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The topic of my speech is "The Role of the Museum When the National State Breaks Up". And perhaps the reason why I have chosen to speak about this subject is that my state of origin, namely the Soviet Union, broke up not such a long time ago. However, the Soviet Union interpreted itself not as an individual national state among many others, but rather as a vehicle of the universal, international idea of communism. For that reason, national identities and national interests of a great number of different nations which lived inside the borders of the Soviet Union, including the Russian nation, were subjugated to this ultimate goal: the emergence of a united, communistic mankind which would make the Soviet Union obsolete.

Instead of that radiant future, new national states began to emerge on the territory of the former Soviet Union after its dissolution. Only now does the question arise about the national cultural identities of these new states, and about how this identity is to be represented in cultural archives of any kind, including museums. In general, it seems to me that in the 20th century we are observing the permanent dissolution of the universal ideologies and the break up not of the national states but of the imperialist powers which legitimized themselves by these ideologies. Communism was probably the last universal ideology of this kind, and the Soviet Union the last empire with a universal, supranational claim. Recently, both have landed on the rubbish pit of history.

However, this event could be politically assessed: it is a chance for museums, as these collect precisely from the rubbish pits of history. The transfer of the cultural objects of the past to museums can only begin after a collapse of an old social order. A tremendous mass of documents, symbols of power and prestigious objects of cult and ideology, and of everyday life as well, lose then their former functions and become a pile of rubbish.

As a modern institution, the museum emerged as an effect of the French revolution and successive revolutions and wars: it was created by modern national states with the aim to save the treasures of the ancien regime from ultimate destruction. From the beginning onwards, the museum functioned as the symbolic heir of the old supranational regimes, based on religion and tradition. Therefore, the modern museum is organized as a system of universal representation inside a national cultural context - or as a kind of symbolic universalist empire inside a national cultural identity. In the context of modernity, too, the museum collects everything that is outmoded, dated or exceptional to the ever-changing context of modern life and everything that seems to be foreign, strange or exotic as well. The modern museum is a symbolic space of otherness inside the relatively homogenous context of the modern national state. And at the same time the museum is the place where the cultural identity of this state is formulated, because there is no possibility to define your own cultural identity other than in comparison with other cultural forms. The modern

national state needs the space of otherness. It needs the museum to be able to articulate its own cultural identity. At the same time however, the museum is a permanent danger to this cultural identity. It is fundamentally subversive because it exhibits all kinds of things which obviously don't belong to this identity. This paradoxical structure of the modern museum vis-à-vis the modern national state produces a specific tension and at the same time an inner complicity between museum and state. This situation is very well known and actually confuses the modern museum as a public institution.

In a certain way, the modern museum is even the most characteristic institution of the modern age. For sure people have always been collecting, but it was only in the modern age that the museum, that is the state collection, was able to attain its current central and cultural position. With the advance of Enlightenment and secularisation, it became increasingly difficult to rely on God's eternal memory or the unchanging laws of reason and nature to secure any kind of identity, including cultural identity. Therefore, in the modern age, an artificial memory, a cultural archive, a museum, would have to be created where historical memories are recorded in the form of books, pictures, and other historical documents. Modern subjectivity has no other way to define itself in the world than by collecting, by creating an archive of objects to save it all from destruction through time by the technical means of conservation.

There is no fixed metaphysical, eternal order any more which could be discovered under the changing surface of life. Therefore, man is condemned to create such an order artificially through collecting. Susan Sonntag once wrote that Karl Marx was only partly right: the world, indeed, cannot be understood, but the world cannot be changed either, as Marx proposed. The only thing that man can do with the world is to collect it. The fundamental question about what remains unchanged in time is now turned from a metaphysical, religious or ideological question to a technical issue about collecting and conservation in a museum. We are what we collect.

But as a result, a number of practical questions arise concerning the construction of cultural identities. For God's memory was not only omniscient but first of all free of charge. According to traditional belief, a place in the divine memory should be acquired through good deeds, and not by financial investments. Museum storage on the other hand costs a lot of money which is never really available. And, as result, the central economical, or maybe rather ecological, question arises: what should be transferred into the museum from the immense rubbish pits of history, with a constantly growing volume at an increased speed? We are confronted now with a certain cultural-ecological crisis: the contemporary media and cultural industries of every kind are producing an ever increasing mass of cultural artifacts. These artifacts don't disappear any more through natural destruction throughout time. On the contrary, the cultural trash is permanently accumulating beyond any conscious conservation. Under these new conditions, the role of the museum changes: the museum becomes a place where the historical-cultural trash undergoes a recycling process to produce relevant, present-day cultural identities. Today's museums are ecological disposal and recycling machines, and after the collapse of the gigantic civilisations, like

Communism, these museum machines are - or at least should be - running at full capacity. Their work is quite useful and in many regards even crucial for our culture - like any other ecological work, as well. The cultural identities produced in the museums are then employed in politics especially. But they are also used in today's global context of mass media culture, which can by no means be reduced only to entertainment. This mass culture, for its part, makes a kind of virtual museum out of the whole world. For orientation in its nearly endless diversity, today's media culture uses a symbolic global map on which certain virtual places are marked with identity-giving symbols: pyramids and mummies for Egypt, Coca-Cola for America, or the Lenin Mausoleum for Russia. These symbols are basically museum symbols because they have been already aesthetically recycled in the museum: pyramids and mummies would have never acquired their present relevance without the Louvre or the British Museum. As a matter of fact, the same also applies to Coca Cola or the Lenin Mausoleum, whose present cultural relevance would be a completely different one without its aesthetic recycling by Andy Warhol or by the new Russian art. On the other hand however, the worldwide virtual museum created by the contemporary mass-media also influences the functions of every single traditional hardware museum, so to speak.

First of all, it concerns the criteria of choice, which are used in the process of exhibiting. At first sight, these criteria seem to be relatively simple: in the historical trash you just have to find some artifacts which might correspond to your own conception of your own identity. But such a strategy soon proves to be difficult, if not even impossible. For the museum is, as I said, an institution of our post-metaphysical, post-religious age. If we were able to know what our identity is then museums that is to say the places where artificial identities and memories are constructed would be superfluous: our identity would always be present to us beyond any museum. However, modern museums have emerged precisely because the search for the true, hidden identity has proven to be futile.

Museums of the modern age show collections of very heterogeneous objects in a homogeneous surrounding. These objects stand - or hang - next to each other, but they do not form an organic unit anymore, as they once did in the past in a church or in a palace. This lack of internal unity, this irreducible inner heterogeneity constitutes not only the modern museums, but the modern subjectivity as well. At the same time, this diagnosis poses the following question: when we are talking about cultural identity, including national identity, do we mean the identity of the one who is collecting, or the identity of cultural forms being collected?

This distinction is really crucial. What is the Louvre, what is the British Museum, and all the other modern museums that emerged after them? Do these museums show the subjectivity and the cultural identity of the collector, that is to say, the states of France and England during a certain historical period for example, or do these museums offer an objective, neutral panorama of historically known cultural identities? In this last case, it would be paradoxically the very collector who has no identity of his own. That is the way Hegel, being the father of modern historicism, saw the role of a museum: historical consciousness reflects history without being a part of it and without having a specific identity within history. This

Hegelian vision of the absolute spirit as an identity-free curator of its collections continues to live today in the vision of the universal virtual museum of modern mass-media. Thus, with regard to the museum as an institution, we have to ask ourselves what we actually expect of it: to be a collector or be collected? To be a curator or an exhibit? In other words, do we want to construct identities, or do we want to merely accept ready-made identities that others have constructed for us?

Of course, the cultural-political explosiveness of this question can only be perceived if we bear in mind that a great number of the cultural representatives of the new national or regional entities that emerged on the territory of the old empires, including the communist empire, have opted to be collected. They seek a cultural identity by asking themselves how they can define this cultural identity as a specific form in the context of all other cultural forms. That actually means that they see themselves with the eyes of a virtual visitor of the virtual museum. According to this strategy, artifacts, in the first place signs and documents, are selected to refer to the times before the traumatic experiences of Communism or imperialist conquest. An attempt is thereby made to forget and repress the events that have shaken and actually destroyed the stable image of one's own cultural identity. So, this image is borrowed from the museum as a kind of ready-made. Liberation from foreign domination leads to reducing oneself to an object in the context of an exhibition.

The rediscovery of national tradition, which had been buried, suppressed or ignored by Communism or Imperialism is surely something to be welcomed. But, at the same time there is a strong tendency in some newly emerged states to ignore and dislike the modern art which precisely reveals the fragility of one's own identity and reflects the traumata of its eventual destruction. Furthermore, there is also a tendency to dislike every interest for 'the other' which actually constitutes the modern museum, because of the fear to betray one's own cultural identity. If you do not collect the others however, the others will collect you.

For that reason, a deep and unpleasant complicity arises between fundamentalist cultural censorship, either nationalist or regionalist, and the international cultural tourism, which in many respects has become dominant today. For the postmodern global flaneur, putting all cultural signs on the same level certainly implies a scepticism towards any claim on universal truth. But this very scepticism makes it possible for any cultural standpoint to be considered absolute, without laying such a universal claim. Today we are observing an interesting drama of cultural claims both absolute and regional, brought to us by contemporary cultural fundamentalism. For this kind of fundamentalism a certain truth is absolutely valid - but only on a certain territory. The traditional link between truth and universality doesn't exist any more and it is significant that the whole world turned itself today into a virtual museum.

The postmodern tourist, who reacts to this drama of contemporary fundamentalism as a spectator, will just smile ironically on hearing of fundamentalist claims to a regional truth - but he is actually unwilling to completely reject these claims. Because, as I said, he sees the entire world as a virtual museum. And every museum is constructed in a way that all historical identities presented to spectators are distinguished from one

another by means of certain outwardly recognizable and permanently defined differences. The work of the museum conservator consists in monitoring and guaranteeing the inviolability of these differences. In the process, such a museum conservator must sometimes be too rigorous and overzealous, but basically he remains endearing, because his exaggerated enthusiasm is for the good cause of preserving the identities entrusted in his care. By such an eye trained by the museum, a regional dictator who prescribes his subjects a certain outwardly recognizable identity would be regarded as a somewhat over-enthusiastic but basically endearing museum curator. After all, if this dictator-curator did not exist, the corresponding identity would disappear, and, as it has become usual to say, the world would be more dull, more monotonous. The local fundamentalist identity seeker and the international identity-free tourist are therefore united by the same museum eye-training: patriotic, nationalist sentiments of love for one's own national identity prove to be not only noble, but internationally profitable as well.

As a consequence the universalism of modern ideologies is substituted now by the universality of modern media: the ideal of universal truth is replaced by the reality of universal accessibility. So, today we still have to deal with universalism but it is a negative universalism, so to speak. The strategy dictated by this media universalism consists of drawing the limits of one's own separate identity so narrow, that it is purified from everything that could lead to this identity being confused with others. Hence, there is an internal complicity between the museum gaze and the repressive policy of identity that tries to purify one's own cultural domain from all foreign influences.

To be sure, these influences cannot be completely repressed, because the modern subjectivity cannot be satisfied by being only collected and regarded: it wants to collect as well. And the collecting as such has its intrinsic laws. The most important of these laws consists in expanding collection and looking for the other and different in the process. Almost by definition, collecting is the collecting of the other that was not in the collection before: the tautological, the redundant, the already known would not be admitted to the museum. The centrality of the museum as a modern cultural institution is also the explanation why the other and the new are preferred in modern art. By preserving the artifacts of the past which earlier, frequently got lost due to the power of time, the modern museum provokes the need for the other and for the new. Museological collecting is the greatest motor for the new in culture and art. The avant-garde artists of this century have all protested against museums and wanted to blow them up. But actually they protested only against being merely collected and exhibited by the museum curators. In a way the avant-garde artist can be defined as a curator of himself, or herself. The avant-garde artist begins to collect instead of being collected. Therefore, he functions as agent of the expanding practice of the modern collection by bringing to museums what was not collected there in the past. The famous *Fountain* of Duchamp is only the most obvious example of this artist-as-curator practice. Avant-garde art became a permanent part of modern museums, only because the avant-garde artists met the museums' demands for other things and other signs. The best way to fight against museums and to ensure the chances of never being admitted to them would be to produce

museum art, that is to say, the art that is already available in museums and is already being collected.

By refusing to be simply collected and by beginning to collect themselves, the modern artists lose their fixed, closed identity. They become not objects, but rather subjects of the collection by constantly crossing the boundaries of their identities. Truly modern subjectivity chooses a different option with regard to a museum as many theorists of cultural identity suggest: this subjectivity defines itself not through being collected, but rather through collecting. And a collector is only good, when he has as little identity as possible. The meaning of a collection as a whole can never be definitively fixed, because the collection is constantly changing, so that the subjectivity of the collector, or of the curator, is continually being redefined in the process of collecting.

This opposition between collecting and being collected which constitutes the museum allows us to formulate better the relationship of museums to the national state. Historically speaking, the modern state, or to be more exact, the curators who were commissioned by the state did the collecting. Everything else was collected. However, in a certain way this extreme separation itself belongs to the past: we live in the age after the historical avant-garde where everyone both collects and is collected. The state and its representatives cannot pretend any more to be the only privileged subjects of collecting. They either have to suppress the modern art strategies completely or to reduce their cultural identity to an exotic artefact for the tourist industry.

But under these new conditions the following disturbing question arises: how can a modern subjectivity manifest itself inside the museum when this subjectivity has no fixed identity any more and is open to the foreign, different and new? For as I said earlier, paradoxically just the subject of collecting is supposedly doomed to remain invisible.

This fundamental difficulty of the modern museum is well illustrated by the problems museology was recently faced with. The official art of former communist countries sees itself exposed to the accusation of not being really original and exotic enough, of being too trivial - which hinders its transfer into the museum. I remember well how high the expectations of the international art-world were after the collapse of Communism. The western world hoped to discover an original-looking art, especially in Russia, as they thought art had developed in a cultural isolation for a long time. Unfortunately, the disappointment was just as high when it was realized that, on the purely aesthetic level, this art did not radically differ from the Western art of this century - be it the neo-classicism of the 30s and 40s. This style had become the lingua franca of different totalitarianist states of that time, or other various tendencies of modern art. The remains of earlier, pre-modern civilizations could be transferred so successfully into the modern museum, because at first sight and on the purely formal, stylistic level they appeared to be different, strange and exotic. However, this no longer applies to the art of the former Soviet Union: this art does not offer anything exotic or aesthetically different (compared for example to Egyptian pyramids) by which its identity may be fixed. The difference between art of the Soviet Union and art of the

West is the difference in collecting, in ordering and in use of art - and not simply the difference in the outward identifiable form.

In a certain way, Soviet Communism always regarded itself as a kind of museum - as a collection of the best of everything that had ever been produced in the history of mankind. Soviet art, architecture and everyday culture quoted freely from every historical period as far as these quotations were compatible with the basic principles of Communist ideology. Excluded from this virtual communistic museum was only everything reactionary that supposedly obstructed the course of history towards Communism. The question about what was progressive or reactionary what was to be collected, and what was to be cast off and forgotten, was answered differently at different periods of Soviet history. In any case, Soviet Communism wanted to collect, but not to be collected. Now this strategy is taking revenge because nothing that Communism left behind looks really collectable. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union into national states, the Soviet empire simply disappeared.

And this complete disappearance is in itself a very interesting phenomenon. The uniqueness of Communism lies in the fact that it is the first modern civilization that has historically perished - with the exception, perhaps of the short-lived Fascist regimes of the 30s and 40s. All the other civilizations that had perished up until that time were pre-modern; therefore they still had fixed identities. So the fate of Communism is a good example of the fate of modern subjectivity in general. It shows the danger that modern subjectivity after its death dissolves into nothing, leaving behind only a heap of trash that this subjectivity has collected during its life. That is a deep reason, why someone could prefer to be a work of art and not an artist, as Nietzsche said, or, rather could prefer to be an exhibit - and not a curator, because an exhibit has a chance to be preserved when the collection itself disappears.

That is the true paradox of the museum: the museum collection serves the preservation of artifacts, but this collection itself is extremely unstable, constantly changing and it might completely dissolve. Collecting itself is an event in time par excellence. It was a universal illusion at the beginning of the 19th century that the universal museum could be created in which everything historically relevant could be preserved for an unlimited amount of time. And it is obvious that in recent times, the temporality of the collection is increasingly reflected in the museum system itself. It is especially noticeable that the museum is gradually changing its status from the site of the permanent collection to the theatre for large-scale travelling exhibitions, organised by international working curators, and installations, created by individual artists. Every large exhibition or installation of that kind is made with the intention of designing a new order of historical memories, of proposing a new principle of collecting which constructs history differently and anew. These large exhibitions and installations are temporary museums. They are telling history in a subjective way instead of the state-approved way of before. But when these exhibitions are dismantled, only a catalogue, or a video tape, or another kind of documentation remains. Museums were originally created as places of stability in the midst of large cities where time flies quickly. Today, when you arrive in a large city as a tourist and ask if anything new is happening in that city, the first thing you expect is to

learn what new exhibitions are going on. Today time flies faster in the museum than outside its walls. The museum is now increasingly experienced as a privileged place of change. The *vernissage* has become a social event like the opening of the opera season in the past. This theatricality of today's exhibition practice and museum system is often interpreted as a sign of their degradation, but in fact it can by no means be reduced to a mere entertainment. Rather this theatricality is demonstrating the collecting process as event in time, or the fundamental temporality of every museum. Every archive exists in time. That means that every archive is in a state of flux. We are confronted today with a kind of Heraclitean archive where all the cultural identities are extremely unstable and must be permanently defined anew.

For a great number of commentators these new museum conditions seem to be somewhat frustrating. However, I am inclined to see it as a great chance for an individual in the modern world. Let us return to the problem posed at the beginning: the break up of modern states. Or, maybe better to say, the relative decline of the modern state. And let us not be too sad about this decline and even about this eventual break up, if it really takes place. At least in the context of the museum system this decline not merely transfers new cultural artifacts into the museum as I mentioned before, it also gives the private individual a chance not only to be collected, but to collect. That means, the individual can use the state museum, which served earlier as a permanent representation of history from the viewpoint of the state, as a stage for putting on his or her own historical vision in the form of a personal, if only temporary, collection.

Under this condition of a museum in flux, a cultural identity can also no longer be a stable form among other stable forms. Huge exhibitions, artistic installations, and other museum events which travel around the world and attract international attention are the best remedy against the narrow, local search for a stable national identity. It would be a great error to consider this increasing internationalisation and temporalisation of museum practice merely as an effect of media strategies. On the contrary, as I tried to show, the mass-media culture has a tendency to create its own stable, closed worldwide museum with easily identifiable cultural identities. Contemporary exhibition practice moves across the boundaries of these identities and gives to an individual curator, or to an artist, a chance to formulate a personal, subjective and innovative historical vision. Such a vision is sometimes accused of looking foreign, when it seems to be unusual, and faces an institutional rejection. This still happens in the new post-communist states but not in the form of direct censorship anymore. So we can only hope that all the national and regional authorities open their museum spaces for international exhibition practice, give up their rhetorics against alleged loss of cultural identity and foreign influences, and allow also their own citizens to collect and to exhibit, not only be collected and exhibited. The state that doesn't respect these strategies of modern subjectivity risks breaking up as was the case with the Soviet Union.