economy, rhetorically positioned within a discourse of difference between East and West – as immature capitalism and thus deeply flawed. In addition to describing the flaws of the present economic system, the article also seeks to prescribe for young adults some better ways of negotiating for jobs. It also builds on the assumption that capitalism is good, and that the United States provides a model of a successful capitalist economy. Although the
authors’ goals are different from my own, their observations support my claim that social connections remain important, and even take on renewed significance in realms newly defined by the changing economy.

Using Networks to Get Help from the State

Involvement in the informal economy has alternately been viewed as resistance (Haraszti 1978), a means of undermining the power of the state (Ledeneva 1998), or a kind of safety valve that compensates for the inadequacy of centralized institutions (Sampson 1985–86). While conducting fieldwork in state socialist Hungary, Martha Lampland was often told, “you can steal from the state or steal from your family.” This expression helps to explain how certain acts, such as selling items acquired from work or using work time to do freelance jobs, were considered acceptable, and even admirable. Because the state did not provide what citizens believed that it should, people felt justified in using informal means to acquire those goods and services as a matter of moral expediency. Such reasoning persists in postcommunist Poland, especially in cases where the state is still held responsible for services it no longer officially provides.

I observed a striking example of reciprocity that reveals an innovative way of using state institutions and new capitalist enterprises. Some rural respondents explained a practice whereby friends or relatives are put on the books of a small business as employees so that they become eligible for state benefits, even though they do not actually work. This was not intended as a political statement so much as a tactic for getting by, using whatever means at their disposal. When pressed, they justify their unorthodox methods by blaming the state for failing to provide a “normal” means of livelihood. Such behavior fits into what Scott (1985) calls “everyday resistance,” in contrast to more public and organized forms of political protest. A case will help to illustrate this practice.

After graduating from high school, Marta spent a number of years in Italy working as a live-in companion for an elderly woman. She returned to Bieszczady in 1999 because she got pregnant and she had no way of supporting herself once the baby was born. Because she was not married, she did not dare tell her employer the reason for her departure. At home, she had a free place to stay and her mother could help her care for her infant. While awaiting the birth, Marta’s cousin signed her up as an employee in her store even though Marta did not in fact work there. This was to the benefit of her cousin, who could subtract the “salary” she presumably paid her employee from her net profit. Marta, in turn, paid the amount the government charged her cousin for the workers’ insurance plan. Thus, the state covered medical costs when the baby was born, and Marta received a maternity leave pension for three months. Had she returned to Poland sooner, she could have been listed as an employee longer, and been eligible for several more months of assistance. Perhaps this is dishonest, but it is also a means of survival. Even though she has a high school degree, Marta has been unable to find employment in the depressed local economy. There are only a handful of businesses in her village, and she would have to spend much of her salary on public transportation if she found a job elsewhere. Because working abroad gave her a little financial security, she struggles with the thought of leaving her child with her mother and returning to Italy.

Besides illustrating the tactics used for obtaining state benefits, Marta’s story reflects the limited choices open to rural residents in Poland. Despite the strong cultural value placed on locality and multiplex social relations, many Bieszczady residents have made the choice to follow single links that take them abroad for work. There is a significant difference in the choices rural and urban residents make about migration. Most of my urban respondents have been to foreign countries, but they have gone for specific work or school related activities, or as tourists. Few have any interest in emigrating; for the most part, they are confident that they can achieve their goals within Poland.

In sum, social networks continue to fill a significant, but shifting place in the newly defined and experienced postcommunist social world. The evidence I have presented supports
the claim that kinship and social networks need not lose significance when centralized economic structures such as state socialism or capitalism are established. On the contrary, when viewed from the perspective of everyday interactions, networks can contribute to the smooth running of large economic institutions in that they are the means by which information is distributed and people gain access to opportunities.

I anticipate that network-based economic tactics will persist in Poland, and in market economies generally, for a number of reasons. First and foremost, they continue to work. This does not mean that they have not changed – it is their very adaptability that contributes to their persistence. In Poland, networks are no longer so important for obtaining material goods, but they remain central for attaining employment, medical care, and other services that are no longer provided by the state. Second, networks remain one of the few tactics available to the rural underemployed. Many lack the education or skills to get jobs on the basis of their experience alone, and there are few jobs that pay a decent wage in rural areas. Just about everyone, however, can turn to kin and acquaintances for help. Third, this particularism, as opposed to the universalism that tends to be conceptually associated with capitalism, also persists because of issues of trust. Especially in small, face-to-face communities, people tend to distrust strangers, and to prefer to share opportunities with those whom they already know. The relationship itself is believed to provide a guarantee. Forth, the mutual obligation felt among social connections increases the likelihood that the gift, favor, or recommendation will be reciprocated at some point in the future. Finally, orientations reflect the general understanding that there is a certain moral expediency to using connections when one is poor and institutional structures do not provide the means for earning a basic standard of living.

The unique shape of capitalism in post-communist Poland can in part be explained by the way state socialism remains a point of comparison for my respondents. They interpret and evaluate the present in relation to their memories of the past. They also retain certain orientations, perhaps most significantly a tendency to distrust institutions controlled by the state, and to trust particularistic relations instead. They remember the past as a time of uncertainty because of unpredictable and unjust social controls, and they conceptualize the present as a period of continued uncertainty, although the reasons for the uncertainty have changed from political to economic concerns. Because of this ongoing sense of uncertainty, people tend not to plan far into the future, tending instead to keep their options open and see what comes up. Such an orientation is actually more suited to the irregular opportunities that arise through social networks, which are often not planned nor anticipated. Consequently, these opportunities take on the appearance of chance occurrences, attributed to luck or miracles rather than to the savvy manipulation of connections. This is consistent with the characteristics of gifts that I outlined above – because gifts and counter-gifts are divided in time, an element of uncertainty about whether a gift will be reciprocated always remains, and the connection between gift and counter-gift can be forgotten. Both of these factors can make the help offered by a friend seem like a miracle. Indeed, social and ethical pressures help to maintain the appearance of disinterested cooperation among social networks, further obscuring any control that anyone might have over these processes. Thus, Poles tend to see themselves quite differently from the rational actors usually associated with capitalism.

Networks and Social Reproduction

Having shown how social networks continue to be used in innovative ways that are shaped by the emerging market economy, I conclude with some comments about their impact on social inequality. Theories of social reproduction identify the institutional structures that, together with cultural beliefs, values, and dispositions, cause people to act in ways that reproduce existing social hierarchies, and cause children to retain the social class of their parents (Bourdieu 1977b). Anthony Giddens (1984) leaves more room for individual agents to make choices that affect their personal outcomes, and that sometimes affect established institutional
structures, as well. Nevertheless, case studies by Paul Willis (1977) and Jay Macleod (1995) show that often the choices made by working class British boys and poor urban Americans prevent them from taking advantage of the opportunities that schools are supposed to provide. The stories I presented above illustrate, on one hand, young Poles’ innovative uses of the means at their disposal to make a living in the new capitalist economy. On the other hand, these stories reveal that occupation, education, and place of residence influence the kinds of support available to individuals from their social networks, and that capitalist reforms in Poland have created a social environment where economic inequality compounds social distinctions among occupational classes.

Despite state rhetoric about creating a classless society, Carole Nagengast (1991) and Chris Hann (1985) show in their ethnographies of Poland that occupation-based class distinctions persisted throughout the communist period. Government policies gave workers and peasants special privileges over the historically dominant intelligentsia, and inadvertently kept the distinctions among these occupational groups meaningful and strong. Rural residents were aided by infrastructure development programs that brought roads, schools, and industry to rural areas. Under the former system, farmers could always find buyers for their surplus, either through official distribution channels, or on the black market. In addition, state policies that encouraged urbanization also had the unintended consequence of spawning links between recent migrants to cities and their relatives who remained on the farm.

Relationships of mutual obligation with relatives in the country were essential for urban dwellers who wanted a reliable source of meat, eggs, and fresh produce (Wedel 1986). In exchange, farmers could request manufactured goods of their urban relatives, or send their children to live with urban relatives so the children could get a better education. In short, networks tended to cross class lines, and thus helped to maintain some degree of economic equality between urban and rural, educated and uneducated.

Since 1989, economic hardship in rural areas results from a combination of factors, some deriving from the state socialist legacy, and others from pressures of the market economy. As Frances Pine (1995) points out, the failure to collectivize Polish farms under state socialism has inadvertently contributed to the difficulties farmers face when they try to adjust to market demands. Particularly in mountain regions like Bieszczady, farms remain small and the hilly terrain and short growing season make mechanization impractical. State socialist policies exacerbated this by investing the bulk of funds for agriculture in the few collective and state farms they had managed to establish (Pine 1995). In the Bieszczady region, small farmers got some help from the state in the form of a regional system of collection and processing of milk that made it worthwhile to maintain several cows at a time. Since 1989, milk collection has been deemed unprofitable and thus ceased, and new health regulations require that milk be kept refrigerated until brought in for processing. As a result, small mountain farmers can no longer sell their milk and so have reduced production to the level of their own consumption, or have ceased production entirely. Instead, they rely on temporary or long-term work abroad, or seasonal jobs in the tourist sector. As Pine notes, these are not new tactics. What has shifted, however, is the decrease in the amount of basic services and income that farmers were assured by the state under socialism. The loss of state supported services, together with the increasingly monetized economy leaves rural residents with little recourse besides social connections to gain access to temporary jobs or opportunities abroad.

Although this may not be the case in all regions of Poland, in Bieszczady and in Krakow, I have not seen much evidence of links between urban and rural relatives in recent years. Instead, I have noted more ties with relatives and friends abroad. In Bieszczady, I also see links between residents of villages and nearby towns such as Lesko and Ustrzyki Dolne. For the most part, urban residents do not seek out their rural relatives for produce. Because distribution and access are no longer a problem, they just buy what they need in stores. Overall, urban residents are better able to afford things than their rural counterparts because the bulk...
of capitalist development and investment has been in Polish cities, leading to all kinds of opportunities for work and better pay. In rural areas, by contrast, private enterprises have failed to replace many of the state industries that have closed, resulting in a decline in the overall number and quality of jobs. Also, although an extended summer vacation in the countryside continues to be valued by urban residents, most rent a place in the mountains or by the sea rather than stay with relatives. This may in part be because the generation of urban Poles that I studied does not, for the most part have close relatives who live on a farm, and they are not maintaining the relationships with rural residents that their parents did.

To sum up, peasants and peasant-workers are the occupational groups most hard hit by economic restructuring. The government no longer invests in rural areas, and few private firms have taken the place of state industries and farm cooperatives. Young people who want to stay in Bieszczady have to, for the most part, find jobs in the service sector that require little formal training and offer little possibility of advancement. Urban areas by contrast boast low unemployment rates, high levels of commercial development, and extensive opportunities, especially for university graduates. The growing structural, social, and economic inequalities between urban and rural residents might further weaken relations between these groups as rural exchange partners become less and less able to reciprocate anything of value to their urban counterparts.

The divergence of opportunities available in urban and rural areas is further compounded by differences in educational achievement. One of the central theses of social reproduction theory is that tracking in secondary school has a direct impact on occupational outcomes (see Bourdieu 1977b; Macleod 1995; and Willis 1977). Under communism, most students were tracked into technical and trade programs that prepared them for specific jobs. Some schools even had formal agreements with factories, where students participated in on-the-job training while still in school, and got jobs in these same factories as soon as they graduated. Thus, it was not necessary to call on personal social networks to find employment. Because of the official emphasis on industrial labor, only 25% of youths attended college preparatory high schools, called lyceum, and less than 10% completed university. Fewer rural youths went to lyceum than urban youth, and even fewer went on to higher education. This was in part because most colleges and universities are located in cities, and most rural residents could not afford to live in cities unless they could stay with a relative. In addition, getting a higher education had few obvious rewards; factory workers earned higher salaries and received more benefits than university-trained professionals.

In the early 1990s, when my respondents attended high school, students continued to be tracked into programs that prepared them for employment in state industries that no longer existed. For instance, the Technical School of Agriculture continued to teach students how to manage collective farms, even as these farms were being dismantled. Many rural residents made the accurate assessment of their social world that all they had to gain from extending their education was a temporary reprieve from seeking employment in a very tight labor market. Regardless of what they studied, all they were likely to find in Bieszczady was underpaid, low skilled service positions. These trends are borne out by the life stories I have described – Zosia made use of networks to get a job as a store clerk, and Marta pretended to work at her cousin’s story so she could finagle subsidized maternity care. Urban residents, by contrast, are better able make use of social connections to advance their educational and professional goals. For example, Ewelina is getting experience that will help her become a lawyer, and Aneta got her start in the entertainment business through a family acquaintance.

During the summer of 2000, Marek, a graduate of the Technical School of Agriculture, his girlfriend Beata, and I chatted while peddling a paddleboat on the lake by his village. Both grew up in remote mountain villages, went away to universities in cities, but then came back to Bieszczady. Beata had just defended her master’s thesis on the aspirations, expectations, and outcomes of Bieszczady youth. She found that a remarkably high percentage finished
secondary school (80%) and went on to higher education (35%) but relatively few have been able to find well paying work (or even work of any kind). Even those with jobs do nothing related to their majors, but rather work in the commercial sector as cashiers or warehouse laborers. Many have left Bieszczady because there are no opportunities for them there. Beata further attributed the low self-esteem of her research subjects to the education system and the general social environment that emphasizes their lack of prospects. Most blame themselves – they do not believe they are capable of achieving more. Beata said her own experience was a little different because she always wanted to be a teacher, and although she was tempted to stay in the city because of the greater opportunities there, she could not imagine raising children amidst all the dirt and traffic. Furthermore, she would miss the people and rhythms of everyday life in the place where she was raised.

Marek, by contrast, admitted that he had been one of those children who had no idea what he wanted to do, or what he was capable of doing. He asked if I remember what he was like in high school when we first met. At the time he never dreamed of going to college. He called it an accident that his friend decided to submit his papers to a university and he decided to accompany his friend. Even after graduating from university, Marek had no vision for his future. He moved back home and did nothing for six months until a neighbor mentioned to him that there was a job opening at the regional government center 20 kilometers away. Marek was as surprised as anyone when he was offered the job. Despite the low pay and long commute, he too remains attached to this place and would not want to live anywhere else.\footnote{He contrasted himself to some of his neighbors, including another graduate of his high school who is just a year younger but unemployed and alcoholic. Marek says that their own abilities have little to do with how he and his friends have turned out; it is more a matter of chance and circumstance. Marek’s self-characterization reflects how people in postcommunist Poland continue to put their faith in miracles. Fortune and fate are used to explain opportunities that come unexpectedly; personal skills and effort tend to be credited less often.}

To conclude, whereas conditions under socialism helped to minimize the social and material differences between occupation and residence-based social classes, capitalist reforms compound these distinctions. Though urban and rural, educated and uneducated, turn to their social networks to help them acquire what they need, the urban and the educated gain more from the connections that they have. Nevertheless, the life stories above reveal the competence of social actors who make innovative use of the connections available to them. In part, this shows the successful deployment of agency, especially for rural residents able to recognize and make use of the transient and idiosyncratic opportunities that present themselves and thus make up for the structural failings of their social world. Through personal networks of reciprocal exchange, they build more security for themselves and their families in the midst of weakening social services, limited economic development, and high levels of unemployment. Theirs is far from an unconditional success, however, because there is more to social inequality than an individual’s ability to mobilize networks. For some, survival requires great sacrifices such as leaving behind all that is familiar and doing menial labor in a foreign country. Most patch together enough to get by, but subtle shifts in structural conditions (an increase in public transportation costs or a surprise pregnancy) can mean the difference between managing on one’s own and having to turn to others for support. Local support networks remain tight enough that no one starves or is left homeless, but rural Poles remain far removed from the economic vitality of the city, and thus confront substantial limits to the benefits they can reap from the agency they exhibit. Urban residents, by contrast, gain much more from their social networks because information, favors, and recommendations provide access to more opportunities for education and employment in the city. The continued reliance on networks of intimates thus magnifies the disparities between urban and rural residents in postcommunist Poland.
Notes

Acknowledgements: This article is based on fieldwork that was funded by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) in 2000. The University of Alabama Research Advisory Committee in 1999, and IIE Fulbright and the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation in 1991–1993. I am particularly grateful to the participants in the study who generously shared their time and their thoughts with me. Earlier versions of the manuscript were presented in 2001 at the George Klein Symposium at Western Michigan State University, Kalamazoo Michigan: “Transitions in Process: Social, Political and Cultural Dimensions of Change in Eastern Europe,” and at the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association in 1999 and 2000. Special thanks to the discussants and participants at these sessions for their thoughtful comments and critiques. Thank you also to Michael Murphy, and to the participants in the Interdisciplinary and Interpretive Writing Group at the University of Alabama for commenting on earlier drafts of the paper.

1 Karl Polanyi (1944) identified the distinctions among reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange. He recognized that more than one kind of exchange system exists in most societies, but he tended to assume that reciprocity would not normally be a significant factor in market exchanges. Here, I show that reciprocity among networks of intimates is actually used to gain advantages within the market economy.


3 Scholars of Eastern and Central Europe have settled on a number of ways of labeling the periods before and after 1989. Whereas studies of Russia usually distinguish between Soviet and post-Soviet, studies of the former Soviet satellites variously use the terms socialist, communist, state socialist, capitalist, post-1989, postsocialist, and postcommunist. Here, I use the term “state socialist” to describe the period before the Round Table Discussions of 1989, and “postcommunist” to describe the period since then. Before 1989, Polish scholars tended to use the terms “communist” and “socialist” interchangeably; communist denoted the ideological orientation while socialist came closer to the system in practice. State socialist is probably the most accurate term for the pre-1989 system, as the state controlled economic production and distribution. Labeling the present system as post-state socialist would be too awkward, however, which forces me to choose between postsocialist and postcommunist. The reason I favor the later is because communist ideology has been left behind, for the most part, but socialist economic structures and ideology have not. The strongest evidence for this is the popularity of reformed socialist parties throughout the former Soviet Bloc. In Poland, President Kwaśniewski, who is serving his second elected term, is a member of the socialist-leaning Liberal Democratic Party (SLD). Surveys regularly show that this political party has more support than any other (though still less than a majority). In the monthly reports published by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), support for SLD fluctuated between 20 and 38% in 1998, 28 and 38% in 1999 and 34 and 41% in 2000 (Cybulskia 1999, 2000, Pankowski 2001). In short, it would be misleading to call Poland “postsocialist” when the president and the most popular political party are both socialist.

4 I adopt the awkward sounding expression “ways of using” from Michel de Certeau (1984). Like him, I am interested in understanding how social rules and public rhetoric are “consumed,” or used in everyday practices. In short, it is not enough to know public ideas about reciprocity. It is also necessary to view those ideas in relation to what people actually do when faced with everyday life choices.

5 Larissa Lomnitz (1977) collected data in an urban Mexican shantytown populated by recent migrants from the countryside. Although the context that she studied is very different from post-communist Poland, her conclusions are similar to my own, that reciprocity remains essential to the functioning of complex societies, and that social networks are one of the key adaptive mechanisms for marginal populations. She also notes that networks among the urban elite serve to reinforce their dominance over a backward countryside.

6 De Certeau explains, “a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing’… It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’. The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them. This is achieved in the propitious moments when they are able to combine heterogeneous elements (thus, in the supermarket, the housewife confronts heterogeneous and mobile data – what she has in the refrigerator, the tastes, appetites, and moods of her guests, the best buys and their possible combinations with what she already has on hand at home, etc.); the intellectual synthesis of these given elements takes the form, however, not of a
discourse, but of the decision itself, the act and manner in which the opportunity is ‘seized’.

All translations from Polish of interviews and written sources are my own.

To paraphrase my respondents, “everything is available in stores.” Acquisition of material goods is no longer limited by supply; all they need is the money to buy them. Nevertheless, because many rural residents cannot afford much of what they see in store windows or advertised on television, some informal exchanges of material goods continues – for instance relatives who maintain the family farm will give produce to relatives who work in town, and receive various gifts of purchased goods in exchange.

Besides employment, in recent years, the state has moved away from subsidized healthcare, higher education, and housing.

Ledeneva (1998), in her study of blat in Russia, Herrmann (1997), in her study of American garage sales, and Gell (1992) in his study of barter in Melanesia examine the similarly ambiguous space between “gifts” and “commodities.”

Other traits high school students in 1992–3 said they associate with their nation include: argumentativeness, drunkenness, intolerance, valor in warfare, and national pride. They felt ambivalent about all these traits. For instance, many said they feel proud to be Polish, even though they do not believe they have any good reason to feel so.

Ledeneva (1998) makes a similar distinction between bribes and blat in Russia.

Interestingly, the dictionary points to the connection between gifts and bribes; “śpówka” is defined as “money or a gift given with the goal of paying someone off” (Skorupek et al. 1969).

In 1999 63% and in 2000 64% of those surveyed by CBOS agreed with the statement, “The present situation forces [people] to give bribes” (Falkowska 1999, 2000).

A number of respondents in both rural and urban areas made this same point, that if medical professionals were paid properly, such irregularities would not occur. Doctors and nurses on the state payroll have shockingly low salaries, often below the national average. The nurses strike continued through the end of 2000.

Another friend of mine, a university student in Krakow, was deeply offended once when a Polish friend of hers accused her of acquisitiveness because she had asked an American student for some corkboard that the American was throwing out. She asked me with great concern what I thought about her and her actions. She insisted that she would hate to be regarded as a poor Pole who befriended Americans for instrumental reasons.

I include joint ventures in this category. Many foreign concerns work with a Polish partner, which eases government regulations and tax standards, but still their administrative structures remain independent of existing hierarchies of influence in Poland.

Except for the Catholic University in Lublin, all institutions of higher education in Poland were state run under state socialism. Tuition was also free, and continues to be for day students who pass an entrance exam. However, these state schools were ill prepared to teach business or economics independent of Marxist theory. Thus, the earliest and most respected business programs were established at new “for profit” institutions, most of which were (and continue to be) affiliated with institutions in Western Europe or the United States. It is only in recent years that institutions such as the Academy of Economics in Krakow have developed programs in international relations and banking that are considered on par with the best new Universities. This means that the earliest graduates with degrees in business attended schools that charge tuition; in other words, they already constituted an economic elite. This is why Beata’s case is so interesting – her intelligence, determination, and interpersonal skills had more to do with her success than social status.

This case further illustrates how networks work – Marta followed a high school friend who had, in turn, joined her brother in Italy. In each instance, the earlier arrival arranged a job for the relative or friend who came later. Marta, in turn, helped her younger sister find a job during summer vacations from university. All were motivated by the promise of earning more than they could in Poland. This chain of relations also illustrates a variety of outcomes – the brother remains in Italy after over nine years, Marta stayed six years, her friend returned to Poland after a year and shortly thereafter married, Marta’s sister has gone for short periods during school holidays. Presumably, once she finishes her studies, she will look for a job in Poland.

A number of studies have made the point that discourses of “transition” often obscure structural and organizational continuities underlying apparent changes throughout Eastern Europe (see Verdery 1996). Lampland (1995) and Kideckel (1993) consider similarities in the organization of rural life in Hungary and Romania respectively. According to Grant (2001), monuments in the guise of childlike fairytale figures are intended to symbolize the reconstruction of the Russian state, but nevertheless remain akin to Soviet “cosmological frames” that emphasize state power projected into the future.

Similarly, Kideckel (1993) identifies postwar urbanization as a key factor in fostering social connections between urban and rural Romanians.

The unemployment rate in urban centers is 4–5% in contrast to over 20% in some rural areas. In Krakow and Bieszczady respectively, unem-
ployment rates are 4% and nearly 20%. The national average was down to 10% in 1999, and was closer to 14% in 2000. Further rural unemployment is masked by the high percentage of residents on disability or other forms of social support. Conversely, much rural labor is temporary, part time, and unofficial, and as such does not get registered in national statistics.

Another index that shows the difficulty for residents of Bieszczady is the number of job offers relative to the number of registered unemployed. Between March 1999 and March 2000, there were 528 registered unemployed for each job listed in the Podkarpackie Województwo (the regional administrative district) in contrast to a national average of 213 (GUS 2000:23). The difference between Krakow and Bieszczady was even more extreme when measured in 1998 within the old regional boundaries: in the Krośnieńskie Województwo there were 1591 registered unemployed for each job listed and in the Krakowskie Województwo there were 84 for each job listed, compared with a national average of 251 to 1 (GUS 1999:LXVIII, LXXI).

Residents of the Podkarpackie region have the lowest average salaries in Poland; workers in the industrial sector average 1596 złotys per month, in contrast to the national average of 1942 zł. Residents of the Małopolskie region earn 1754 zł. on average (this region includes agricultural and mountain villages as well as Krakow) while in the Mazowiecki region, where Warsaw is located, the average monthly salary is 2574 zł. The salary discrepancy between urban and rural regions would be even greater if agricultural workers were included in the statistics.

The unemployment rate for university graduates averages about 3%.

24 The school that youths chose was, in part, influenced by the profession and education level of their parents, but not entirely. Initially under state socialism, there was rapid urbanization that brought many peasants to the city where they and their children became skilled workers largely through technical and trade school programs. Political restrictions sometimes prevented the children of intellectuals from gaining a higher education or from going to college preparatory high schools.

Although a commute of 20 kilometers may not seem excessive, it would be impossible to do without a car. Only 2 buses a day go between Marek's village and his place of work, they do not travel at the times he needs, and they would take at least an hour per day in each direction. Marek drives a tiny Polish Fiat along the narrow, winding road between home and work. The road is often ice covered and impassable in winter. Even if he wanted to live closer to work, he could not afford to rent an apartment on the salary he is paid.

References


Galbraith, Marysia 1997: “A Pole Can Die for the


