

INTERNATIONAL LEXICON OF AESTHETICS

Autumn 2019 Edition, ISSN 2611-5166, ISBN 9788857559926, DOI 10.7413/18258630064

MUSEOLOGY

By *Jesús Pedro Lorente*

(First published November 30, 2019)

It. *Museologia*; Fr. *Muséologie*; Germ. *Museumswissenschaft* / *Museologie*; Span. *Museología*. Museology is broadly defined as the study of museums, a well-established research field with specific courses, conferences, journals and series of books. "Museography" is a related term, which refers to museum practice according to the definitions sanctioned by the International Council of Museums (ICOM). However, the differences between both names and their derivations were, and still remain, somewhat blurred in some languages. Furthermore, the term "Museology" in English is commonly replaced with the paraphrase "Museum Studies", particularly in Great Britain and Australia, while designations like "New Museology" are used with different meanings in diverse linguistic contexts. More self-evident are other labels like "Critical Museology", although this is just one of the many appellations lately in vogue.

OVERCOMING A HISTORICAL DICHOTOMY: MUSEOLOGY VS. MUSEOGRAPHY

Museology is an erudite word that has been used for around 200 years, but not always with the same meaning (Mairesse, Desvallées 2011). The oldest treatises on museums to describe the strengths of collections and their arrangement were often labelled as *Museographia* or as equivalent terms in different languages. However, in the 19th century some publications in German started to use the name *Museologie*, including Georg Rathgeber's book *Aufbau der niederländischen Kunstgeschichte und Museologie* published in 1839, and particularly J. G. Theodor Graesse's influential journal *Zeitschrift für Museologie und Antiquitätenkunde sowie verwandte Wissenschaften*, published between 1878 and 1885. *Museumskunde* was also very much in use then; however, since 1905, *Museumswissenschaft* became commoner and, as the 20th century advanced, both terms were replaced in German with a return to the etymological designation *Museologie* (Waltz 2018). Nevertheless, *Museographie* remained the preferred label in French, particularly as regards issues on museums of art and antiquities. Thus, it was the title chosen by a Paris-based agency

of the *Société des Nations*, the *Office International des Musées*, for the world conference on architecture and display in art museums held in Madrid in 1934. Since then, the global tendency has been to use that appellation most particularly for spatial arrangements in museum buildings or other practical questions.

Broader and more theoretical matters were addressed by the American Academy of Roma and the *Direzione Generale per le Antichità e Belle Arti* in an international congress organized in Perugia on March 18-20, 1955 and entitled *Museologia*, which has been saluted as the first public usage in Italian of this word (Becherucchi 1976: 30). Later in 1958, a UNESCO seminar organized in Rio de Janeiro proposed the terminological disambiguation consequently established by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1970 by defining Museology as the science of the museum, which studies the history and *raison d'être* of museums, their function in society, their peculiar systems of research, education and organization, the relationship they have with the physical environment and the classification of different museum types. Museography, on the other hand, would henceforth be identified by ICOM as the technical implementation of museum guidelines, especially through architecture and the articulation of curatorial facilities. These two definitions were based on the terminological debates between George-Henri Rivière, the Director of ICOM in 1945-1965, with Jan Jelínek, the Director of the Moravian Museum in Brno, a very active member of ICOM since 1962, who went on to become its president from 1971 to 1977. Unable to communicate in their native French or Czech languages, these two influential anthropologists held their discussions in German, which somehow determined their lexical choices. However, such a clear-cut disjunctive is still far from customary in other linguistic contexts (Lorente 2012: 18) as museography presently tends to be considered a subset contained inside the broader superset of Museology. In fact, not only museological scholars, but also many museum workers tend to call themselves "museologists", with "museographer" being a rare word in most languages and used not so much for museum staff, but for freelance contractors in charge of exhibition displays and other curatorial tasks.

FURTHER TERMINOLOGICAL DISPARITIES: MUSEOLOGY / MUSEUM STUDIES, NEW MUSEOLOGY

In the second half of the 20th century, taking the cue from earlier precedents who provided education for prospective museum professionals, all sort of courses mushroomed worldwide, sometimes with museological titles, if practical training remained paramount. This was precisely the case at the *Fachschule für Museologen* in Leipzig or in other specialized centers where some teaching on museum theory and history was offered as an introduction before students tackled questions about conservation, documentation, didactics and other museum tasks. This was even the case of the postgraduate courses offered at university campuses, but their development would entail new chairs and departments identified by this denomination, including the Department of Museology founded in 1952 at Maharajah Sayarjao University in Baroda (India), or the establishment of the Department of Museology in Brno in 1963 (then Czechoslovakia) as a joint venture between the Moravian Museum and Masaryk University, then called Jan E. Purkyne. Nevertheless, "Museology" would still be considered an applied science for many years, rather than a fully-fledged discipline, whose Greek-derived name appeared as some strange academic jargon. Such was the opinion of Raymond H. Singleton when he founded the Department of "Museum Studies" at

the University of Leicester (UK) in 1966, a new label originally meant to advocate more empirical approaches. Meanwhile, the term "Museology" was endorsed elsewhere by institutions such as the University of Zagreb, where museological postgraduate studies also started in 1966, or at the Università Internazionale dell'Arte, with a private center founded in Firenze in 1968 that specialized in studies on museums, conservation and art critique. Another prominent case was the *Cours de muséologie générale*, delivered since 1971 at the Université de Paris I by Georges-Henri Rivière, and officially supported by UNESCO for more than a decade. However, Singleton's alternative designation thrived in Britain and was also adopted by the University of Toronto for the Master in Museology created in 1969, which was renamed Museum Studies in the 1970s. This new denomination also prevailed in 1975 at the University of Sidney, while in 1976 the label Museum Studies was also used by the George Washington University in the federal capital of the USA, and there are many other cases (Simpson 2006). The terminological disagreement continued when ICOM founded the International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) in 1977, a world forum convening theoreticians from different linguistic background; in fact, the participation of scholars from the Anglosphere has remained very limited in the history of ICOFOM (Brulon 2019).

Such a cultural gap grew wider when French experts vindicated a new typology of museum called *ecomusée*, which was subsequently adopted in francophone territories like Quebec or Nigeria. Following the success of the *nouvelle vague*, the *nouveau roman*, the *nouvelle histoire* and other renovation movements in different disciplines, these activists founded the so-called *Mouvement International pour une Nouvelle Muséologie* (MINOM) in 1985, with many followers in not only France and some neighboring countries, but also in Latin America. Their demands were in tune with the social turn preached in a book edited in 1989 by Peter Vergo entitled *The New Museology*. Nevertheless, no ecomuseums were mentioned on its pages, where no reference was made to MINOM or to the existing bibliography in French. Later, the specific culture-historic context defining properly-called "new museologists" was made clear in some prestigious publications in English (van Mensch 1992; Bedekar 1995). However, it is still a common mistake to allude to the latest museological tendencies as "new museology" or with equivalent words in other languages. "Critical Museology" came as a postmodern alternative and quickly spread from North-American universities thanks to the growing dominance of English as universal lingua franca (Shelton 2013). Many other neologisms have also been proposed, but now museologists tend to use them with a broad-minded attitude by transcending former cultural divides (Mairesse 2016; Message 2018), including the artificial separation of theory and practice: Museology must inspire changes in museums and, *vice versa*, it has to reflect their ever-changing reality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- L. Becherucchi, *Museologia e metodo*, "Museologia", 4 (1976): 30-34.
- V. H. Bedekar, *New museology for India*. New Delhi, National Museum Institute of History of Art, Conservation and Museology, 1995.
- B. Brulon (ed.), *A history of museology. Key authors of museological theory*, Paris, ICOFOM, 2019.

- J. P. Lorente, *Manual de historia de la museología*, Gijón, Trea, 2012.
- F. Mairesse (ed.), *Nouvelles tendances de la muséologie*, Paris, La documentation française, 2016.
- F. Mairesse, A. Desvallées, *Muséologie*, in A. Desvallées, F. Mairesse (eds.), *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséologie*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2011: 343-383.
- K. Message, *The disobedient museum. Writing at the edge*, London-New York, Routledge, 2018.
- A. Shelton, *Critical Museology. A manifesto*, "Museum Worlds Advances in Research", 1/1 (2013): 7-23.
- A. Simpson, *Integrating university museums into Museum Studies programs*, "Opuscula Musealia", 15 (2006): 85-92.
- P. van Mensch, *Towards a methodology of museology*, Zagreb, University of Zagreb, 1992, accessed November 3, 2019, <http://emuzeum.cz/admin/files/Peter-van-Mensch-disertace.pdf>
- Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, London, Reaktion Book, 1989.
- M. Waltz, *The German voice in the "Babelian tale of museology and museography": creation and use of terms for museum science in Germany*, "Museologica Brunensia", 7/2 (2018): 5-18.

HOW TO QUOTE THIS ENTRY

J. P. Lorente, *Museology*, "International Lexicon of Aesthetics", Autumn 2019 Edition, URL = <https://lexicon.mimesisjournals.com/archive/2019/autumn/Museology.pdf>, DOI: 10.7413/18258630064.

Please note that this URL is fixed, since it belongs to *ILAE's* archived edition. This allows readers to quote a stable document for academic purposes.

This entry also belongs to the second volume of *ILAE's* printed edition. Each issue of this edition collects *ILAE's* Spring and the Autumn online editions per year. The proper reference of the printed edition is:

J. P. Lorente, *Museology*, "International Lexicon of Aesthetics", Vol. 2, Milano, Mimesis, 2019.