

CALL FOR PAPERS

Thinking Places: museum, library, theatre...

International Symposium

20-22 June 2018

Paris

Is it possible, while maintaining the momentum of Pierre Nora's studies on *Sites of Memory* (*Les lieux de mémoire*, 1984-87), or Christian Jacob's current researches on *Places of Knowledge* (*Lieux de savoirs*, 2007-2011), to consider particular public places – museums, libraries, theatre, the list is endless – as sites dedicated to the process of thinking, as *places where one thinks*? To what extent, in which ways, and for what purpose might institutions and places strive for stimulating, elaborating, shaping a thinking process? What kind of institutional, architectural, or design devices would such a dedication to the thinking process involve? What professional or artistic issues, limitations, resources, would this impact?

Both the attention given to the « power of placement » (Newhouse, 2005) and the concept of « dispositif » (Mairesse & Hurley, 2012) tend to highlight the importance of the interior layout inside the museum (Davallon, 1992, Duncan & Wallach, 1978 and 1980). It seems thus relevant to describe the exhibition display as a dramatization process, and objects as magnets, drawing attention and setting thoughts in motion (Mouton-Rezzouk, 2016). Museums such as the Ethnographic Museum in Neuchâtel (Switzerland) lead the way in exhibitions aimed to baffle and compel visitors to consider the location and the relationships between the objects and the devices displayed (Gonseth, Hainard & Khaer, 2005). Similarly, many artistic projects aimed at museum display – or museum diversion – intend to cause visitors to reflect on those specific sites. (Putnam, 2001). A survey of those sites concerning temporary exhibition has already been thoroughly conducted in the field of art history (Altshuler, 2008, 2013).

The « Power of Libraries » (Baratin & Jacob, 1996) likewise was built from its interior layout; hence the diversity of architecture and the structuration of display, and whether the library relies on generic classification (Dewey or Otlet), or on specific intention, as found in Warburg (Baratin & Jacob, 1996, Michaud, 1998). Whereas libraries' architecture, much like museums' and theatres', has been a topic of research for a long time (Pevsner, 1976), it is now essential to analyse the interior layout of the library to understand how this « distributed cognition » actually operates (Latour, 2007) while the issue of a knowledge commons overrides the concept of the « third place » (Dujol, 2017, Failla, 2017). The increasing of an extensive cultural offer inside the library (exhibitions, performances, conferences...) may be considered as a dramatization process, in order to elaborate new ways of promoting knowledge appropriation, and to reconsider the access to books and, more broadly, to the cultural and documentary content.

Lately, research that considers theatre as a social event (Duvignaud, 1965) tends to focus on the *venue* (Biet & Triau, 2006, Barbéris & Poirson, 2013, Urrutiaguer, 2014) and, concomitantly, to underscore the venue's ability as a heuristic and critical process (Suutela *et al.*, 2012). Although this theatrical way of thinking (or thought *from* the theatre) is mainly described and analysed in political terms (Hamidi-Kim, 2013, Neveux, 2013, Plana, 2014), it tends to be considered within the field of philosophy, as a theoretical issue (Badiou, 2014, Guénoun *et al.*, 2010, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 2013, Rancière, 2008), and as a key concern for many artists and institutions, such as

Emmanuel Alloa in the Théâtre de Gennevilliers, Alain Badiou and Marie-José Malis in Aubervilliers, Philippe Quesne at the Théâtre des Amandiers in Nanterre, Bérangère Vantusso at the Studio-Théâtre, in Vitry. However, the realm of *thought*, in theatres, exceeds politics and philosophy, and can be considered by itself as a theatre knowledge (Aït-Touati, 2017) or a theatre-thought (Garcin-Marrou, 2017).

Those converging perspectives must now transcend the disciplinary barriers, and it is time to consider more broadly the relationship between the venue and the process of thinking, as museums, libraries, and theatre tend to repurpose themselves as public places devoted to the actual activity of thinking. In an era characterised by global flux, when thought converts into a liquid (Bauman) or a gaseous state (Michaud), is it still possible to remain confident of the ability of the actual physical location (buildings) to offer a haven and a framework for the activity of thinking? Conversely, when sites do pretend to promote the emergence and the unfolding of thinking, what kind of actual process does it refer to, in terms of content, purpose, form, intensity? Is this thought *in situ* specific, or not? How shall we describe it? When precisely does it occur, and from whom? Is it shared, shareable, collaborative, collective? Might it just be another name for didactic pretention, or even for a propaganda agenda? What forms of expression does it enable— when it does? Above all, how can it be induced, deliberately or not, by the place itself? How do the various stakeholders (professionals, users) perceive and imagine this relationship between the intellectual process and the place, and to what kind of architectural models do they refer it to?

This conference takes part in a broader research program dedicated to the relationship between places and thinking, in which we aim to analyse how particular places – theatres, museums, libraries, in the broader meaning of each term – intend to produce and to shape the thinking process. The purpose is to test an assumption: the hypothesis is that those « sites » (namely places circumscribed in a specific territory, architectural structures, spatial arrangements – scenography, expography, classification systems – including the objects and pieces of art exhibited, but also as institutional and professional structures, with specific missions and values), define specific modalities of thinking, for those who work there (professionals, artists) as well as for the audience (spectators, visitors, users); and that we could conceive – i.e. both analyse and design – those places as « thinking-places », possibly as philosophical places, for contemplation, reflection, and critical practice.

We propose therefore, during the three days of this conference, to collect *case studies*, meaning specific sites, whether permanent or temporary (museums, exhibitions, libraries, performing arts venues, but also, if pertinent, public gardens, etc.), which will enable us to draw comparisons across disciplinary boundaries in an effort to develop methodological tools and further, to build a common framework from which to analyse the relationship between site and thought. The contributions will thus focus on this relationship, and will be structured in three main parts, considering first the characterization of the site selected (location, institutional or artistic characteristics, architecture), then proceeding to the analysis of the internal layout or display, and focusing finally on an explicitation of the thinking process actually induced or produced. The texts are to be sent quite early, well before the conference, and will be given to all participants before it commences in order to constitute a common corpus for discussion during the workshops.

The first day of the conference, June 20th, will be dedicated to plenary sessions (free admission, subject to availability and after registration); keynote speakers will examine the issues of such a dedication of museums, theatres and libraries to the practice of thinking; the second day, June 21st, contributors will take part into workshops on the « sites collection ». The third day will gather the organizing and scientific committees with the workshop rapporteurs in order to summarize the previous discussions and to consider the following steps of the program.

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Paper Submission and deadlines

Submissions are limited to 2000 characters (brief presentation of the case study, characterization of the venue and of the thought process involved) and should be sent by **January 15, 2018**, to the following email: cyclelieuxdepensee@gmail.com. Acceptance notifications will be sent in early February 2018.

Full papers: Not to exceed 12,000 characters, including tables and references, and submitted by **April 15, 2018**.

The papers will be edited and e-mailed to all participants by June 1st. A paper edition will be provided to the participants during the conference.

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