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Wolfgang Ernst...*Arsenals of Memory*...MM 8#1...*English*

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## Beyond the Museums

There are stores, storerooms and depots which certainly do not run under the name 'museum', becoming so explicit and amounting to nothing. Nevertheless and, as is the intention/view of this title -- they fulfil museum-related functions *avant la lettre*, forming, so-to-speak, the archi(ve)museum a priori of the museum's conceivability. Now having become an institution and as such genealogically at an end, the museum, that classical terminal for parcel post from the history of art and culture, must now think anew with respect to ageing storage techniques i.e. it must remove its barriers and become a flow-through and transformer station if it is not for its part to fall victim to museum-like crystallisation. Recycling instead of finality: the linearity of product -- consumption -- waste -- deposit/rubbish and/or museum, as expounded by Michael Thompson, is replaced by the post-historic cycle of product -- use -- separation -- recycling -- secondary product. ([Note\\_1](#)) The questioning of the function of the museum therefore takes place on the basis of very real challenges forcing the museum to decode itself anew. Archaeology has up to now snatched cultural-historical values from the soil and supplied them to the museum, but nowadays it is carrying out 'waste-archaeology' of the present in real-time. ([Note\\_2](#)) 'Tradition' and 'conservation', two classical areas of responsibility for the museum are now also called 'long-standing polluters'. At the same time, in the process of an increased awareness of nature, the same is threatening to itself become a museum reservation.



The real element of the consumption economy stipulates: the length of storage is becoming increasingly more short-term; the supply system of the clothing firm of Benetton is trying to virtually programme its storage times to zero by the supply-demand-relationship aiming at real-time. As James Stirling has recently shown in a factory building near Kassel, computer-controlled warehouses are making out of real sheds that which the PC is completing in the microcosm: *memory*. Here, too, organisation and service takes place according to the principle of random access; the museum has been the place of Read Only Memory for long enough. The anagram says it: I am writing out this text from ROM, the place of the long-term memory stage-managed by the imperial or religious side, the memory which was continually being defeated by forgetting, as the ruins know, that ironic commentary of literal and material clusters of significants continually saying RAM. History thus has no longer a canonical place; bequeathels and further dispatches are forever taking a stand. To the extent to which events are no longer being put into the archives or being intermediately stored but are becoming direct, we also witness the expiring of that additional element of museums, that *différance*, which indeed legitimises

the medium, the `mediator' museum: *The museumising of the world intends to spread the basic thought that everything happens just as if everything had already happened*, as Henri Pierre Jeudy indicates. *Yet the electronic element is not the death sentence of the imaginary memory. It bases the representation of storage on the flawless use of the stored information without, however, excluding play. Are these amazing means merely aimed at storing information? Memory itself is realised by means of counter-information, disinformation. In the endless manipulation of the recollected elements, it is interwoven with narratives and images. Accumulation represents no obstacle at all for all these movements of the mind.* ([Note\\_3](#)) The museum's demand is now pointing the way to mobilising the accumulation of the depots, making it publicly accessible and also recycling stored stocks in the exhibition area. The memory, the basis (store) of the museum is liquefying. The museum's depot is therefore increasingly reflecting the switching technique of its successor media.



As the real space of the museum has nowadays lost its privilege of being the most advanced storage medium in matters of cultural and image memory i.e. a function as the `mass medium' of the 19th century, it must now reconsider its role. In such a way it is becoming the place of reflection on its own successor technologies. ([Note\\_4](#))

The museum is transforming from the final storage place to the `interim store' ([Note\\_5](#)), analogous to the language of nuclear disposal technology. Norbert Kottmann and Adrian Schoormans also arranged an art exhibition under this name on 18th May 1990 in Düsseldorf's Hildebrandtstraße: one room (84 m<sup>2</sup>), one office (furnished), one shelf (3.15 x 5.6 x 1.1m). The *Container-Museum* conveyed the impression of a stopgap (also with the meaning interim store), just as had been intended by Michael Fehr's early conception for the Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Museum of the History of the Federal Republic of Germany) in Bonn, and which was consciously realised in the Portikus exhibition rooms in Frankfurt.

Museum aesthetics was long since taken hold of by analogous storing technologies. There is the example of the presentation of antiquity in the Museo Gregoriano Profano in the Vatican, namely a structural performance reduced to archaeology. Silence and abstraction in contrast to the continual (art) historical commentary. *L'architettura è presente (...) tutt'altro che neutra, ma nessun dialogo con le opere (...)* as one observer criticises ([Note\\_6](#)), and another however praises (...) *how the unclassical setting makes visible something of a new relationship to antiquity.* ([Note\\_7](#)) Technology, frame i.e. that which Hegel called memory in contrast to recollection. No tempting of the glance by the suggestion of a museographic narrative, no (v)ideology: (...) *Elemente mobili modulari e quindi amorfi, quali tralicci metallici e tubi in ferro, sostengono statue relievi ed epigrafi de risultano evidenziati nel contrasto con le strutture portanti.* ([Note\\_8](#)) A modern quintessence of the binary conception of Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764): *L'attuale sistemazione (...) prevede un'articolazione in parte cronologica, in parte tipologica.* ([Note\\_9](#)) In the middle of this museum there is a storeroom, a mobile metal framework with antique inscriptions fixed according to systematic criteria. The attachment of these to the grille corresponds to the modules for antiquity in the exhibition except that here the objects no longer take a didactic detour via stage-managed rooms but form within a very close space the pages of a transparent book, a palimpsest (as shown by the perspective). Pure register, the archives, the index:

*Le musée comme banque de données* (Jean Louis Déotte). History as an orientation aid for the general public is superfluous when the aesthetics of the experts' systems of archaeology is taken for granted as information studies for the museum visitor familiar with the computer.



In the age of late capitalism, industrial regions are affected by this in a two-fold manner: in the course of the petering out of their traditional work base (e.g. coal/steel), they are at present being transformed into their own industrial museum as a conception of a leisure-time landscape [\(Note\\_10\)](#) -- an attempt at the aesthetic sublimation of the crisis. The West German Ruhr area is affected by this: *For instance: the coal mine of Zollern in Dortmund. An industrial museum has emerged here showing what it once meant 'to mine coal'. It should all be as if the mine were still running, only the dirt is missing and the noise.* [\(Note\\_11\)](#)

However on the other hand the Ruhr area is suffering in very concrete terms from the consequences of industrial disposal difficulties i.e. under the burden of the waste disposal and soil contamination of the last 200 years, and no museum can dispose of this, it can at best build over it.

The true tragic archives are the soil, the industrial fallow land. Andrej Tarkowski's film *Stalker* shows a corresponding 'zone'; in *Der Museumsbesucher* (The museum visitor) by his student Lopuschanski (1989), it has become a museum situated off a waste-covered coast and -- non-accessible as it is -- it provides the magical solution to the great questions. [\(Note\\_12\)](#)

The citizens of Hattingen experienced mixed feelings towards the sell-out i.e. the dismantling of their steel furnace, to China and the simultaneous transformation of the steel works area into an outstanding industrial museum: as a result of the museumising, the town has evaded the question of soil waste management. Here the museum figures as a distraction of attention from the actual industrial legacy i.e. the contaminated soil as a chemical store.

And yet another distraction: the same Ruhr area which now stores its past history and identity under the key word 'Industrial Museum' has, during the course of structural transformation under the keyword 'Technology Parks', become the place of totally different stores, namely those of electronic microchips. These however evade the classical aesthetics of portrayability.

In 1861 a commentary by the British Museum in London presented its function as a post-historical deposit, a case analogical to Noah's Ark: following the disappearance of occidental culture, future visitors from distant lands should be able to find there a representative collection of their past. The Noah's Ark of today is however presented by the video archives. [\(Note\\_13\)](#)



In the age of the disintegration of the terms of space and time by speed (Paul Virilio), of the advancing immaterialising of information and its being caught up by recording systems in real-time, the historical space of the museum becomes a two-fold nostalgic retroeffect. [\(Note 14\)](#) A completely material indication of this is the buying policy of present museums: museums not only commission works of art which no longer take the roundabout route via the private collector or the room of representation, and every-day objects are being bought at the present time in which they are still rubbish, before they fall victim to later museumising i.e. to an increase in value. [\(Note 15\)](#) At the same time the museum is turning into the reservation of comprehensibility in the age of fast images. Born of the enlightenment, it will become its final resting place: that too is called memory. The art-historical and cultural-historical museum whose exhibition always produced an anachronism in that it presented the past in the present, is itself becoming an anachronism, gaining its attractiveness from the deceleration wish of the consumers against the background of the fast ageing of everything new (Jochen Hörisch) -- the museum as the place (of refuge) of delay, the *différance* of perception. *Donner le temps (de la traduction)* [\(Note 16\)](#) : perhaps today there is a final function determination of the medium museum in allowing time, opening up time-spaces in places in which they long ago were lost as a priori because electronic interception is indifferent to this differentiation.

## Beyond the Muses

No more metaphors of memory but aesthetic stores. Works of art are no longer understood as agents of the symbolic but increasingly as forensic bodies, as a reflex of the dispositions of the real. Storing is in itself becoming worthy of depiction when it is a matter of remembering.

Public exhibition rooms as aesthetic places stand in the shadow of locating/hoarding, of those dispositions of political or economic power serving control monitoring. Stores are not the space of art but of the administration of this real element. Jacques Derrida drew attention to the *Depôt légal* in Paris which receives the compulsory copies of every French publication. [\(Note 17\)](#) All discursive knowledge is thus in league with its non-discursive double. The military archives in Freiburg have set up a micro film store in the galleries of coal-mines with photocopies of all relevant administrative and cultural-historical documents of the Federal Republic of Germany. Wolfgang Heinke has, as an artist, responded to this in the form of his *Central microfilm-archives*, once exhibited in the Museum of Photocopying (Mühlheim a.d. Ruhr). The origin of the stores is the memory of the war, the reserve.

A succession of artists have developed a special sensorium for the real, which has always been directed at them through the concept of *ars memoriae* -- namely the pure construction of spaces of recollection. Anselm Kiefer's painting *Deutschlands Geisteshelden* (Germany's spiritual heroes) (1973) is not only a store -- like all art -- but also shows it, and Sigrid Sigurdsson's installation *Vor der Stille* (Before the silence) aims at the museum as a place of forgetting -- a shelf, the archives, the pure depot. What else was that *museion* in Alexandria which Luciano Canfora had traced back as *Die verschwundene Bibliothek* (The lost library) down to the burial chamber of Ramses II? All art is testamentary. As Sigurdsson says: every museum observer has his own archives and those of the others. [\(Note 18\)](#)

Media determine the situation (Friedrich A. Kittler) and long ago expropriated the autonomous view (what else is the Critical Theory). Every video camera opens up latent photo archives, and does the camera indeed ever forget what it has exposed? *The true image of the past flashes past* wrote Walter Benjamin in his essay *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (On the concept of history). *The past*, according to Benjamin, *can only be recorded as an image which simply flashes through one's mind at the moment*

of its discernibility never to be seen again. The fleetingness of the past (passer/passé) is caught up by video aesthetics; as a consequence of this aesthetics, historical exhibitions present their material no longer in a monumental but in a fleeting manner. ([Note\\_19](#)) Electronic points of light on the screen: the fleetingness of these images deregulates the stability of any interpretation for which the museum provided monumental guarantee.



In view of the inability of classical art to think in terms of the presence of the past in the present other than as 'memory', the qualities of the media become involved, that which it alone sees (video): the 'blind' spot of all historical visions, its technical disposition. For history (histoires) are that which distracts from the practice of storing. The real, however, exercises a rhythmic veto even towards narration. For a store (storing) is that of which my text processing programme is continually reminding me. If the art project store is *an attempt at the depictability of history/histoires*, it is taking place at this point.

*L'archive naît du désordre* (Arlette Farge). That disorder of images which once characterised the sales rooms, artists' studios and depots of old galleries makes a new sense of the perspective of the chaos-theory. The concept of entropy as the second law of thermodynamics has found its way into physics, as the title of a novella by Thomas Pynchon it finds its way into post-modern literature -- it revolves around the dis/information which can be read from New York's waste. Under the roof of a deserted warehouse on the Quai de la Seine, the studio of the Parisian photo-caster Pascal Kern represented an interim step up to the blaze -- forming the transition between art and archives. In the words of the art critic Bernard Mercardé on Kern's *Fictions colorées: Il règne comme un désordre dans les images que nous donne à voir Pascal Kern, un désordre d'objets, de matières, de références, à l'image de l'environnement dans lequel ce dernier vit et travaille (...). Son atelier, en effet, conserve dans la moindre de ses détails le souvenir d'errances, de dérives dans ces lieux de déréliction que sont les terrains vagues, les maisons et les fabriques abandonnées (...). Très vite, cependant, on sâperçoit que ce désordre est très organisé, comme est organisée l'encyclopédie citée par Borges (...). Le monde de Pascal Kern, de la même façon, constitue une curieuse taxonomie (...) selon une logique qui n'avait rien d'aristotélien: le bureau, l'atelier, les catalogues typographiques, les films de voyages, la bibliothèque, les livres de compte, les réclames (...)* ([Note\\_20](#))

The depot, the store, the archives were up to now architectonically stipulated; its objects understood the tradition of the past in the room. The archi(ve)texture of electronic space (fictions colorées, in fact) now cope with the difficulties of conventional (i.e. handed down) images by means of restructuring. It is not only the place where new images are invented but the emporium, the transformer station of that which has been found. The other side of inventio -- that which ancient rhetoric technology knew about: pure finding. The déjà-vu element is at stake; Christian Boltanski once installed it as *Réserves*, another time as *Les Suisses morts*, as was recently the case in Lausanne.

For stores also mean the delaying of death. When Boltanski piles up metal boxes with photos of the deceased to which loudspeakers murmur the names of the dead, we have gone from the space of the narrative directly into that of counting, of computation. ([Note\\_21](#)) That which occurs as an analogy is decided upon digitally i.e. in that space escaping from figurative depiction. The consideration of

depictability of which Sigmund Freud spoke for the humane psyche is that which inhibits us in thinking in terms of store.

Perhaps there is indeed a place which ruthlessly confronts us with it: Yad Vashem near Jerusalem. Here, to the accompaniment of the no less narrating(counting) rhythm of the naming of names through loudspeakers in the memorial of the children's holocaust, even the clarity of the photos of the dead recedes as a result of the pure candlelight, reflected thousand-fold. It is indeed hardly possible for history/histoires to deal with the National Socialist crime of having reduced human life to numbers in concentration camps until nothing was left of them but numbers, if not on its part by means of narration/counting: the hall of names stores in alphabetical order commemorative sheets with data on the dead, three million up to now. The monstrous project of the National Socialists to extinguish the memory of European Jewism is annulled in that field which is typical: that of administration. The hall of names consists of archives and is also presented as a store. ([Note\\_22](#)) Yad Vashem means nothing else: *Even unto them will I give in my house and within my walls a place and name* (Isaiah, chapter 56, verse 5). On the 15th August 1953 this name became law by the unanimous resolution of the Israelian Knesset, law 5713. Yet another number, storable.

translation [ANN THURSFIELD](#)

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Note\_1 See the catalogue of the Frankfurt Werkbund exhibition *Ex und hopp. Das Prinzip Wegwerf. Eine Bilanz mit Verlusten* (The principle of throw-away. A balance with losses), published by Ot Hoffmann, 1989. Accordingly also the request for entries to the design competition *Küche 2000 -- die intelligente Rohstoffquelle* (Kitchen 2000 -- the intelligent source of raw material) by the Gesellschaft für Kunst und Gestaltung (Society for Art and Design), Bonn (1989), 5 [Go Back Again](#)

Note\_2 Italo Calvino describes this scenario in *Unsichtbare Städte* (Invisible Cities)..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_3 `Die Musealisierung der Welt oder Die Erinnerung des Gegenwärtigen' (The museumising of the world or the memory of the present) in *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, issue 67/68, year 18 (1987), topic `Kultargesellschaft', 30..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_4 As the museum director of the Karl-Ernst-Osthaus-Museum in Hagen, Michael Fehr has not only developed this thought but also put it into practice within the framework of his exhibition and book series *Museum der Museen* (Museum of the museums)..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_5 Thomas A. Seboek put the question about the store as a semiotic challenge: How can a nuclear depot be described as such for readers who are no longer familiar with our alphanumeric code? `Pandora's Box: How and Why to Communicate 10.000 Years into the Future', in: Marshall Blonsky (publisher), *On signs*, Baltimore 1985, 448-466..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_6 The architecture is present (...) is anything but neutral, but without any dialogue with the works (...) Marco Fano and Clementina Panella, `Note sul nuovo assetto dei Musei Lateranensi al Vaticano', in *Dialoghi die Archeologia*, 7 (1973), 422-439. Here according to: F. Mancinelle and F. Roncalli, `Il Trasferimento delle Raccolte Lateranensi al Vaticano', in: *Bolletino dei Monumenti e Musei Pontifici I.1*, 1977, 19 - 32 (= Rendiconti della Pont. Acc. Rom. d'Arch. 48, 1975/76, 401- 415), here: 415..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_7 Karl Schefold, `Das neue Museum im Vatikan' (The new museum in the Vatican), in: *Antike Kunst*, supplement 9 (On Greek art), Basel 1973, 85 - 93..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_8 (...) Mobile modular elements accordingly shapeless such as metal grille works and iron pipes support statues, reliefs and epigraphs which are set off against the weight-bearing structure. See above, Note 6, 415..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_9 (1764): The present arrangement (...) allows for a partly chronological and partly typological articulation. Paolo Liverani, 'Musei Gregoriano Profano e Pio Cristiano', in: *AAVV, Condotte nei Restauri*, Rome 1992, 189 - 192, here: 189..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_10 See Hermann Glaser, 'Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert und präsentiert man Industriekultur?' (What is industrial culture and to what end is it studied and presented?), in *Museumskunde* 49, issue 3 (1984)..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_11 As was expressed in Anja Kempe's radio-feature on 22nd April 1990 in WDR 3: *Der Himmel ist blau, der Eintritt frei. Eine Region wird zum Museum. Eine Führung durch das Ruhrgebiet* (The sky is blue, entry free. A region becomes a museum. A guided tour through the Ruhr area)..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_12 Film review in: *Film und Fernsehen* 1/1990, 26..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_13 See W.E., 'ArchiVideo', in: *Querspur. Zwischen Intimität und radikaler Entblößung* (Between intimacy and radical exposure), catalogue on the video festival of the same name in Linz, May 1990, 25ff..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_14 Captivated on video, the memory of history also becomes shorter: see Albert d'Haenens, 'Eine neue Kultur begründen! Gefahren und Chancen an der Schwelle des elektronischen Zeitalters' (Found a new culture! Dangers and chances on the threshold of the electronic age), in: Jörn Rüsen and others (publishers), *Geschichte sehen. Beiträge zur Ästhetik historischer Museen* (Contributions to the aesthetics of historical museums), Pfaffenweiler (Centaurus) 1988, 65 - 67..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_15 Michael Fehr, 'Müllhalde oder Museum: Endstationen in der Industriegesellschaft' (Rubbish dump or museum: ends of the line in industrial society), in: the same/Stefan Grohé (publisher), *Geschichte -- Bild -- Museum: zur Darstellung von Geschichte im Museum*, Cologne 1989, 182-198..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_16 Title of the contribution by Jacques Derrida in: G. Christoph Tholen/Michael O. Scholl (publisher), *Zeit-Zeichen, Aufschübe und Interferenzen zwischen Endzeit und Echtzeit* (Signs of the time, delays and interferences between the last days and real-time), Weinheim 1990..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_17 Jacques Derrida, 'Titel (noch zu bestimmen)' (Title (still to be determined)), in: Friedrich A. Kittler, *Austreibung des Geistes aus den Geisteswissenschaften. Programme des Post-Strukturalismus*, Paderborn/Vienna/ Munich 1975, 37, Note 8..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_18 According to Michael Fehr, 'Sigrid Sigurdssons Vor der Stille -- Kunst als 'Bewußtsein' von Geschichte' (Sigrid Sigurdsson's Vor der Stille -- art as the 'conscience' of history), in the exhibition catalogue of the same name, Karl-Ernst- Osthaus Museum Hagen (1989)..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_19 For example, in the exhibition *Die ersten 100 Jahre. Österreichische Sozialdemokratie 1888-1988* (The first 100 years. Austrian social democracy 1888-1988) in Vienna's Gasometer (Simmering). See in particular the catalogue contribution by Helene Maimann *Das wahre Bild der Vergangenheit* (The true picture of the past)..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_20 Something like disorder prevails in the images which Pascal Kern shows us, a confusion of objects, matter, references equal to the surroundings in which he lives and works (...). His studio does,

indeed, retain down to the final detail the recollection of roaming around, drifting away to places of desolateness such as empty grounds, deserted houses or factories (...). However one notices very quickly that this disorder is based on order just as the encyclopaedia of which Borges speaks is ordered (...) In the same way Pascal Kern's world depicts a strange taxonomy (...) according to a logic which has nothing to do with anything Aristotelian: the desk, the studio, the typographic catalogues, the travel films, the libraries, the accounts, the advertising (...). Catalogue for the exhibition *Fictions Colorées* Galerie Zabriskie, Paris, September 1985..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_21 See exhibition review 'Gestapelter Tod'(Piled up death) in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper of 29. March 1993, 33 (Sige 'E.N.')..[Go Back Again](#)

Note\_22 At this point I should like to thank the 'Deutsch- Israelische Stiftung für wissenschaftliche Forschung und Entwicklung' (German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development) which, within the framework of the research project *Nationalism and the molding of sacred space and time*, made possible the autopsy of this situation..[Go Back Again](#)

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