

# Models of Time in the Museum. On Exposition Solutions in History and Art Museums

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All human activity takes place in time and around time. Philosophical systems, value opinions, and all routine thinking are based on the interpretation of time. Analysis of the fourth dimension is of primary importance also in the context of museum culture. Time is like a secret focus, from which all activity pertaining to heritage culture and the understanding of which we are trying to reach by different methods in a closed space spring. Any museum room is the visual form of time, as the solution of its space is always executed on the basis of a certain time concept.

The following meditation offers subjective digressions on the schemes of history and art museum expositions,<sup>1</sup> to study how such a relationship between time and space functions; how and whether they can be reciprocally identified, whether associations can be found between models of time and models of museums; how different concepts relate to past matters and spiritual tradition and the exhibition space as a whole. How time is exhibited.

By its nature the modern museum is characteristic mostly of the Western reason-centred society, where human wisdom, instead of divine truth, occupies the central place. The source material used to embrace the past is the basis for the creation of a myth of the past. What the vision of the past is like is largely due to how history is depicted. Whether it is seen through a prism of heroism or nostalgia, centred on the individual or the society, in a linear, cyclic, continuous or finished way eventually defines the receiver's stance on how the past is presented, but it also refers to the museum's solutions of the present day and visions of the future. The methodology of how the passage of time is presented in a museum

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<sup>1</sup> Only types of history and art museum expositions from the 18th to the 21st century are treated, with earlier collections and the exposition policy of other museum types left aside. History museums include, in addition to general history museums, also ethnography, war or open-air museums.

is largely based on the Cartesian vision of the world. Proceeding from the rationalistic understanding that knowledge is procured by the mind, not through the senses, the modern museum developed in the 19th century. The museum that started on its triumphal march then has not changed in essence, although types of different museums attempt to detach themselves from the paradigm of the Modernist, linear and rational museum and move towards other methods of the interpretation of time.

### Perception of time

Time can be viewed as a purely physical quantity or as a philosophical notion that, in turn, can be analysed in many ways – as a process (linear, cyclic treatment of time etc.), or as an opposition between personal or social time or between objective and subjective perception of time. On the one hand, it could be a neutral-objective stance regarding Aristotelian incessant movement and, on the other hand, it could be a subjective perception of time that has the present moment in its focus, as St. Augustine sees it in his *Confessions* (Annus 2002: 145).

The basis of the present analysis is the different forms of time as a process through cultural history. An understanding of the course of time can be different in principle, not to mention the differences in things such as calendar systems or the starting point of chronology.

The notion of time emerged simultaneously with the rise in human consciousness, when the notion of temporality developed. Archaic civilisations (Mesopotamia, Egypt) and traditional cultures for which no history existed yet knew only one time, the so-called absolute time. By means of rituals and myths, human existence was integrated into a larger unity, which constituted a small part of the natural universal continuity (Bazin 1967: 5).

Together with the rise of the personal and the worldly fates, consciousness of the notion of time emerged. Man began to notice himself not only as a result, but also as a reason. In Greece, for the first time, people began to pay attention to space-time and its temporality, which was necessary to understand social development. In classical antiquity, one can notice for the first time widespread interest in the people's own past, expressed in mass collections of objects and the creation of libraries and archives.

For the Greeks there were two notions of time – eternity (*aion*) and the course of time (*chronos*). The cyclic concept of time is connected with the latter: the con-

stantly changing stages of time – the past, the present and the future – formed part of the unity of time that alternated, as did human life in its continuity. The same system occupied an important place also in the world-view of the medieval man; the cycle of the seasons was for worldly life and the ecclesiastic cycle for liturgical life. The cyclic course of nature is the basis for both religious and historical cycles, as well as for those of personal life.

In modern historical philosophy, Giambattista Vico, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee have all treated history in terms of historical cycles, one following the other, and all of them have stressed that the past cannot be viewed as just one linear progression.

Among the time concepts dominant in Oriental cultures, the idea of the infinity of time, based on the Taoist principle of constant circulation of time, is of the highest relevance in this context. Only the material form changes in the course of time, but time itself moves on into infinity.

In the mind of a person belonging to a Christian culture, time is interpreted in two ways – time that passes and time that continues – ‘human’ and ‘absolute’ (divine) time. For the first time it was clearly defined by Augustine in his *Confessions*: ‘Your years neither come nor go; our years: come and go, as all years do. [---] *Your years are but one day ...*, and your day is not ‘every day’ but ‘today’, since your today does not give way to your tomorrow, nor take over from your yesterday. Your today is eternity...’ (*Confessiones*, 11.14.16.) God is timeless; God is the eternal now (the present). Divine time is the supreme stage of temporality; timelessness is the supreme idea and desire of human culture to which we aspire. Human time, on the contrary, moves and passes, being subjective because it springs from the person alone. Human time is linear, moving irrefutably from the past to the present and from the present into the future toward the Last Judgement. The temporal linear world-view with a clear beginning and end based on the Jewish-Semitic time concept (Walsh 2001: 10) was manifested in the Christian religion. The time of the Modernist treatment of time, a line without a beginning or an end, was defined in the light of rationalism and the philosophy of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, when time began to be understood as one-dimensional, inevitable and unchangeable movement, its pillars being the annual calendar and the clock showing the right time. A change arrived when Albert Einstein ‘filled the Universe with clocks, all of them showing the right time’ (Walsh 2001: 66).

Einstein's theory of relativity and the technological revolution at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries created the precondition for the subjective time concept. The relativistic theory of time, contrasting with Isaac Newton's theory of absolute time, lays emphasis on change in time – time is not something that is physically above the universe – everything connected with time also applies to the physical universe. Space-time came to be interpreted as a continuum in which the two parts depended on each other.

Analysing the perception of time as a certain model it is possible to divide it also on another level – into personal and social time. In the context of the protection of heritage, such a model plays a very important role – whether one speaks of individual or social time in relation to the past, as they are mostly not synchronous with each other.

Is the basis of history personal memory, recollection or document? Is history created by the individual or the social system? The museum was established at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, clearly as a means of the implementation of the history of society and its power and of the establishment of its ideology. The linear time concept in the environment of a museum postulates the most important achievements of social memory, 'objective history'.

In the 1970s and 1980s changes in the cultural landscape, one of the aims of which is greater openness of the museum, again brought to the fore versions of the interpretation of individual time. Subjectivity of memory also came to be stressed more and more in museum concepts. 'Memory is not a passive process; it creates emotions and desires, whether positively or negatively charged. Memory is always guided by the longing to remember or forget. By its very nature memory is moral, connected with the mind and the body, but at the same time it is unbelievably unreliable ... memory is not static.' (Crane 2000: 1–2.) The key words pointed out here – activity, personality, morality – are key words that accompanied the raising to the pedestal of new models of time, such as circulating time, and valuation of subjective time in a very different way.

The above time models can be seen also in museum space – whether in linear, timeless, cyclic or circulatory museum exhibitions. The above-mentioned types have changed their positions throughout history, blending with each other – changes in the treatment of time constitute one of the most important reasons for the revolutions that have taken place in the exposition policy of museums.

## **Linear exposition**

Linear treatment of time can be regarded as a human construction that is fundamentally contrasted to the cyclicity of nature. The linear time concept is connected with the subjectivity of the 'I', the rise of self-consciousness and stability of life in Renaissance culture. Rising individualism established a certain superiority of time, so that time began to appear to man as a flexible means, as an object.

This change in principle is connected with the replacement of Platonic generalisation with Aristotelian individuality around the 14th century. In fact, Aristotle had laid the foundation for the western linear treatment of time, defining the past, the present and the future as different times. For Aristotle, time was a clearly physical quantity, something that was always in motion. Thomas Aquinas took Aristotle's ideas and blended them into medieval theology. Through him the idea of the Greeks that time is the measure of movement, i.e. that time is a subjective and not an objective phenomenon, reached the masses.

The mechanical clock, which came into use in the 14th century, also became an important stimulus for the rise of the linear treatment of time. The timepiece, such a common instrument today, led to the regularity of time and its social use, as well as to the gradual triumph of the linear treatment of time. Time came to be treated as something controlled by man – it is either a natural reality in the Cartesian sense or a subjective form of human perception as Immanuel Kant defined it. The tendency of the human hand to give a divine dimension to constantly flowing time can best be observed in heritage culture. In fact, the basis of the linear treatment of time of the Age of the Enlightenment is the understanding of man as the crown of nature.

The linear treatment of time received its new justification in the Age of the Enlightenment, together with the birth of rationalism. The philosophy of the Enlightenment postulated a belief in the inevitability of human progress and the power of science and technology, which permits man to gain control of both himself and society as a whole. In modern terms, it was the postulation of the Christian idea that time moves in a linear fashion from the past into the present, containing everything that has been (Viikari 1995: 357). The perception of the integrity of history, peculiar to the Age of the Enlightenment, rationalism and the Modernist desire for progress, also constituted the ideological basis of the museum model that developed throughout the 19th century. Modernism became a discourse where 'the present continues to separate from the past in

the shape of constant renewal' (Habermas 1989: 48), defining clear boundary lines between the past and the future, through a constant process of renewal. Modernist ideology has given to museum expositions their most characteristic face – linearity.

The linear exposition can be best observed in state history museums, starting from their rise in the 19th century to examples of Soviet museums in the 20th century. Linear history is characterised by its large scale, comprehensiveness and emphasis on long periods chronologically following each other. That attitude is the basis of most large historical presentations. In that context, the museum is the most immediate bearer and keeper of social memory.

By means of the linear treatment of time, the museum displays history in its integrity, as the story of a society in which movements, states and ideologies play a role. According to that world-view, the world is like an integral irrefutable movement. There is no wish or need to bring in major key individuals, because it is the Great Narrative that is important. In the museum of a linear model of time, man as an individual has no independent role or crucial importance; the leaders of a state, party or movement or the presentation of great creators are impersonal by nature. Instead of flesh-and-blood personalities, there are schematic figures playing a game in some larger system. Like time, mankind is also depersonalised and above its usual course.

In the case of the linear museum model, there is a clear contradiction between the viewer and the viewed, the Cartesian subject and the object. The solution, in which the exposition is on one side and the viewer on the other, is vividly illustrated by one-way communication. This is a play on oppositions, which gives the viewer only the role of the passive receiver of predetermined truth. It is moralising, objective and pedantic truth. Such an aspiration for objective history is based on 19th century principles of historical science, above all on attempts to 'write' in the museum room history, in keeping with the Rankean principle 'as it has actually been' (*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*).

It is in the nature of the museum with a linear treatment of time to be systematic and didactic. Johann Wolfgang Goethe described the museum as 'an eternal spring of pure knowledge to the youth; a strengthener of sensibility and good principles to the man, and wholesome for everyone' (McClellan 2002: 47). It is a model that has the above aims and lacks intrigue. Problems have been replaced by postulated knowledge. Instead of questions, there are statements. For these

reasons, that type of museum can be relatively easily interpreted as the puppet of ideology or a cemetery of old things, and often quite justifiably so.

Letters and numbers, definitions and statistics are important in the linear museum. In that space, history is a science of facts and only a recorded past. Verbality is the keyword that carries one of the most important ideas of the linear museum – the linear museum is verbal by nature. The museum approaches the viewer from the position of the word, not the picture. Visuality and the focus on objects springing from it substantially occupy a secondary position here, although they firmly exist. For that reason, only material culture is seen as being of any value, and no room is found for non-material culture. In the linear space, speech is in categories of the 19th century bourgeois culture, in which Christianity and Enlightenment intermingle – both being cultures based on the word. Verbality is also the reason why, in the present age, focused on pictures, it is difficult to enjoy museums of that type.

What then is the linear course of time in a museum environment? In addition to its focus being on society, verbality and its postulating nature, it is also characterised by clear classifications and a display of historical progress.

Systems form the basis of the world perception of the Modernist man. In the museum context, the classification system of the Swedish naturalist Carl von Linné could be considered one of the most influential ones. Recalling the importance of natural science in the context of 17th–18th century science, it is not difficult to understand why several ideas and renewals of principle sprang from science and were adopted by other branches of learning, such as art history. It is from there that we have the desire for classification. Side by side with systematisation (which will be dwelt upon at length in the section on the cyclic exposition), it is perhaps more important to emphasise the idea of progress in that context. The Darwinian theory of evolution, the fundamental basis of which is the struggle for survival and through it gradual improvement and adaptation, is perhaps the purest carrier of the ideology of development. It can be illustrated by means of a line leading to a more developed, stronger and more resistant species. This belief gives us the power to move on towards a brighter future and justifies methods created for that development. We all want to live in a better future. 'Insofar as museums are social institutions dedicated to producing a better life here on earth (rather than an afterlife in heaven) and have proven themselves adaptable to contingent historical circumstances and shifting visions of what constitutes a better future,

we should think of them also as utopian institutions.’ (McClellan 2002: 46.) This is the supreme ideal of the liberal Modernist museum.

In the linear treatment of time, the time is finally past – time that will never return. It alienates people from their past, and in the process also from their heritage, traditions, and cultural and political systems. Such distancing is partly expressed by trust in the specialist (including the museum), a trust that a consumer has in a professional who produces representations of the past (Walsh 2001: 3).

The desire for progress is genuinely expressed in history museums connected with the rise of nationalism in the 19th century. The rise of nationalism, as well as the birth of new states, required history to support it. On the basis of that idea, state history museums were established, the aim of which was presentation of the national history of the new state in a linear progression from the beginning of time until the present day, emphasising its linear passage from the dusk of the past towards a bright future. Such linearity can perhaps be observed most clearly in Soviet museum expositions, where the desire for progress is manifested as an irrefutable fate awaiting us. On the other hand, it also provides a justification for evaluations of other social orders, where the same bright present and the imminent future provide the opportunity to create a hierarchy of cultures, in which some cultures are ‘more developed’ than others. According to Donald Preziosi, by the middle of the 19th century, museum types had come into existence, of which ‘One is the *temple of art*, which is to say the *shrine of and for the self*, intended to “cure” (i.e. discipline) individuals, and transform them into citizen-subjects of the nation-state or members of the Folk...’ or traits that are characteristic of the above linear museum type. ‘The other is the *exposition* or expo, the *shrine of the object*, the sacred fetish, which was intended to transform citizen-subjects into consumers.’ (Preziosi 2002: 39.) A sanctified cult of objects is the form of expression of the next type of museum exposition.

### Timeless exposition

One of the main postulates of the whole thinking about museums is the desire for timelessness or eternity. Defining the notion of eternity, we could use the words of Jorge Luis Borges, ‘eternity ... is not the mechanical sum of the past, the present and the future. It is something simpler and more magical; it is the simultaneousness of these times’ (Borges 2004: 354). Museum space contains the yearning to create a vacuum in which there is no constant inevitability of



the movement of time. In that context, the museum is like a temple of time, a conservator of the past and presenter of eternity. The museum is the modern God that saves things from destruction. Timelessness, aspiration for absolute time, sanctifies the object and puts it in the most important place. Everything else is secondary. It is the most powerful manifestation of the focus on the work – the eternal sublime work of art.

Timeless exposition has been the most often implemented in 20th century art museums, which hallowed the material displayed. Things, or to be more precise, things and their myths, served as the basis for the exposition concept. A historical document is turned into a monument. The monument, however, is based on materiality. It is via the valuation of matter that time is stopped – eternalised. For that reason, materiality is the most important value category in this context. For one of the pillars of the self-determination of the Modernist man is his self-determination through materiality.

It is the creation of empty space that forms the background for superhumanly sublime art. The museum as a pure sacral space that serves something higher – original objects, original works of art, the best part of mankind's heritage: a museum item as a relic, art as something higher than man.

Such museum space radiates eternity – there are no vain references to modern time, no nervous pulse of time; the space is above it all, a white box isolated from society, the *musée clinique*. The sanctity that has developed on the basis of such a time concept has created the idea of the museum as an institution alienated from life. Such an empty space, with a few isolated, best signs of human creation bearing the sign of genius, springs from Kantian aesthetics, where aesthetic enjoyment and beauty are the aim and function of art.

We can actually see a similar aspiration for the creation of timelessness in a totally different type of museum, the personal museum, where a person is presented as a hero. In the personal museums of different artists, writers, war heroes and the public, we can see an attempt to create a total environment, which bears the myth of eternal life. Although the man himself is dead, the memory of him lives on. Like Christ, that creator has come to eternal life through life and death, the eternal museum room being its expression. This is also the reason why it is difficult for such museums to change – they simply do not have a reason to.

## Cyclic exposition

The cyclic time concept can be observed relatively clearly in the context of museums: it is a division in accordance with different cultures, schools and periods – a grouping of the surviving past by certain clear substantial or formal common features. Such a solution can often be seen in the case of exhibitions of 20th century art and applied art museums, as well as in ethnographic, open-air and also natural history museums. The exposition is divided into cycles, where each of them forms a relatively independent whole. In different cycles, time can circulate on its own, being similar to the modern hypertext; in that space-time there is no progress in time, only a parallelism of time (in the case of art museums, the chronological system is often added to the cyclic treatment). Instead of a large historical narrative, history composed of smaller fragments is often presented.

There can be numerous forms of cyclicism, either thematic, taxonomical or school system in the case of open-air, natural history or art museums. All these presentations are based on an intrinsic order, of which Carl von Linné's classification theory can be regarded as one of its most important bases.

The foundation of Linné's theory was the classification of all living nature into groups, on the basis of which it was possible to emphasise the similarity of certain species and to compare differences. In the shadow of that extremely influential theory, history, too, is reflected as classification, and art history as a closed system based on types or schools. What cannot be accommodated in these frames remains out of the entire art history discourse, in practice.

Johann Joachim Winckelmann postulated the school approach for use in art history. By his *History of Ancient Art* (*Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, 1764) he became the first to classify works of art, on Greek examples, into groups based on time, and style into the archaic, the Classical and the Hellenistic periods. For the first time, we can see such art history based on schools in museum expositions in Belvedere, the palace of the Austrian Emperor Joseph II, in 1778, where the artistic adviser Christian von Mechel arranged the ruler's art collection according to the new classification system (Bazin 1967: 159). Schools became dominant in the exposition policy only at the end of the 19th century, and since then art history has mostly been presented on the principle of the cyclic presentation system. Such a classification system can often be seen even today in natural history museums, where the intention is to present the organic world divided in the taxonomical language, divided first into large blocks such as air,

ground and water, the polar, the temperate and the tropical zones, or some other characteristic.

Division of the exposition into groups creates a substantially new language to understand the past. The aim of the presentation is to give an insight into, not an overview of, the theme, by means of the most characteristic fragments. These could be either the exposition of a history museum that is clearly divided into thematic blocks, natural history divided into classes and species, the ethnographic or ethnological museum, where we can see different countries' cultures in friendly coexistence, or the open-air museum, whose structure springs from the collection of different regions' cultures in one museum space.

The cyclic time concept in the museum environment represents a model where groups, schools or cycles occur side by side, although they often lack a direct linear connection. We could also stress the hierarchical structure, as more relevance is given to some of the 'cycles' than to others.

If the exposition is rather traditional, in the case of a solution where it is divided into cycles according to taxons or schools, then the case of an exhibition divided into thematic cycle narratives plays an important role, with the aim of creating a visual illusion. In that case, the whole substantial material is at the service of the narrative, to which a large proportion of secondary material is added. Often the illusion is actually created by means of secondary material, and therefore the exposition is mostly relatively emotional. As for the museum items, they are put into context, laying the emphasis on their meaning and original role.

As it is possible to speak of 'the poetry of history' in modern historical science, so it is also becoming possible to speak of the poetry of the presentation of history, the bearers of which are thematic museums and, even more so, museological institutions bearing a living tradition.

### **Circulating exposition**

According to Aristotle, time is always both beginning and ending. 'The now is the beginning and end of time, although not of the same time, but the end of past time and the beginning of future time; time is like a circle – convex and concave in one and the same thing, as time, too is always both beginning and ending.' (Annus 2002: 181.) In the context of museums, circulating time focuses on the revitalisation of heritage. While in the case of all other models we had to deal with a finished past, in this context heritage is vital and it can, in fact must, be

interpreted and reproduced. The presumption of such a concept is acceptance of the subjectivity and selectivity of history, emphasising the moralist-educational aspect of the past and recognition of the creative process as an important part of preservation. The indirect ideological foundation is acceptance of the Platonic focus on the idea, which provides the justification to keep and re-create the heritage of the past. References to such an approach are also found in the Eastern cultural space. Reproduction of culture, either on the substantial (keeping alive a cultural tradition) or formal (copies) platform, is justified via the concept of the circulation of time. The value of time is not in its passage back into the past, but in the present, the current moment. After all, fragmentation of time is characteristic of the post-Modernist treatment of time, the disappearance of the perception of time that causes life in the endless present and in endless changing (Jameson 1992: 125).

Such an approach also prepares the ground for the creation of an extremely personal or biased vision of the past, as often only that which is pleasant or attractive is re-created. Living culture and living traditions are preserved in today's world by modern open-air museums, ecological museums, and theme parks, as well as science museums or information centres. The 'progressive' world fairs, directed at the new technical and cultural achievements from the middle of the 19th to the beginning of the 20th centuries, significantly influenced the development of ideas about museums. Research centres, from where important ideas were taken over for traditional museums, became important influencers in the 1960s and 1970s. This gave the impetus for the modernisation and reorganisation of museums and, most importantly in this context, a basis for the introduction of a different treatment of time into the museum environment.

The recent past, the modern day, visions of the future, and parallels between different ages are vigorously brought into the museum space, which had previously been centred on the past. Often such a solution brings to the fore strong moralistic traits, on the principle that 'we must touch time by hand, then we learn to understand it', although they may sometimes feel strange (largely in connection with the 'pedagogical' museum idea). The ideological basis is communication and search for meanings, not their postulation. In other words, 'the aim of the post-Modernist museum is to teach how to cope with information. It is reminiscent of the times of the early museum when it was still called the inventory of the world.' (Ernst 2000: 18.)

A directly 'sustainable culture', the ecological museum, also developed side by side with vigorous cultural centres and renewal-minded open-air museums. In the context of open-air and ecological museums, it is possible to speak of going out of the (museum) room, about the integrated room, or the moving room. Non-material heritage, continuation of traditions, 'living' culture, occupies an important place. People can move in time and bring to life cultural traditions. Side by side with original objects many new things are used to bring alive the past. In that context, values created during those times are not mummified, but circulate.

Why does the reproduction of culture occupy such an important place in this concept? As a justification, we can use the cultural vision of Walter Benjamin, from his well-known article, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935/1936). According to Benjamin the heart of tradition is repetition and the most developed type of repetition is the ritual. With a change in the society, the cultural value also became exposition value, which today is regarded as independent art. The existence of an aura provides the reason for the ritual, as we have already seen in the analysis of the timeless exposition. The aura depends on the existence of tradition and uniqueness of the object (Mattick 2003: 94; see also Benjamin 2000: 323–326). The basis of the Modernist society, however, is capitalist mass production and production of all the culture functions in the same way. From this we can draw important conclusions. In the desire for rituality, it is possible to show, instead of a single unique object, even mass production, that is, everyday culture that was for a long time not regarded as valuable enough to exhibit, and secondly it is possible also to use analogues, 'simulacra', of things made in the past (Walsh 2001: 56). In the sense of the 20th century, a copy is a duplicate lacking an auratic field. But the object in its physical form is there and the traditional ritual can take place – fictitiously, in a museum space, for participants who lay importance on the process itself, not on its means.

Benjamin also speaks of photography in his article, saying that photography no longer satisfies the selected few, but only the masses, thus reflecting the type of experience echoing social changes triggered by technical development. In fact, photography can be effectively used for the reproduction of culture – it is considerably more accessible and people can read it more easily (Benjamin 2000: 327–329). One of the most influential art ideologists of the French cultural space of the 1930s, André Malraux, created the concept of the *musée imaginaire*, based on

photography (a museum without walls), which, side by side with the Modernist vision of art, underlined the idea of the mass popularisation and multiplication of art. The photograph is modern reproductive graphic art or a gypsum figure that carries in itself the appreciable contents of culture and reaches every consumer of culture. Such was the circulation of the Modernist cultural heritage in the mid-20th century, which made it possible for it to come forward as an explosion in the last decades of the 20th century.

The basis of the circulating exposition is recognition of the idea over the materiality and use of history in the name of preserving it – whether in the form of modern interpretation, material reproduction or experiential processuality. Experientialism and the blotting out of temporal boundaries are also today's 'in words' on the heritage landscape, in more general terms, and in their extreme forms these 'in words' are manifested in hyper-real kitsch-smacking theme parks (Eco 2001: 400–410).

### **Face of the museum**

The described models of time in the expositions of history and art museums are the author's interpretations of the given theme, which hopefully provides a way to understand the museum landscape in today's society. The described types characterise possibilities of the interpretation of time in museum space, but also a wider relationship to heritage through the past two centuries, whether it is their constructive, deconstructive or reconstructive nature: the constructive reason that characterised the century of museums, as the 19th century has been aptly called (Bazin 1967: 193); the sublimity of heritage, by which heritage has been awarded in the 20th century; the analysing and dissecting second half of the century, or the desire to reconstruct the history one is dealing with on the threshold of the 21st century. These different faces have sprung from different attitudes to heritage culture, but even more from a different attitude to time and history: time as an inevitability moving in a linear way, time as a construction consisting of pieces, or time as a continuously circulating idea.

The ambition of the 19th century museum was to be a research institution, which with its reason-based stock of knowledge helped guide mankind from the past into a better future; the museum of the 20th century, on the contrary, laid the emphasis on absolute categories established by canons of Modernism, which must have felt eternal, at least then, and which at the end of the 20th century

were realised in a sharp and often very painful return to the present – to spheres more earthly than ever before. In accordance with different treatments of time, the appearance of museum expositions is different; it is either more creative or more mimetic, linked either with actual contemporary problems or connected with values appreciated in the past – either temporal or timeless.

Museum expositions can be analysed on the basis of different concepts of time by bringing out their regularities and similarities, either in substantial or formal terms. It is from the differences in the time concepts that differences in the explanation of history, interpretation and use of historical material derive.

Similarities between different museum types in the exposition of time are clearly visible, regardless of whether they apply to the aspiration to linearity of the 19th–20th century history museums, the timelessness or school concept of 20th century art museums, the cyclic treatment of time of ethnographic and open-air museums, or the circulating time story of the latter, as well as of ecological and science museums. These firmly established exposition concepts constitute one of the reasons for the relative traditionalism and conservatism of museums. The answer to the question of how to present time gives the museum its appearance and niche. It is a matter of putting it into practice.

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