

MAUD GUICHARD-MARNEUR

The 'Narrative' Museum as a 'Memory' Machine. The Case of the Schindler Factory Museum, Kraków, Poland

I propose to disseminate the findings of the research I have undertaken for a book chapter on museums of communism in post-communist East-Central Europe, commissioned by the Central European University, Budapest. I consider museums as knots of complex interactions between history and memory. Museum narratives both reflect and participate in the shaping of what Anderson terms 'imagined communities'. The Schindler Factory Museum opened in Cracow, Poland, in June 2010. As a 'narrative' museum (i.e. story based rather than object based), it addresses the history of World Two in Poland. Within this time span, it focuses most particularly on the lives and daily struggle of the inhabitants of Cracow. The museum is located in a significant building which formerly housed the administration of the enamel factory owned by the German, and at times Nazi sympathiser, Oskar Schindler, who is also known to have saved Jewish lives. Today, people queue to visit it.

I will show how the museum narrative developed at the Schindler Factory Museum epitomizes the political and societal construction of grand national narratives at stake in contemporary Poland, and as such, how the museum historical narrative is an attempt at forging contemporary memory. The approach is two-fold: Using Bal's approach on narratology, I will critically assess how the historical narrative at play in the museum functions on different levels, an interlink of what Bal calls 'fabulas,' and how they (i.e. the coloured fabulas) interact to address not only national but also transnational history and memory. This is significant because the troubled history of World War Two in Poland has yet not passed and the museum narrative is also a way, it is argued, to tackle the fact that Auschwitz, located 80 km from Cracow was made possible in Poland. With Ankersmit's historical representation in the background, I will apply De Groot's paradigm of 'reality history' and Hartog's notion of 'presentism;' to critically investigate the museum's museography and its 'representation of reality.' The museography relies heavily on true to life reconstructions, an economy of symbols, aestheticism and apparent multiple voices. Therefore, I will examine how the museified historical narrative functions and plays within the [history-memory/visitor experience-memory] inter-relations. This analysis will shed some light on how the traditional history museum can turn into a memory machine for today's and tomorrow's visitors, both Poles and foreigners. This research has been undertaken as part of my PhD Fellowship at the University of Copenhagen and whilst doing extended field work in Krakow, Poland.

Maud Guichard-Marneur, PhD Fellow, Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen, maud@hum.ku.dk or maudguichard@gmail.com