

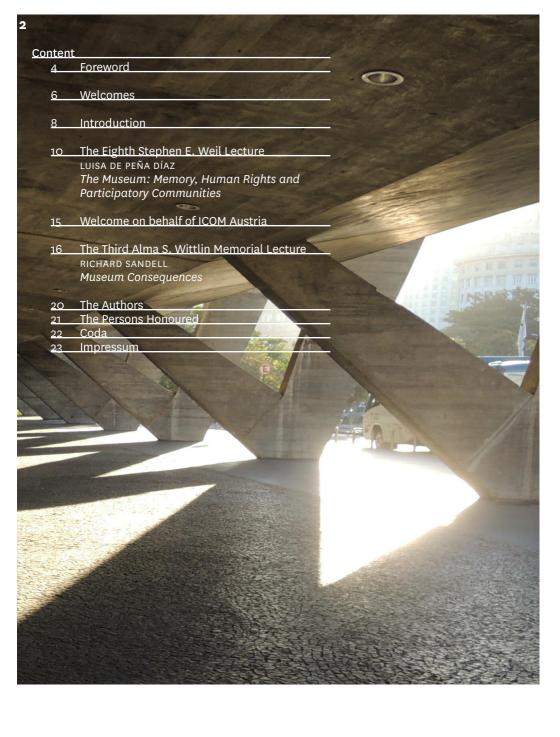
Stephen E. Weil

Alma S. Wittlin

MEMORIAL LECTURES 2013

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

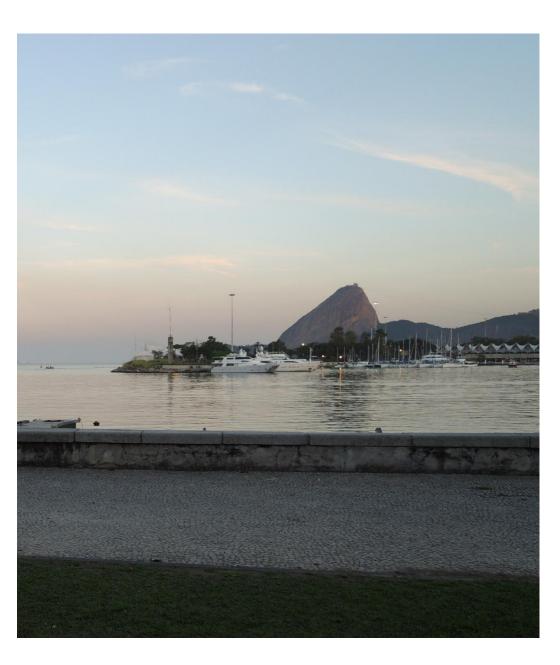




Stephen E. Weil and Alma S. Wittlin Memorial Lectures

held during the Twenty-third General Conference of the INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 2013



Foreword

It is a great honour and pleasure that I, in my new function as president of ICOM Austria, can contribute to and continue an undertaking that had been inaugurated within the frame of the ICOM General Conference in Vienna, in 2007.

One of the main goals within ICOM is to strengthen the international network and foster professional exchange and discourse. The Memorial Lectures, organised in commemoration of two eminent museologists, Alma S. Wittlin and Stephen E. Weil, present an excellent opportunity for exactly this kind of engagement. In this sense, it is a noble and at the same time appropriate task, to make the two papers of the Memorial Lectures 2013, graciously shared by the speakers, Luisa de Pena Diaz and Richard Sandell, available for the international collegiate and to publish these on the internet.

I extend my thanks to them as to all involved in the preparation and running of the Memorial Lectures, especially to Hans-Martin Hinz, the President of ICOM, who had been decisively supportive for this event and who honoured the audience of the ICOM Memorial Lectures 2013 in Rio de Janeiro with an introductory welcome.

Danielle Spera

President of ICOM Austria

Vienna, November 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear ICOM-

Colleagues

it is my great pleasure as the President of ICOM, the International Council of Museums, to greet you tonight here in Rio de Janeiro, and invite to a very special event within the frame of this year's ICOM General Conference. In an interdisciplinary effort, five International ICOM Committees, those for Education & Cultural Action (CECA), Exhibition Exchange (ICEE), Museology (ICO-FOM), Training of Personnel (ICTOP), and Management (INTERCOM) are sponsoring this welcome opportunity to continue an interdisciplinary discourse begun in Vienna in 2007. Held under the auspices of ICOM Austria, and organized with the support of ICOM-Brazil and its collaborators on the spot, the two Memorial Lectures, will be given by two influential and internationally respected museum colleagues, Luisa de Peña Díaz and Richard Sandell.

Taking a lead from the theme of ICOM's 23rd General Conference, "Museums (Memory + Creativity) = Social Change", fundamental theoretical and practical questions relating to the social function of museums, their tasks and relevancy for future developments will be treated. This joint event will be offering key-input, reflection and theoretical treatment of interdisciplinary issues. In this sense, revisiting Weil's and Wittlin's exemplary notions of the museum in service of society, the eighth Stephen E. Weil Memorial Lecture is to honour this eminent museum activist and thinker, and the third Alma S. Wittlin Memorial Lecture will remind us of the work and fate of this emigrée Austrian. I am looking forward to the Memorial Lectures which will explore specific aspects of museum work of the 21st century and the ensuing discussions. I want to invite you to join me in thanking all those involved in the organisation, and the two speakers who will share their experiences and ideas with us.

Thank you. Obrigado.

Hans-Martin Hinz

President International Council of Museums

Rio de Janeiro, August 13, 2013

Organizing Committee Words on the Memorial Lectures

It has been a pleasure for the Organizing Committee of the 23rd International Conference of ICOM to foster, in the best way we could, the organization of the Eighth Stephen E. Weil and the Third Alma S. Wittlin Memorial Lectures during ICOM 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

ICOM Rio 2013 Organizing Committee proudly supported the Memorial Lectures during de 23rd General Conference of ICOM not only because the event is already a tradition in ICOM General Conferences, but as an appropriate way to pay homage to two distinguished intellectuals with strong commitments with the idea of museums as social tools for development. It was a pleasure also to join CECA, ICEE, ICOFOM, ICTOP, INTERCOM, ICOM Austria and ICOM Secretariat in this truly international and interdisciplinary endeavour and effort, representing ICOM's most valuable and high objectives.

The Organizing Committee recognized the importance of this initiative since the beginning of ICOM Rio 2013 organization and is very happy to see the results, represented by the opening words by ICOM President, the impressive audience, the well-selected keynote scholars and the high scientific quality of the lectures, interventions and discussions.

The Memorial Lectures once more embodied the ICOM spirit of friendship, camaraderie, networking, excellence in the museum world and social preoccupation.

The Organizing Committee of the 23rd International Conference of ICOM heartily thanks Miss Hadwig Kraeutler for her commitment and indefatigable spirit that made the Memorial Lectures in Rio a reality.

Carlos Roberto F. Brandão

President, Organizing Committee of the 23rd International Conference of ICOM

ICOM Memorial Lectures 2013 Introduction

The Eighth Stephen E. Weil and the Third Alma S. Wittlin Memorial Lectures were held in the frame of the ICOM General Conference 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and under the general theme of that meeting, "Museums (memory + creativity) = social change".

The Memorial Lectures 2013, featuring papers by Luisa De Peña Díaz and Richard Sandell, were organized under the auspices of ICOM Austria, with the co-operation of ICOM Paris and ICOM-Brazil, and by financial support of ICOM's International Committees for Education & Cultural Action (CECA), Exhibition Exchange (ICEE), Museology (ICOFOM), Training of Personnel (ICTOP) and Management (INTERCOM). The Memorial Lectures 2013 event was attended by some 180 delegates, mostly, but not exclusively, members of these five International Committees.

The audience of the ICOM Memorial Lectures 2013 was honoured by welcoming words by Hans-Martin Hinz, the President of ICOM, who underlined the importance of this kind of exchange of theory and practice, in a spirit of cooperation and of furthering progressive and socially responsible museum work. Greetings by Carlos Roberto F. Brandão, Chairperson of the 23rd ICOM General Conference, were followed by a short address of Peter Keller, the representative of ICOM Austria.

David Fleming, immediate past President of INTERCOM and instrumental for initiating the very first Memorial Lecture in the frame of an INTERCOM annual conference, introduced the two keynote speakers, Luisa De Peña Díaz and Richard Sandell, both internationally renowned and active museum professionals.

The ICOM Memorial Lectures 2013 explored crucial theoretical aspects and practical questions of rights based museum work, conscious of fundamental values, and acknowledging problems of the 21st century.

In this sense, Luisa de Peña Díaz, in the Eighth Stephen E. Weil Memorial Lecture pointed out how museums can and should play a role as institutions with a responsibility to work with historical facts, relating them to human rights, democracy, and education in present societies.

In the second paper, prompted by the equation that ICOM had put forward for this conference, "Museums (memory + creativity) = social change", the focus of Richard Sandell's Alma S. Wittlin Memorial Lecture was the relationship of museums to social change – more particularly the potential museums hold to actively shape the social climate, the thoughts and conversations societies have about difference, about fairness and equality.

Leading the discussion after the Memorial Lectures 2013, and in closing this evening's program, Ann Davis, President of ICOFOM, remarked that two eminent museum personalities were honoured, not only had the speakers gone back to their writings, but had shown with examples of their influential museum work, how the museum can take decisive action in developing more inclusive and rights based programmes. Dr Davis underlined that the Lectures helped to foster exchange of expertise and opinions, and provided food for thinking and for action for all in the audience, as well as for the officers of international committees. She also expressed her hope for similar occasions of interdisciplinary collaboration for the future.

My sincere thanks go to all involved in the sponsoring, organising and running of the Memorial Lectures ICOM 2013 held on August 13th 2013 at Cidade das Artes, Barra da Tijuca, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, especially to the untiring team of ICOM-Brazil and its leadership.

More than 50 years ago, Alma Wittlin had made a strong case, stating that museums were not ends in themselves, but means in the service of humanity. In the very first Alma S. Wittlin Memorial Lecture in 2007 in Vienna, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (Prof. em., School of Museum Studies, Leicester University) commented on her work: Alma Wittlin was a trenchant critic of museums, deploring the fact that European museums had not developed into institutions that were vital to their communities (Wittlin 1949:176). Wittlin's ideas are still of considerable relevance today and have a contemporary ring, one of Wittlin's suggestions being that museums fail because they are not subject to public scrutiny

and another that museums should be measured by their capacity to serve people. (cf. Hooper-Greenhill, Refocusing museum purposes for the 21st century: Leadership, Learning, Research. First Alma S. Wittlin Memorial Lecture, unpublished paper, 21st General Conference of ICOM, 20 August 2007, Vienna.)

Regrettably, Hooper-Greenhill's First Alma S. Wittlin Memorial Lecture was not published. Then, in a next step and new effort, and with the support of ICOM Austria, it had become possible to publish online the ICOM Memorial Lectures 2010. In 2013 this finds a continuation, and again – although this is not an important commission for them (but making a qualitative difference for the reader) – under the careful handling and appealing design as provided by fuhrer-Vienna.

This Web-publication of the papers by Luisa de Peña and by Richard Sandell, at the same time the documentation of the Memorial Lectures 2013, provides a welcome opportunity to thank again the speakers – especially for sharing their work so freely in this format and thus making it widely available – and the five International Committees of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) who from start to finish were supporting the event.

Hadwig Kraeutler

Vienna, November 2013



We all know what a museum is. What we need to understand is that in today's world, museums – dynamic institutions – must be at the service of society. The traditional museum as a place dedicated exclusively to amassing sundry collections no longer meets the needs of contemporary society.

Museums must reflect the changes and challenges of their times by serving from within their communities and contributing to their sustainable development. They must become organizations that promote and safeguard values of humanity as essential components of our identity.

Memory is that intangible element that defines human beings as a social group. Through memory, we remember our past, cherish our values, as well as the sacrifices our forebears made in order to elevate our human condition and to win rights we now regard as fundamental. These values and rights are both individual and collective. As human beings we are born with inalienable rights that are intrinsic to our nature. The rights to truth and knowledge are such rights. Once a society recognizes that these are in fact its rights, it will defend them by all means.

Today the world is witnessing a crisis of values, an undeniable moral crisis. We can observe a hedonism that reigns supreme, a new generation with, what we may call a "light" attitude to life. More than any time in the past, an individual is valued for what s/he possesses, the money accumulated, but not for what one is. It makes no difference how you obtain material possessions, what matters is to possess, easily and fast. This view is common among mediocre and miserly beings who inflict dispair and hopelessness in societies, causing human tragedy.

Museums as entities that protect the legacy of humanity should approach this pro-actively and responsibly. They must contribute to educate and to foster thought in this "light generation." As museum workers, we must foster values, become guides that aid recognition of our human rights, and above all, of the incumbent obligations and responsibilities, and accept our important role in forming responsible citizens.

Memorial museums, sites of memory and sites of conscience abound throughout the world. They have become a part of collective memory and of communities who are concerned about their past, present and future

At this time I wish to share with you a few examples of the ways museums can contribute to the community in which they operate, as well as to the local, regional and world communities. Such can easily be observed in the Dominican Republic and I would like to describe some memorable experiences.

The Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance

But first, let me introduce the Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance. It is the umbrella institution of the Federation of Patriotic Foundations, their properties and offices. The Federation of Patriotic Foundations is a group of NGOs comprised of survivors and families of the victims of the Trujillo and Balaguer dictatorships that held the Dominican Republic in their grip from 1930 to 1978.

As an umbrella organization, the Museum harbors a series of spaces, museums, and sites of memory throughout the country. The main location, a memorial hall, is in a subway station of Santo Domingo. A second location is under construction. And we also run the Mirabal Sisters House Museum, which was the home of the sisters whose cruel deaths gave rise to the United Nations' declaration of International Day against Violence to Women (November 25). We also have monuments and memorials at the sites where the remains of some survivors now lie, as well as at sites of memory and sites of conscience, sites at which Dominicans remember people slain in the struggle for democracy and freedom as well as places where historic events took place.

Among our various programs, I would like to highlight one, known as the testimonial visits. These visits are coordinated with school groups, and generally related to the school curriculum. They consist of cross-generational encounters in which people who

participated in resistance movements share their experiences and memories of historic events with the younger generation. Young people have the opportunity to talk with individuals, who they also learn about as historic figures in their textbooks. These are highly enriching and memorable experiences for all.

On one occasion, a few weeks after a testimonial visit. I talked with teachers who had brought their students to the museum. One of them told me that the visit had triggered a process of questioning and critical thinking. After hearing one of the protagonists describe how historical events develop, the students began to view certain national institutions and textbooks with a critical eve. Some went so far as to guestion their parents and grandparents regarding the crimes against humanity committed by the dictatorships, discussing the concepts of collective and of citizen responsibility.

It is important to keep in mind that many of these former resistance fighters are retired, and some of them are quite elderly. Sharing their experiences makes them feel useful, strengthening their sense of self and self-esteem. An estimated 95% of resistance witnesses, (testimonial participants) make return visits to the museums, and some become museum volunteers, thereby improving their quality of life. And many have expressed satisfaction that young people share their concerns, despite the lure of the all-encompassing hedonistic society to transform them into 'light' people. This often comes as a surprise to them, as the codes of language have changed, yet the content is the same. The young people no longer mail small notes or messages to friends; instead they now 'Twitter', and the senior citizens also discover a new usefulness of those 'awful mobile phones'.

However, the most important aspect is the intergenerational encounter in the context of education and memory. The value of memory is demonstrated in practice as this transmission of knowledge is given a face. The experience of working on historic memory leads to a process of creativity which in turn transforms personal conscience, and that eventually im-

pacts the collective sphere. It is fundamental that our youths develop the capacity of critical thinking in order to build a more just society, in which human values take precedence over materialism and indifference. This example of memory is applicable to all areas of thought and human practice.

Let me give you another example. How do we become citizens? Young people are brutally thrust into society, with certain emotional violence; just as each of us emerge from our mother's womb.

The phenomenon of indifference toward those who govern us and how they govern is alarming. Throughout the world society it is common for a great many people to abstain from citizenship involvement. The percentage of citizens of many countries who do not participate and do not exercise their right to vote is increasing. This can be seen as the result of mounting frustration with bad political practices, but it is a given that when citizens become involved again, without a chance of critical thinking, the situation may easily be misused. The 'solutions' to social problems are imposed in accordance with the agenda of interest groups in power. We can observe how medieval practices remain in place, as well as absurd discriminations that limit the human being's capacity to grow.

At the same time we are experiencing the onset of a reversal process. In various regions of the world, we see demonstrations, protests, and "indignant" people. In amazement we saw Times Square transformed into the center of a demonstration of conscience, and heard an indigenous president of one of the most poverty-stricken countries of the Americas, speak about inequalities. And I quote Evo Morales:

"Paper after paper, receipt after receipt and signature after signature of the Records of the Indies confirm that only between the years 1503 and 1660, 185,000 kilos of gold and 16 million kilos of silver arrived at the port of Sanlúcar de Barrameda [Spain] from the Americas. [...] We might ask ourselves: Have European brothers made a rational, responsible or at least productive use of the funds so generously paid in advance by the Inter-

national Indo-American Fund? We regret to say no. Strategically, these funds were squandered on battles at Lepanto, invincible armies, third reichs, and other forms of mutual extermination, only to end up occupied by gringo troops of NATO, as in Panama, only with no canal."

With these words I want to draw your attention to a phrase I am hearing with increasing frequency: "Nuclear or core countries and the countries of the south". "The first world and the third world". When we use such catch phrases, we are probably unaware that we are legitimizing the greatest instance of discrimination after slavery. We are affirming that economic development makes us different. And that again, leads us to deny diversity, as we fail to understand the different practices, the different interests and priorities of the various nations of the world. I don't mean to suggest that poverty is natural; on the contrary, what I want to point out is that "my neighbor's poverty", "what's happening in the backyard" affects me, and that we should change this situation. To foster empathy is a duty of all of us who have in our hands the opportunity to transmit knowledge.

Citizen involvement:

Museums and participatory communities

Both citizen conscience, and the exercise of responsible citizenship, are taught, are learned. Our institutions can and must contribute to the process of forming citizens. Museums are in an especially favorable position for contributing to the formation of responsible citizens. Museums have two major functions: to preserve and to educate. In our role as educational institution, we must go out beyond the museum doors. And we have to use not only traditional educational methods but also non-traditional ways. We must not limit ourselves to interchange with similar institutions; we have to reach out and communicate with the population at large in their own setting.

At the Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance we have developed a great many activities. I will tell you about two experiences.

Last year, 2012, was an electoral year in the Dominican Republic. The political campaign was intense, it even influenced every day action citizens took and invaded public instances to become a hysterical race in which the people were led to believe that the nation's life or death hinged on the election results. If this "Communications phenomenon" was overwhelming for adults, the confusion it generated among children was even worse.

Museum volunteers proposed holding elections for children, explaining how the democratic system works, why we should become involved in electing the people who will make decisions about our lives, and how to participate. In short, we wanted to explain what was going on and why.

After a publicity campaign, we held elections for the children electorate. This election activity was visited by International observers (in the country for the election), as well as by electoral board officials, civil society organizations, and, of course, parents or other relatives of the children.

I will never forget an octogenarian who had come with his granddaughter from another city. The 8-year-old girl had been asking him a stream of questions about the political campaign. It occurred to him that bringing her to the museum was the best way to respond to her questions.

During the activity, the children practiced the electoral process, and acted out common scenes as well-known figures, illustrating positive and negative attitudes frequently observed. The children became election inspectors, monitors, judges and voters. The children elected their next president – who turned out to be a girl – campaigned, defended the election, and then celebrated democracy.

The boys and girls understood what was going on. They had seen their parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents and their friends who always used to get along well, constantly fighting now. They learned that it is possible to exercise democratic rights without trampling on the rights of others. They now understand that sometimes we win and sometimes we lose, but

what matters is that we have good practices, because these will always protect each and every-one.

Adults appeared to have forgotten these principles. A dirty campaign mars our human nature, as we have observed in different settings and circumstances, and seems to invade our spaces, reigning supreme.

Important lessons were learned when a boy attempted to sway votes but was rejected; when one of the child judges attempted to alter the election results but the others confronted him. Or, when a group of children tried to manipulate the process in order to obtain results that favored them and all the other children responded with a massive vote for their candidate. Children are like sponges, and we must ensure that they absorb only good, clean water.

Another citizenship training activity we hold is the annual visit to the Chamber of Deputies. The children take their seats, learn about the law-making process and then make laws on issues related to their rights. The first year they debated the right to quality education. This year the issue discussed was the right to a healthy environment. They meet with the elected representatives and question them about these issues.

It is remarkable to see how these children become empowered, how they become conscious of democratic practice, learn constructive criticism, and develop as responsible citizens who are concerned about national, regional, and international problems, and get involved to find solutions.

On December 10, the International Day of Human Rights, we organized a march, carrying photographs of victims of the dictatorship. We then handed over 18 thousand signatures to the National Attorney General calling for an end to initiatives that glorify the dictator and his dictatorship as if this were a rational option for solving pressing social and economic problems. In the right to truth it is simply unacceptable that democratic means be utilized to damage democracy itself, even more so in the name of and respect for the victims' dignity.

The museum also holds exhibits and commemorative activities outdoors, at the sites where historic

events took place and on the anniversary dates.
One exhibit was installed at the plaza outside the
National Congress. This has become a habitual
practice for us and has been quite effective in increasing the number of visitors to the museum, while also
sparking debate.

A museum must serve its immediate community. Part of the challenge our museum faces is to motivate the community at large to travel to the Capital to visit us, and become part of the education process.

Perhaps one of our most interesting activities is an initiative called: 'Orgullosamente vivo en....' ("I proudly live in ..."). This activity entails identifying streets that bear names of resistance martyrs. After locating streets in any city of the country that are named for martyrs, volunteers go door-to-door to talk to neighbors and pedestrians about that historic figure, handing out biographical material. We learned that more than 80 percent of people know nothing about these historical figures and were unaware of the museum's existence. After the first contact with us on their street, a significant number visit the museum.

Our general public is greatly diverse in terms of interests and ages, but our main audience will always be students. The schools are the formal settings in which education addresses our cultural legacy and historic memory. When cooperating with the education system and academic curriculum, we firmly position the museum as a non-formal educational institution. This non-formal setting encompasses all the range of educational programs and activities related to cultural legacy and historic memory that correspond to memorial museums.

An agreement reached with the Education
Ministry has made it possible for us to receive 300
high school students each day and we have initiated
the same process with primary school students. We
train classroom teachers through workshops about

dictatorship, memory and human rights, to enable them to adequately prepare students for the visit to the museum and so that they can later continue studying these subjects in their classrooms.

Within this non-formal setting, the museum offers educational visits and mini workshops on human rights and related values. We have created a series of tools such as an education kit and CD-Rom, a Family Guide, Teachers' Guide, special publications, videos, and workshops on various subjects. Our on-line resources include the following: Web page, Facebook, Twitter, You tube, Flickr, Pinterest.

At the Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance we are convinced that the permanence of museums depends upon developing a close working relationship with the surrounding community. Museums are responsible to contribute to the progress of society and become agents of social change. It makes no sense to remember and preserve vestiges of the past, if the museum fails to apply lessons represented by those objects to build a better future.

Ours is an era of cultural participation. Museums of the 21st century are called upon to be participatory and inclusive. Otherwise, they will fade away in a fog of indifference. We must meet the expectations of these times, meet today's challenges, and fulfill our fundamental mission: to educate.

ICOM Memorial Lectures 2013 Welcome on behalf of ICOM Austria

Dear Hans Martin Hinz, dear Carlos Brandão. dear Luisa De Peña Díaz, dear Richard Sandell. ladies and gentlemen,

Alma Stephanie Wittlin was born in 1899 in Lemberg, in that time an Austrian city. She received a PhD in art history in the mid-1920s, but being Jewish, she left Fascist Austria, and emigrated to England in 1937. 4 years later, she started to work at the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology in Cambridge. In 1949, she was one of five UK delegates at the first General Assembly of ICOM. In 1952, she went to the USA, worked in different places, and from the early 1970s on in California. She died in Palo Alto in 1992.

From her pioneering museological and educational oeuvre, I cite two books: "The Museum: Its history and its tasks in education" from 1949 and "Museums: In search of a usable future" from 1970.

The first Alma S. Wittlin Memorial Lecture was held. in Vienna, at the 21st General Conference, six years ago. In 2010, in Shanghai, Lynda Kelly spoke about "The Twenty-first Century Museum: The Museum Without Walls". This year, at ICOM 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, the speaker for the third Alma S. Wittlin Memorial Lecture is Richard Sandell, introduced by David Fleming. Sandell speaks about the social impact of museums.

It is an honour for the Austrian national committee to support the lecture, in order to commemorate Alma S. Wittlin's origin and to appreciate her oeuvre.

Thank you to Luisa De Peña Díaz and Richard Sandell, to the collaborating committees CECA, ICEE, ICOFOM, ICTOP and INTERCOM, to my Austrian colleague Hadwig Kraeutler, and to all of you!

Peter Keller

ICOM Austria Rio de Janeiro, August 13, 2013



It is a special honour to be invited to give this Memorial Lecture; Alma Wittlin's highly significant contributions to museum thinking have been overlooked for far too long yet, as I hope my talk will show, her progressive ideas continue to resonate and, indeed, to take on greater significance in the twenty first century.

Prompted by the equation that ICOM has put forward for this conference, the focus of my talk is the relationship of museums to social change and, more particularly, the potential museums hold to actively shape the kinds of conversations societies have about difference, about fairness and equality (Sandell 2007; Sandell and Nightingale 2012).

Preparing for this lecture I returned to some of Alma Wittlin's writings and was especially struck by her Twelve Points for Museum Renewal that were published more than 40 years ago (Wittlin 1970). One of these, in particular, powerfully conveys the conference theme we are exploring here in Rio and underpins my own position regarding the social roles and responsibilities of museums;

"Museums are not islands in space; they have to be considered in the context of life outside their walls. [...] Since public museums have developed from private collections, from recesses reflecting the moods and idiosyncrasies of select individuals and of bygone cultures, they are especially in need of considering their viability in terms of their capacity to enhance the overall potentialities of individuals and of society in years to come (Wittlin 1970: 204-5)."

Wittlin was undoubtedly ahead of her time and the progressive ideas she put forward have taken hold in some parts of the museum world. Indeed, her words were echoed some thirty years later in a report in 2000 into the Future of Multi Ethnic Britain which hints at the museum's place in society.

Acts of racism, racial violence, racial prejudice and abuse do not exist in a vacuum. They are not isolated incidents or individual acts, removed from the cultural fabric of our lives. Notions of cultural value, belonging and worth are defined by the decisions we make about

what is or is not our culture and how we are represented (or not) by cultural organisations (The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, 2000; 159).

In other words, the decisions we make in museums have consequences. It is possible to trace a link between what we do in museums - the stories we choose to tell and how we tell them - and the many forms of discrimination and prejudice which collectively blight our societies. And, as well as racism. I include here other forms of oppression on the basis of gender and sexuality; disability; age; faith; socio economic and health status; political viewpoint and so on (Sandell and Nightingale, 2012). This idea - that the stories we tell in museums have real effects and consequences that impact peoples' lives far beyond the institution's walls - is one that Wittlin subscribed to and one that many of us here also believe (although. as we will see in a moment, this is not an idea that is universally held amongst all museum professionals).

Recent years have seen the emergence of a growing number of museums that have at their very heart an explicit ambition to impact society. Here we would include museums such as the Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance: the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool (UK); the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow that seeks to promote mutual respect and understanding between people of different faiths and of no faith. Last year with colleagues from Leicester, I was lucky enough to see the exciting work carried out by the National Human Rights Museum in Taiwan - a former detention centre for political prisoners in Taipei that aims to give young people in particular, an insight into the lives of those who were politically oppressed and to advance understanding of the development and significance of human rights in Taiwan. Moreover, we have seen the establishment and growth of organisations like the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and the Federation for International Human Rights Museums that have supported the work of museums and historic sites committed to using their resources for positive social change.

Human rights museums have been sites for some of the most exciting developments in museum thinking and practice. However, the potential to impact social inequality is not confined to these museums: museums of all kinds have the potential to do this; to counter prejudice and discrimination and, I would argue, a responsibility to do so.

We also have a growing body of research and evidence to support the idea that the decisions we make in museums - about whose stories get told and whose get overlooked or distorted - impact visitors' thinking and more broadly shape the conversations we have as a society about fairness (Sandell 2007). Yet despite this evidence, the idea that museums might use their resources to purposefully counter prejudice and advance cross cultural understanding remains contested within the museum field. Some argue that museums need to be wary of causing offence or of taking sides; of being too political. As a result, many museums still operate as if in a vacuum; they continue to present narratives that reflect and reinforce broader patterns of social inequality and discrimination; they remain worryingly silent on issues that should be more openly discussed; that leave some of our communities feeling excluded

Objectivity and bias

I am especially troubled by the idea that museums should avoid taking up particular moral standpoints on issues because to do so would be inappropriately partisan or political. This argument suggests that there is somehow a neutral position that museums can and should strive for, but of course this is a fallacy. Museums are political institutions; they stand for certain ideas and use their cultural authority to assert and build support for those ideas.

This capacity to shape and influence can be deployed to support positive social change. For example, in recent years museums in many parts of the world have made efforts to respond to the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity of their communities, pursuing ways to reflect the lived experiences of groups who

– for many years – have felt marginalised by museums. The museums' exhibitions carry a clear message; they celebrate diversity and they embody an ideal of equality. And, although they still have a long way to go, such efforts have generally met with support within the profession. There are few who would accuse these museums of unwelcome political bias or demand that alternative (for example, racist) viewpoints are given equal prominence in an attempt to ensure balance.

But, some of the work that has been done to develop similar strategies of inclusion around other groups – for example, sexual minorities – has not always met with approval from within the museum community or beyond. Sometimes such protests can be easily dismissed as the objectionable and bigoted views of a minority. In 2006, the UK Museums Association distributed a survey to its members about material in their institution's collections that related to the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people. The Proud Nation survey elicited many positive responses but also this one from an Association member who wrote:

What is there to be proud of?

- a. Bringing AIDS to the world
- b. Destroying families and marriages
- c. Population decline
- d. Dividing church communities
- e. Bringing the wrath of Islam down upon the west

Please stop forcing your disgusting sickness into our faces. This isn't what I pay my MA subscription for – the Association is to support the museum profession, not to promote filthy perversions among the young and impressionable.

Such extreme responses may be disturbing and repugnant but they are generally limited to a minority. What is much more widespread and, as a consequence, far more worrying perhaps, is a more general (sometimes tacit) level of conservatism within the profession based on the belief that museums can be impartial

observers; that they should reflect different views and opinions rather than take up or actively promote a particular moral position. I find this completely untenable; we would not give credence to racist views in the museum so we should also be willing to oppose other forms of discrimination and oppression.

Let me give you a recent example of this kind of mindset that still persists in the museum field. On 1st July 2013 the UK's Museums Association launched *Museums Change Lives*, a new vision for museums that championed their social impact. It states, Museums change people's lives. They enrich the lives of individuals, contribute to strong and resilient communities, and help create a fair and just society.

The report explores museum impacts under three headings:

- · Museums enhance wellbeing (i.e. individuals)
- Museums create better places (communities and the environments they live in)
- Museums inspire people and ideas (learning but also contemporary thought)

Welcomed by many as a bold statement of the social value of museums, the report also prompted some negative responses with accusations that collections and curatorship were being undermined; that museums were being politicised; that they were in danger of forcing ideas onto their visitors. These outdated views of the museum's role in society continue to hold museums back from realising their potential for positive social change and they are inaccurate and misleading. I do not suggest that museums should patronise or tell visitors what to think about the world around them but I do argue that they should acknowledge that the narratives they present have social effects and accept the responsibilities that accompany that.

Activist practice

Elsewhere I have referred to an approach that acknowledges the social and political implications of museum work and seeks to ensure those implications advance rather than hinder positive social change as a form of activist practice. I want to finish my talk by looking briefly at what this looks like in practice, drawing on an example from my own work.

About 15 years ago, with colleagues in the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at the University of Leicester, we started working on a project designed to address the absence of disabled people within museum collections and narratives. We found some museums that featured disabled people in their displays but in ways that tended to reinforce prevalent negative stereotypes in the media (Sandell and Dodd 2010). Many more were silent on the matter and we set out to do something about it.

Disabled people – artists, activists and cultural practitioners – were at the heart of the projects that followed. They played a crucial role in supporting museums to tell stories of disability that often challenged visitors to think differently. They urged us to shape museum projects in line with ways of thinking about disability that had proved influential in securing rights for disabled people in many parts of the world. This meant adopting a moral and indeed a political standpoint on disability;

- to celebrate the lives and contributions of disabled people;
- to acknowledge the oppression and discrimination they face on a daily basis
- and to encourage visitors to see disability in a different way.

We did not achieve this by lecturing visitors, by telling them what to think. Rather we developed projects through stories that privileged particular ways of seeing and relating to disability that supported the perspective and broader work of disability rights groups. We provided opportunities for debate and dialogue.

Our latest project in this area brings together medical museums and collections to explore ways of presenting objects and information that offer visitors progressive ways of understanding disability. We aim to critique medical models of disability that unquestioningly assume physical and mental differences need to be fixed or cured and which, we argue, underpin widely held and deeply entrenched negative views of disabled people that encourage pity rather than respect and understanding.

The timing of the project has been very interesting. We started it soon after the Paralympic games in London which many have hailed as having an enormously positive impact on people's attitudes and awareness of disability, which I believe it has. But at the same time, reports appeared in the press showing that recent years have seen marked increases in hate crimes against disabled people. Museums, we argue should be aware of such issues and accept that portrayals of disability in the public sphere play a part in creating the climate within which such hate crimes occur.

Early next year, at the culmination of this project, artist Mat Fraser will present a series of performances in museums that combine use of museum objects and collections research with cabaret, dance and comedy. We want audiences to take away with them an enhanced awareness of disability as a political identity. We want them to understand that whilst many disabled people welcome and value medical interventions – not everyone wants or needs a cure.

Some have commented that this project – through its explicit commitment to ideas that underpin the disability rights movement – sits uneasily with the museum ideal of objectivity. But the alternative is to retain museum practice and displays that become increasingly out of step with progressive, rights-based thought and, at their worst, that reinforce negative ways of seeing and understanding disability.

I would like to think that this is the kind of project that Alma Wittlin would have approved of, especially given her insistence that museums 'are not islands in space' but rather organisations that must continually evolve in response to the changing world around them - alert to their potential to enhance their social value and relevance. As organisations in which high levels of public trust are invested, they can play their most valuable roles not in simply seeking to reflect dominant social norms - a moral consensus - but rather in exploring with visitors, issues that many find challenging and in doing so, opening up possibilities for more progressive ways of seeing, thinking and acting.

In conclusion, I am aware that some of this may sound naïve and idealistic. Museum staff cannot always do what they want; they are constrained in terms of the agendas and interests of a variety of stakeholders, they work within different legal and ethical frameworks and so on. But I know that many practitioners have found ways to work thoughtfully and creatively to advance equality and inclusion even in contexts where this might seem impossible.

This work may be challenging and may sometimes provoke complaints both from within our organisations and from external groups and individuals but we must not let this prevent us from realising the enormous untapped potential for museums to play a part in supporting the development of fairer, more inclusive societies.

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The Authors

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Luisa De Peña Díaz has been actively involved in national and international museum organisations (ICOM Dominican Republic, ICMEMO, MAC, ICOMLAC) and is presently a member of the Legal Affairs Standing Committee and of the Executive Council of ICOM

Richard Sandell is Professor in the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester where he teaches across the School's Masters programmes, supervises doctoral students and works in the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries. He has been awarded fellowships to develop projects around these themes (Smithsonian Institution, 2004/2005; Humanities Research Center of the Australian National University. 2008).

He has published five books over the past decade; the most recent (2012) (with Eithne Nightingale) is entitled Museums, Equality and Social Justice. He is currently working on a research project, funded by the Wellcome Trust and in collaboration with the Science Museum, London, Hunterian Museum and Roval College of Physicians that interrogates the potential for medical collections and museums to offer new ways of seeing and understanding disability and to inform contemporary debates about rights and equality.

The Persons Honoured

Stephen E. Weil (1925-2005) was one of the museum profession's leading analysts and commentators. He was a great teacher, a wonderful writer and a revered mentor for many people in the museum profession, especially, though not exclusively, in the USA. As he was one of the guiding lights in the creation of INTERCOM, the ICOM Committee on Management, in 2006, inaugurated an annual Stephen E. Weil Memorial lecture.

'Museums might play an important role in determining how well or poorly the citizens of a democratic society succeed in governing themselves.' (ICOM/INTERCOM, Study Series No. 12, Paris 2006: 8).

Alma S. Wittlin (1899-1992) wrote two influential books on museums 'The Museum' (London 1949) and 'Museums. In search of a usable future' (MIT-Press 1970) exploring them as social and educational agencies. Wittlin had studied in Vienna, exiled to Great Britain in 1937, and further to the USA in 1952. Her work there featured, a mobile museum service (New Mexico), teaching and publishing on museum and exhibition design, and educational research, especially free choice learning.

'Museums are man-made institutions in the service of men; they are not ends in themselves' (1970:204).

Coda

Memorial Lectures 2013 Statements of the Supporting International Committees of ICOM

CECA - Prof. Emma Nardi (President):

"The International Committee for Education and Cultural Action, CECA, has taken part in the Memorial Lectures from the first session held in Vienna 2007. The Committee is proud to have counted Dr Alma Wittlin as one of the outstanding early contributors to the Committee's journal, Museums Annual/Annales des Musées. Next to collection, conservation, and research, education and cultural action are core functions of a museum. To involve audiences effectively in museums and exhibitions is one of the main goals of the committee."

ICEE – Dr Anne-Catherine Hauglustaine-Robert (President): "The International Committee for Exhibition Exchange, ICEE, supports actively the Memorial Lectures programme and speakers. An important goal of ICEE is to share information, thoughts and aims within the international community of museums. The exchange of exhibitions should link to a larger exchange of ideas, professional experiences and topics in order to generate a better understanding of cultural heritage among our visitors. Exhibitions must display, and explain, the cultural function of museums around the World."

ICOFOM – Dr Ann Davis (President): "The International Committee for Museology, ICOFOM, strongly supports the memorial lectures, believing that communication is one of the most important attributes of museums. ICOFOM is an active group of museum workers who research, write and debate museum theory. As such we are interested in all aspects of museums, for theory underpins everything and is vital to the effective operation of museums."

ICTOP – Dr Lynne Teather (President): "The International Committee for Training of Personnel, ICTOP, is proud to support the memorial lecture series and this year's invitee for the Alma Wittlin lecture, Prof. Richard Sandell, as a major contributor to our professional development community. ICTOP is one of the oldest ICOM committees, now over 40 years, and represents an active group of people committed to professional development for museums/heritage and all that is involved from the theory and practice of the field to pedagogy of teaching and learning from premises to action learning."

INTERCOM – Dr David Fleming OBE (Immediate past President): "The evening of Memorial Lectures in Rio is an excellent opportunity to revisit Stephen Weil's commitment to museum diversity and to his belief in the museum as a social enterprise. The INTERCOM International Committee on Museum Management is about improving standards of management in museums across the world with a growing acknowledgment of the audience and an increased manifestation in social justice. INTERCOM believes in the power of museums to create impact and that museums need to learn new skills as the importance of social responsibility continues to grow."

This publication, the ICOM 2013 Memorial Lectures Reader, was prepared by Hadwig Kraeutler for ICOM Austria, and produced jointly by ICOM Austria and five International Committees of ICOM.

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